Empowering Children in the Local Village with Al-Quran Literacy and Character Education

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Abstract:

Because of the urgency to develop human resources in the community, this community service attempts to empower the Muslim children in Kesamben village in the district of Malang with Al-Quran literacy and character education. Using Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) procedure, this community service involved thirty-five children aged between seven and twelve years. These children participated in two programs: an Al-Quran literacy course and a character education program. The course was conducted four times a month, and so was the character education program. The result showed that the children expressed their interest in the course. Regarding the character education program, children were motivated and interactive while watching and reviewing the movie. This project has an implication for parents and community members to provide their children with the appropriate entertainment while educating them and providing an interesting and engaging Al-Quran teaching method for successful learning.

Keywords: *Children; Al-Quran literacy, character education*

Introduction

Al-Quran literacy and character education have become major concerns these days. Regarding Al-Qur'an literacy, the number of Muslims who can read the Al-Quran is lower than that of illiterate Muslims. The report mentioned that about 65% of Muslims in Indonesia have no Al-Quran literacy (Mukhtar, 2021). This data is also similar to that of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which shows many Muslim students cannot read the Al-Quran (Fikaz, 2021). This case is

dilemmatic, for every Muslim needs to understand the content of the Al-Quran as their guide for life in the world and the afterworld.

Concerning children's character and behavior, the community must take serious action for character education. This thing is due to the increasing moral degradation among children in the areas in Indonesia. The report mentioned that some children had been involved in inappropriate behavior in society, like fighting with other children from different schools (Mahendra, 2023), conducting free sex (Prafianti et al., 2020; Shofiyah, 2020), using drugs (Jaya, 2022), and having impoliteness to socialize with other people (Febrida, 2020). These reports reflect that the moral values among some children are low in the community. Based on the issues, it is evident that character development and Al-Quran literacy have become the primary attention for Muslim educators.

As the Al-Quran is the guide for Muslim life, all Muslims need to be able to read and understand the content of the Al-Qur'an. Because of that, the teacher and parents must introduce it early to their children so they can write, read, and understand Al-Quran (Mulyani et al., 2018). The role of the community is also expected to educate society on Al-Quran literacy to help the Ministry of Religious Affairs reduce the number of illiterate Muslims in reading and writing Al-Quran (Khoiri, Mustopa, and Udaibah, 2017). These days, it shows the rising number of Islamic institutions offering the service for learning Al-Quran, in terms of Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren), offline and online Arabic courses, madrasahs, and Al-Quran Education sites (TPA). These institutions support the community's need to improve their Al-Quran literacy.

Several efforts have been made to teach Al-Quran literacy. These efforts aim to improve Muslim performance in reading and writing the Al-Quran (Kosim et al., 2019; Maskur, Saifudin, and Nisa, 2019; Firmansyah, Ali, and Romli, 2022). The implementation of *tahfidz, for example,* has been implemented by Kosim et al. (2019). It underlines the importance of practice at school to improve the character and

memorize the Al-Quran among students. Meanwhile, when dealing with children early on, the techniques should be appropriate to their characteristics. Using storytelling (Mulyani et al., 2018) and playing techniques (Pamungkas et al., 2019) effectively develop children's character. Another strategy involving several procedural steps also improves students' literacy in reading Al-Quran (Supriadi et al., 2022). The steps comprise listening, investigation, tutoring, eradication, reinforcement, adaptation, and testing. In an emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, using an online strategy in teaching character should be managed appropriately to gain the expected results (Hanafi et al., 2019; Rohman et al., 2022). Online Al-Quran reading guidance (Hanafi et al., 2019) and virtual instructional strategy (Rohman et al., 2022) influence teaching Al-Qur'an literacy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, developing character education deals with the ability to maintain emotions. According to Abdullah (2014), this reflects an effort to control emotion by avoiding negative aspects and reinforcing emotion to lead to positive ethics. In the implementation, character building should be congruent with ethics as they are paired elements in maintaining the quality of life (Rahim, 2013; Sukardi, 2016; Taja et al., 2021). In dealing with the success of developing character, all aspects contributing to character building for children should be involved (Abdurrahman, 2016; Cinantya et al., 2018; Fathoni et al., 2021; Sukardi, 2016). These elements include family, teachers, and community. The involvement of the government is also required to optimize the process. In short, character building is correlated to emotion management, which should work with ethics and needs community support.

Studies on various strategies for improving children's character have been conducted over time. These practices were efforts to develop children's character for the benefit of children and society. To the evidence, positive character values have been implemented in the learning process, involving character implementation in the learning activities (Abdurrahman, 2016), integration of character values in

learning materials (Arifin & Fitria, 2017; Munir & Hartono, 2016), and the technological media of instruction (Anwar, 2016; Dianto, 2021). Regarding activities (Abdurrahman, 2016), for example, applied activities such as role-modeling, training, and habituation and implemented rewards and punishment for the student's performance. While related to the content, Munir & Hartono (2016) used updated Islamic character content for the materials in the English class. This effort revealed that students improved their reading performance and developed their character values. Meanwhile, technological media such as online learning can be a prospective option to deliver character education, such as what has been done by Dianto (2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another religious strategy, such as Tahfidz Al-Quran, proves an effective way to develop children's Islamic character (Kosim et al., 2019; Najiburrahman et al., 2022). These reflect that various strategies are beneficial in dealing with children's character-building.

Since developing Al-Quran literacy and character education for children is urgent in the modern era, the focus of the current community is to empower children in Kesamben Village, one of the remote areas in Malang. This area is projected for the university students-community program for developing human resources. The reasons for empowering Al-Quran literacy and children's character education in the village are based on the absence of formal Islamic education and the technological influence that emerged. Because of the importance of character education and Al-Quran literacy for Muslims' lives, university students and the lecturer will conduct this service for one month.

Method

This community service was held to empower children in the Kesamben village of Malang region with Al-Quran literacy and character education. This selection of location and participants was regarded as suitable because it is applicable and supportive for empowering the children with the aspects in that area. Besides its

location in a remote area, this village has a TPA that needs to be developed. This condition happens because the TPA lacks teachers' numbers, resources, and guidance in learning Al-Quran. Furthermore, another effort for character education has not been intensively applied into practice due to the low number of teachers. For that reason, we aimed to help the children in the village develop their literacy for Al-Quran and their character.

The participants who joined the programs were elementary school students around Kesamben village. The selection was based on the limited space for conducting the programs and the appropriateness of the program for children at an early age. For this, as many as thirty-five children were involved in the program designed to match the students' proficiency in Al-Quran recitation and Islamic character development. They were identified with twenty-five females and ten males, aged between seven and twelve years.

This community service employed asset-based community development (ABCD). This technical procedure was adopted to develop the available assets in the target participants and institution. This effort was applied because the program was relevant in terms of the involvement of the resources existing in the village. The resources included human resources and non-human resources. In terms of human resources, the assets existing in the village include children, instructors, student volunteers, the village staff, and community members. These resources have a pivotal role in managing the success of the program. Additionally, in non-human existing assets, some resources supported the implementation of the program, consisting of the availability of TPA, a number of Al-Qurans, and learning materials and media for Al-Quran literacy and character development. With the combination of existing assets in the village in the form of both human and non-human resources, the community service using the ABCD technique for developing Al-Quran literacy and character education for children in Kesamben village was ready to take place.

The procedure for conducting the ABCD technique in the community includes several steps:

a. Survey

This Survey was conducted at the earliest time when students conducted service learning by observing the condition of the village and TPA. It included information on the TPA from the village office staff. Further interview from the owner of the institution. The data mentioned that the children in the area are strongly motivated to learn Al-Quran, but there were not enough teaching assistants compared to the number of children. Secondly, the routine is not varied as the activities are more or less related to reading Al-Quran and remembering short surahs from Al-Quran. It revealed that the Al-Quran sites need more assistants to guide children in learning Al-Quran and more activities to make the learning more engaging and meaningful.

b. Planning Action

To progress in teaching Al-Qur'an literacy and character education, we would like to assist the teaching process, guide the children taking the Al-Quran course in the village, and provide them with Islamic movies to develop their character. In the Al-Qur'an course, we would teach them Al-Qur'an and help them practice more intensively. Meanwhile, we used Islamic films with character education content to give children character education. The movies were selected to contain Islamic and educational characters important for children's personality development. The review section and summary of the movie were given to remind the children about the positive aspects of life the movie taught the viewers.

c. Executing the Action

The application of the project is the predominant action conducted in the community. The report about empowerment in community service mainly relies on implementing the action. It deals with the empowerment of children in the Al-Qur'an literacy program, which contains all activities as an effort from the university students in the Al-Quran literacy program. This action is also supported by the

activities related to character education programs through movie media. These two programs are conducted from the early process until the end as the core of the service program.

d. Evaluation

Evaluation is the final step to measure the program's success in the community. The responses from the children who joined the program will indicate whether the program conducted was beneficial or not. Two types of responses are directed to the children and the director/teacher in the TPA. We directly interview the children and the TPA owner to gain the result at the program's end. We observed the children's behavior during the program and asked for their responses to identify their interests and expectations at the end of the program.

Result and Discussion
1. Al-Quran Literacy Program in the TPA

To improve children's Al-Quran literacy in reading Al-Quran in Kesamben village, the community service was directed to design an Al-Quran literacy program. The activity was done for one hour from 3 PM until 4 PM. The training in reading Al-Quran was conducted every Wednesday for one hour from 2 PM until 3 PM. All the participants were children from Kesamben Village in Malang.

Figure 1.

Children's participation by gender in the al-Quran literacy program
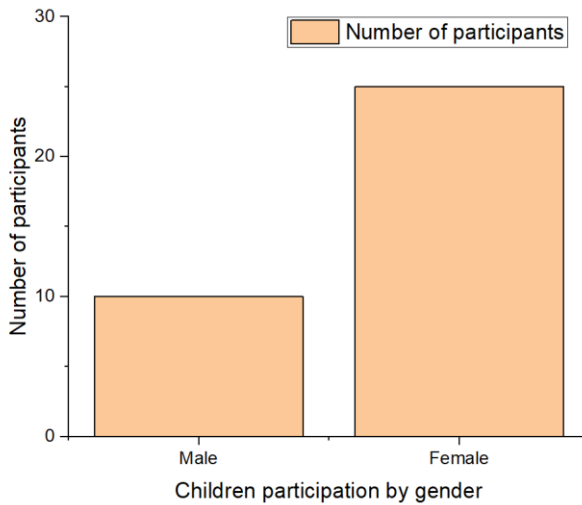
The children who participated in the program were between seven and twelve years old. According to Colina & Listiana (2020), the involvement of children at such an age is essential as learning Al-Quran at an early age can help improve children's religious values. This situation will support the effort to make children more faithful and pious.

Figure 2.

The teacher, teacher's assistants, and children of TPA

The children had several activities in the program: reciting the Al-Quran, memorizing short surahs of the Al-Quran, writing Arabic words, and remembering prayers. Before learning, children prayed for their success in learning. Then, the teacher and the assistants taught the children how to read the Al-Quran correctly. They also listened to students who recited Al-Quran one by one by one and corrected if there were mistakes in reciting the Al-Qur'an. After reciting Al-Quran, children had another additional lesson for Islamic knowledge, such as the procedure of prayers, recognition of Allah's characters, Islamic stories, and histories.

Table 1.

Schedule for the Al-Quran literacy programs.

Course Meeting	The Date of Meeting	Course Activities
I	28 December 2022	Writing and reciting Al-Quran with mahrojul huruf
II	4 January 2023	Memorizing Al-Quran and reciting Al-Quran
III	11 January 2023	Writing and reciting Al-Quran
IV	18 January 2023	Memorizing and reciting Al-Quran

Children were involved in remembering the prayers. The memorization of the prayers and short surah of the Al-Quran aimed to improve students' prior knowledge about the previous surah they had memorized. It functioned for the content of daily prayers. These prayers can be applied in daily activities and used to start doing an activity. It is expected to give positive values in doing future actions.

The "UMMI" method was used to teach Al-Quran literacy. This method is popular for teaching Al-Quran literacy in many Islamic institutions in Indonesia. Its teaching procedure reflects the mother's character in caring for her children. The steps include the following.

- Opening. In this step, the teacher designs the class into a U formation to ensure the children are ready to learn, continuing with having prayer together.
- Apperception. This activity is to review the previous lesson and connect it to the material of the current lesson.

- Building the concept. The teacher and assistants explain the material (topic) of the current lesson.
- Understanding the concept. This effort concerns children's understanding of the concept through repetition.
- Practicing the skills. This activity is done for better learning by reading the Al-Quran and the other children listening.
- Evaluation. The evaluation is done by observing and giving scores on children's performance in reciting Al-Quran.
- Closing. The aim is to bring the children back to normal, then continue with the closing prayer and statements from the teacher.

Figure 3.

The Al-Quran learning using "UMMI" method

The number of children who participated in the programs was thirty-five; most of them memorized the daily prayers and short surahs of Al-Qur'an. In practice, a supporting factor in making the activity work well is strong motivation and enthusiasm when they remember words to ease their learning. Most children showed a solid ability to memorize the prayers and the short surahs of the Al-Quran. Children expressed their perspectives that recitation teaching was great and enjoyable and hoped learning the Al-Quran with the methods would be easy.

The owner and the teacher of the TPA also responded positively to the community service activities in his TPA. He mentioned that university students' involvement had helped him coordinate the number of children who learned Al-Qur'an better. He claimed that if the number of teachers supported in nurturing children were balanced with the children's number, children would pay more attention to learning the Al-Qur'an. He hoped he would get more assistance in helping the children learn Al-Qur'an for the optimal learning of Al-Qur'an.

2. Character education for TPA children through the Islamic movies

To equip Muslim children in Kesamben village, we used Islamic movies. The choice of using the Islamic movie is that the movie presented the positive values represented by the characters in the movie. As stated by Indriati et al. (2021), the proper selection of movies will provide students with various good characters that are important for children's character development. The hope is the children can absorb the movie's content and imitate the movie's positive characters. The selection of the movie as the medium of learning characters is that the movie is the media that is popular in society. According to Russell & Waters (2014), using film in the classroom and engaging students in discussion about the movie will train students to think critically and drive them to think deeply about the meaning of being a good person and an influential citizen. The movie that was used to teach characters to children has been selected carefully by considering the Islamic values and characters that children will imitate for doing suitable activities and behavior in society. These movies were taken from YouTube media and were categorized as short movies, as the duration of each movie was about 15 minutes. The previous study proved that using YouTube could strengthen children's character at early ages (Imroatun et al., 2021). Children were easy to learn through the media so that it can influence their learning. The program of watching Islamic movies was conducted four times during student-community engagement in the village.

As many as twelve students participated in watching the movie in the TPQ in the village after the maghrib prayer. They were children who also had an Al-Quran course conducted in the TPA after the Ashar prayer. The number of participants was less than those joining the Al-Quran literacy program because of certain factors, including distance and time. They were guided by university students who conducted community service in the village.

Table 2.

Schedule for the movie for character education

Program Meeting	Date	Duration (minutes)	Movie's Titles for Character Education
I	24 December 2022	13.56	Kisah Uwais Al-Qarni
II	31 December 2022	16.10	Kisah Bilal bin Rabah; Muazin Pertama Rasulullah
III	7 January 2023	14.13	Kemuliaan Abu Bakar Ash Shiddiq
IV	14 January 2023	14.06	Umar bin Kattab; Pemimpin yang bersahaja dan mengagumkan

The first cartoon movie presented was the life story of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) sahaba, Uwais Al-Qarni. The movie was selected because it contains Islamic values that teach children to obey and respect their parents well. The movie also presents the importance of children loving their parents. The character education from the movie exemplifies that obeying and loving parents will characterize pious Muslim children.

The second movie presented the Islamic character of Bilal, an enslaved person freed by Abu Bakar, one of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) friends. Bilal had a strong faith in and loyalty to Islam. He remained faithful, although people were tortured and influenced to leave Islam. His belief is only one; Allah is the only God that people should worship; whatever happens, it is essential to enjoy the worship and dedication to God. These characters represent positive attitudes for loyalty to the truth.

The third movie presented the excellent characters of Abu Bakar, one of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) close friends. He was identified as someone who had many good characters. Abu Bakar represented the leader's brave, generous, and loyal character. In addition, he was intelligent and innovative. He was also friendly to all people and caring to the needy person. All the characters he possesses show the positive attitude that is necessary for children to learn.

The fourth movie presented the life story of Umar bin Khattab. From the story, there were some moral characters to learn. Umar had shown excellent moral values, especially for being careful and simple. He also always prioritized justice and loved his society and others. He prominently contributed to the initiation of the Islamic calendar (Hijriya) and the making of Baitul Mall.

Before the movie started, the university students provided the LCD projector for the film media. Children and the students prayed together and recited the short surahs from the Al-Quran. The next step before the movie started was that the guides did icebreaking and asked the children to be serious in watching the Islamic movies to understand the Islamic characters performed in the movies.

While watching the movie, the teacher and assistants accompanied the children. These children showed their enthusiasm while watching the movie. It also showed that the children were quiet because they were watching the movie seriously. It indicated that the movie could make them engaged in the activity. Similar effects have proven that the use of cartoons in teaching characters to children is enjoyable for children. The reason is that cartoons present imaginary and interactive content that makes for fun story events (Septianti & Hafidz, 2021).

Figure 3.

Islamic cartoon movies for children's character education

The next activity after the movie ended was reviewing the movie. There was a question and answer session about the content of the movie. Most questions related to the character values they found in the movie. Most children answered correctly related to the characters presented in the movies. Appreciating the children's responses, we gave them a thumb sign or applause, indicating they had done great activities. We also motivated them to apply the characters appearing in the movie in their daily activities. We also summarized the movie's content by reminding children of the Islamic characters.

The result of the implementation of the program was positive. The interview sessions involving three children and the TPA teaching staff revealed that the program has benefits in developing Al-Quran literacy and character development. Regarding Al-Quran literacy, the chief of the TPA admitted that the involvement of the students conducting the service community helped the teaching of Al-Quran in two ways: helping the TPA in accommodating the children more personally by guiding each student in learning Al-Quran and involving

the teaching process in terms of managing the classroom and the teaching and learning activities.

In the implementation of character education, the chief of the TPA also acknowledged that the program of watching movies with content of Islamic values can give children not only entertainment but also the Islamic values that are needed for the children's character development. Further, he mentioned that the program of watching movies using cartoons is relevant to the age of the children as most children like cartoons. Using cartoons as life objects in disseminating Islamic values supports the teaching of character to the young generation. Interviews were also done with three children: 1 male and two female children. All three children agreed that they liked to watch cartoon movies with the content of Islamic character values. They also had the same idea that they could learn about the good characters represented by the characters of famous people in the movie. Additionally, the three children expressed that they want to be a good person, as shown in the movies, and to make their parents happy. Previous studies conducted by Husna & Dewi (2021) and Azminah (2020) also used movies representing Islamic characters in their content in an attempt to develop children's characters, revealing that the movie supports the development of Islamic characters in children at early ages.

Conclusion

The result of community service can be divided into two positive categories. The first one is the positive side of positive effect on the Al-Quran literacy process in TPA. This community service supports the learning process in terms of helping TPA with the need for teachers who can help TPA accommodate the learning process. The more teachers are involved in the TPA, the easier it is for the TPA to nurture all the children who joined the Al-Quran literacy course in the village. Secondly, the introduction of the movie representing Islamic characters to the children in the village provides children in the village with

character education. The movie also could trigger critical thinking by discussing moral content, which leads to improving children's character.

This community service also has further implications for teaching children about Al-Quran literacy and character education. The first is that it is vital to involve community members in educating their children as more people involved will benefit children in receiving more treatment and attention for their success in learning. It is also suggestive that it is not enough for TPA to provide learning. Still, the family has a significant role in teaching children as children stay longer in the family compared to other institutions. Similarly, to give children more character education, the family has a central role in providing their children with character education, including entertainment. While improving Al-Quran literacy, the family also provides entertainment, including movies selectively and wisely, through appropriate movie selection for the children's character development.

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