



# EPISTEMOLOGI

## Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat dan Penelitian

| e-ISSN: 3047-2830 |

<https://jurnal.rahiscendekiaindonesia.co.id/index.php/epistemologi>



## Qur'anic Literacy for Children: A Community Service Project in Gunung Melayu Asahan

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### KEYWORDS

Qur'anic literacy, Islamic education, community service, children's religious learning, rural education, Gunung Melayu, Asahan,

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### A B S T R A C T

This paper presents the implementation and outcomes of a community service project aimed at improving Qur'anic literacy among children in the village of Gunung Melayu, Asahan, North Sumatra. The project was initiated in response to the limited access to structured Qur'anic education in the area, particularly among children aged 6 to 12 years. Using a participatory, community-based approach, the program combined formal instruction in Qur'anic reading and tajwid with interactive and engaging activities. The results showed a significant improvement in the children's ability to recognize Arabic letters, recite short surahs, and follow basic reading rules. The project also fostered greater parental involvement and communal responsibility for religious education. Despite challenges such as limited teaching resources and facilitators, the initiative proved to be effective and well-received by the community. This project serves as a model for similar efforts in rural or underserved regions, demonstrating how local collaboration can strengthen Islamic educational foundations for the younger generation.

## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as the central religious text of Islam, holds a profound place in the hearts and lives of Muslims around the world. Its verses are recited daily in prayers, memorized by heart, and studied for guidance in every aspect of life. For Muslim communities, ensuring that children become literate in reading and understanding the Qur'an is not only a religious obligation but also a cultural and spiritual legacy that must be preserved and passed on to future generations. Qur'anic literacy among children is, therefore, a fundamental part of Islamic education that begins at an early age and often serves as the foundation for broader moral and religious development.

However, achieving Qur'anic literacy remains a significant challenge in many rural and underdeveloped areas, where access to formal religious education, qualified teachers, and supporting resources is limited. In such contexts, community-based efforts and service projects play a vital role in supplementing formal education and creating opportunities for children to learn the Qur'an effectively. One such effort is

the community service project implemented in the village of Gunung Melayu, located in the Asahan Regency of North Sumatra, Indonesia.

Gunung Melayu is a modest rural village where the majority of residents are Muslims who uphold traditional values and practices. Despite the strong religious identity of the community, various socio-economic barriers hinder the effectiveness of Qur'anic education. Limited educational infrastructure, a shortage of trained Qur'anic instructors, and the absence of structured learning programs contribute to low levels of Qur'anic literacy among the younger generation. Many children in the area either struggle to read the Qur'an fluently or lack a proper understanding of its teachings. This situation raises concerns not only about religious education but also about the preservation of Islamic identity and values in the community.

Recognizing these challenges, a group of educators and volunteers initiated a community service project aimed at improving Qur'anic literacy among children in Gunung Melayu. The project was designed not only as a short-term intervention but also as a sustainable educational initiative that could empower local stakeholders to take active roles in enhancing religious education. Through collaboration with local religious leaders, schoolteachers, parents, and youth organizations, the program sought to develop a structured Qur'anic learning environment that is both accessible and engaging for children.

Qur'anic literacy plays a vital role in the religious and moral development of Muslim children. It involves not only the ability to read and recite the Qur'an in Arabic but also to understand its meanings and teachings. For many Muslim families, teaching children to read the Qur'an is one of the first and most important steps in introducing them to their faith. It forms the foundation of Islamic education and helps children develop a strong sense of identity, discipline, and spiritual awareness from an early age.

Islamic education for children traditionally begins with the learning of Arabic letters, followed by basic recitation, memorization of short surahs, and gradually progresses toward understanding the messages within the Qur'an. In many communities, this process is guided by local religious teachers and supported by families and religious institutions. However, in rural areas and underdeveloped regions, there are often significant challenges that hinder the effective delivery of Qur'anic education. These include a lack of qualified teachers, limited access to learning materials, inadequate facilities, and low parental involvement due to socio-economic conditions.

In Indonesia, especially in rural areas such as Gunung Melayu in the Asahan region, these challenges are quite pronounced. Many children are eager to learn the Qur'an, but they are constrained by their environment. In some cases, Qur'anic education is informal, sporadic, and heavily dependent on the availability of volunteers or community leaders who may not have formal training in pedagogy or religious instruction. This creates a situation where Qur'anic literacy becomes inconsistent, and many children either struggle with reading or reciting properly, or are not motivated to pursue deeper understanding.

Community service has emerged as an important approach to addressing these educational gaps. Community-based Qur'anic programs are particularly effective because they involve local participation, reflect the values and needs of the community, and create a sense of shared responsibility for children's learning. In many successful cases, educators, university students, religious leaders, and volunteers come together to organize Qur'anic learning sessions in local mosques, homes, or makeshift classrooms. These initiatives often adopt creative and interactive teaching methods that are more engaging for children. Storytelling, memorization games, group recitations, and visual aids are used to make learning more enjoyable and effective.

In addition to these methods, parental involvement and consistent practice at home play a significant role in supporting children's Qur'anic literacy. When parents actively support their children's learning and reinforce what is taught in the classroom, the results are often more sustainable. In some communities, digital tools such as Qur'anic learning apps or audio recitations are also used to support home learning, though access to these tools remains limited in many rural areas.

This paper presents an overview of the community service project, highlighting its objectives, implementation strategies, challenges, and outcomes. It aims to document the practical efforts made to address Qur'anic illiteracy in a rural setting and to provide insights that may be valuable for similar initiatives elsewhere. The study also explores the broader significance of community-based religious education in strengthening social bonds, fostering spiritual development, and nurturing future generations of Muslims. By focusing on the case of Gunung Melayu, this project demonstrates how localized educational interventions, grounded in cultural sensitivity and community involvement, can make a meaningful impact in promoting Qur'anic literacy and religious growth among children.

## **METHOD**

This community service project was conducted as a practical initiative to enhance Qur'anic literacy among children in the village of Gunung Melayu, located in Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. The method used in this project followed a participatory, community-based approach, emphasizing collaboration between organizers, local stakeholders, and families. The primary aim was to create an accessible, engaging, and sustainable learning environment where children could improve their ability to read, recite, and understand the Qur'an.

The project began with a preliminary survey and informal discussions with community leaders, religious teachers, and parents to assess the current state of Qur'anic education in the village. These initial steps were important in identifying the challenges faced by the community, such as limited availability of Qur'anic instructors, lack of structured learning schedules, and insufficient learning materials. This needs assessment helped in designing a program that was responsive to the specific needs of the children and realistic in terms of implementation.

Based on the findings, a structured Qur'anic literacy program was developed. It consisted of a series of weekly learning sessions held over the course of two months. The classes were conducted in the afternoon at the local mosque and community center to accommodate school hours and ensure maximum participation. The target participants were children aged 6 to 12 years who were either beginners in Qur'anic reading or had basic reading skills but needed further guidance and practice.

The teaching team consisted of university students with a background in Islamic education, supported by local religious teachers (*ustadz* and *ustadzah*). Before the program started, the teaching team received a short training session to standardize teaching methods and introduce creative approaches to Qur'anic learning, including the use of visual aids, repetition techniques, group reading, and positive reinforcement strategies.

The program was divided into several modules: introduction to hijaiyah letters, basic tajwid rules, short surah memorization, and daily recitation practice. In addition to formal lessons, fun and engaging activities such as Qur'anic storytelling, quizzes, and recitation competitions were held to maintain the children's interest and motivation. Parental involvement was encouraged through weekly updates and occasional invitations to observe sessions or participate in group prayer and evaluation meetings.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the project, a simple pre-test and post-test approach was used. At the beginning of the program, participants were assessed on their ability to recognize Arabic letters, read basic verses, and recite selected surahs. The same assessment was repeated at the end of the project to measure progress. In addition, qualitative feedback was gathered through informal interviews with parents, teachers, and the children themselves to understand their experiences and suggestions.

Throughout the project, collaboration with local stakeholders was key. Community leaders provided logistical support, including access to venues and promotion of the program during Friday sermons and community events. Their involvement helped build trust and ensured the sustainability of the effort beyond the formal project period.

In summary, this project adopted a participatory, child-centered, and culturally sensitive approach to Qur'anic literacy. It combined structured learning with community engagement, creating a supportive environment that encouraged children to grow in their Qur'anic knowledge while fostering a collective sense of responsibility for religious education within the village.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Qur'anic literacy program in Gunung Melayu Asahan yielded encouraging results and revealed valuable insights into the potential of community-based religious education. Over the two-month period, approximately 30 children participated consistently in the weekly learning sessions. Their level of

engagement and enthusiasm grew steadily as the program progressed, indicating that the approach used was well-received by both the students and their families.

The most immediate and measurable result was the improvement in the children's ability to recognize and read Arabic letters. During the initial pre-assessment, many participants were only familiar with a limited number of *hijaiyah* letters, and their ability to connect letters into syllables or words was minimal. By the end of the program, post-assessment results showed that a majority of the children had developed basic fluency in reading short Qur'anic verses. Some participants also began to recite selected short *surahs* from *Juz Amma* with correct pronunciation and tajwid, especially those who received extra support at home or had prior exposure to Qur'anic learning.

Beyond technical reading skills, the program also fostered greater confidence and discipline among the children. Regular attendance, the structure of the classes, and the interactive learning methods helped create a positive and motivating environment. Group activities such as recitation games and storytelling not only reinforced the lessons but also built a sense of camaraderie among the participants. The inclusion of mini competitions and rewards boosted their motivation and made the learning process enjoyable rather than burdensome.

From the perspective of the parents and local religious leaders, the program was seen as a much-needed initiative. Informal interviews revealed that many parents were grateful for the opportunity, as they had previously struggled to find consistent Qur'anic instruction for their children. Some expressed their desire for the program to continue beyond the initial project period and even suggested involving more age groups, including teenagers. Religious leaders also acknowledged the positive change, noting that children were more engaged during mosque activities and began to show interest in attending *pengajian* or group Qur'an readings with their families.

However, the project also highlighted several challenges and areas for improvement. One of the main issues was the limited availability of learning materials such as Qur'anic textbooks, flashcards, and visual aids. While the teaching team improvised with handmade resources and shared materials, the lack of printed and age-appropriate learning tools affected the consistency of the lessons. Additionally, although parental involvement was encouraged, not all families were able to support their children's learning at home due to work commitments or lack of knowledge about Qur'anic reading.

Another challenge was the limited number of facilitators. With only a few volunteers and local teachers available, managing a large group of children with varying skill levels proved difficult at times. Some children required more one-on-one guidance, particularly those who were complete beginners. This suggests that future implementations should consider increasing the number of trained facilitators or organizing smaller learning groups based on proficiency levels.

Despite these limitations, the overall impact of the project was highly positive. It demonstrated that even with limited resources, a well-organized, community-driven initiative can make a meaningful difference in improving Qur'anic literacy. More

importantly, the project rekindled a collective sense of responsibility within the community for nurturing religious knowledge among the younger generation.

The success of this initiative also aligns with broader findings in the field of Islamic education, which emphasize the importance of early intervention, culturally relevant pedagogy, and active community involvement. It reaffirms the idea that religious education does not rely solely on formal institutions but can thrive when local communities take ownership of the process. In rural settings like Gunung Melayu, where access to structured religious education is often limited, such community service programs provide not only educational benefits but also contribute to spiritual and social cohesion.

In conclusion, the project proved that enhancing Qur'anic literacy among children in rural areas is achievable through collaborative, creative, and context-sensitive approaches. It laid the foundation for continued learning and opened the door for future initiatives that can build on this experience to reach even more children and families in need of religious education support.

## **CONCLUSION**

The community service project on Qur'anic literacy for children in Gunung Melayu, Asahan, has demonstrated that grassroots educational initiatives can significantly contribute to addressing religious education gaps in rural areas. Through consistent, structured, and interactive teaching methods, the project succeeded in improving the Qur'anic reading abilities of participating children and revitalized interest in Islamic learning within the local community.

The program's outcomes highlight the importance of early Qur'anic literacy as a foundation for spiritual development, character building, and cultural identity. Despite limitations in resources and infrastructure, the collaboration between university students, local religious leaders, and parents created a supportive learning environment that empowered children to take meaningful steps toward becoming literate in the Qur'an. The combination of formal lessons, creative activities, and communal support proved to be both effective and sustainable in the short term.

This initiative also reinforced the critical role of community engagement in educational development. The active participation of local stakeholders ensured that the program was culturally appropriate, well-received, and aligned with the community's values. Moreover, the positive reception and growing demand for continued programs signal a strong potential for future expansion and replication in other underserved areas.

In summary, this project has not only provided a platform for enhancing Qur'anic literacy among children but also served as a model for how community service can address educational challenges in meaningful and culturally sensitive ways. Continued efforts, with stronger institutional support and resource allocation, can build on this foundation to foster a more literate, religiously grounded, and empowered young Muslim generation.



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