

Internalization of Islamic Educational Values and Character Strengthening for Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers at The at-Tanzil Learning Center in Lembah Jaya, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the process of internalizing Islamic educational values and strengthening character for children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) at the At-Tanzil Lembah Jaya Learning Center (SB), Ampang, Selangor, Malaysia. PMI children face structural exclusion from the formal education system due to their parents' illegal immigration status. This study describes the effectiveness of five program pillars: worship practices, tahsin-tajwid, tartil Al-Qur'an, aqidah akhlak, and batik art. The approach used is descriptive qualitative based on participatory observation. The results show that consistent habituation of worship routines can shape the discipline and emotional stability of students. The naghham bayati and nahawand methods have been proven to increase Quranic literacy and self-confidence of students. Social programs such as visits to orphanages instill the values of empathy and Islamic brotherhood. The integration of Islamic and national identities through flag ceremonies and batik art strengthens the identity of diaspora children. Overall, the community-based non-formal Islamic education model at SB At-Tanzil has succeeded in becoming a concrete response to the failure of the formal system in serving migrant children and has proven that the depth of educator commitment, the relevance of the contextual approach, and community solidarity are key factors for success.

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Introduction

The Quran is a light of guidance sent down by Allah SWT for all humanity, regardless of geographical boundaries, race, or language. As the primary source of values and wisdom, the Quran inspires Muslims to build a civilization based on the integration of knowledge and morals. Quran-based education must not be limited to geographical boundaries but must continue to shine brightly for generations of Muslims everywhere, including those living abroad with limited access to education.

The Indonesian Migrant Worker (PMI) community in Malaysia, particularly in the Lembah Jaya area of Ampang, faces significant sociological challenges. Most PMIs work as

factory workers, construction workers, domestic workers, and plantation workers on uncertain contractual terms. Their unofficial or illegal administrative status prevents their children from accessing Malaysia's national education system, putting them at risk of dropping out of school and losing their basic right to education. Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) affirms that every child has the right to education without discrimination, including regardless of the immigration status of their parents.

Amidst the darkness of access to formal education, the At-Tanzil Learning Center (SB) exists as a non-formal educational institution that serves as a small light for Indonesian children. With very limited facilities, this studio keeps the fire of learning and the values of the Quran burning in the hearts of around 80 to 90 students between the ages of 6 and 15. Studies on Islamic education in migrant communities are still very limited in the academic treasury. Comparative studies show that diaspora communities that have succeeded in maintaining cultural and religious identities across generations almost always have strong community-based non-formal educational institutions (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The SB At-Tanzil model is unique because it integrates the dimensions of general education and the development of Islamic values in a holistic manner—an approach that aligns with al-Attas's Islamic educational philosophy of comprehensively developing good human beings (the good man).

This study aims to (1) describe the sociological and educational conditions of PMI children at SB At-Tanzil; (2) analyze the effectiveness of internalizing Islamic values through the five pillars of the program; (3) identify the psychological and spiritual impacts of the community service program; and (4) formulate the implications of a non-formal Islamic education model for migrant communities.

Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach based on community-based participatory research. Data were collected during a 40-day service period (February 7–March 16, 2026) at SB At-Tanzil, Jalan Sri Intan 5, Taman Seri Intan, 68000 Ampang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Data collection techniques include: (1) participatory observation during the implementation of daily programs; (2) daily field notes (logbooks) that record processes, obstacles, and achievements; (3) visual documentation in the form of activity photos; and (4) informal discussions with the managers and ustadz of SB At-Tanzil. Data analysis was carried out descriptively-reflectively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The research subjects were approximately 90 students of SB At-Tanzil from the Tadika (kindergarten) level to the beginning of junior high school, with very heterogeneous educational backgrounds. The focus of the study covered five main program pillars, namely: worship practices (ablution, prayer, adhan), tahsin and tajwid, tartil Al-Qur'an, aqidah

akhlak, and the art of batik, as well as a special Ramadan program in the form of a Ramadan Festival and a social visit to the Rumah Kasih Ibu Orphanage.

Results and Discussion

1. Sociological and Educational Conditions of Indonesian Migrant Workers' Children at SB At-Tanzil

Sociologically, children in SB At-Tanzil often experience a "double stigma." They are the children of parents working in the informal sector, often with incomplete documentation.

The following are the social conditions of PMI children at SB At-Tanzil

a. Layers of Stigma: Economics and Legality

The first stigma is socioeconomic. As children of parents working in the informal sector (laborers, plantation workers, or domestic workers), they are often viewed as a marginalized social class. Within the local social structure, they occupy a "lower" position, perceived as merely providing cheap labor.

The second stigma is legal-formal. Their undocumented status labels them "illegal." Sociologically, this label is highly damaging, creating a persistent sense of fear and restricting their physical and social mobility.

b. Impact on Identity Construction

According to symbolic interactionism theory, a person's identity is shaped by how others perceive them. As a result of this double stigma, children at SB At-Tanzil experience:

- **Internalized Oppression:** Deep feelings of inferiority due to feeling "different" and "unwanted" by the social system outside the studio.
- **Liminal Identity:** They are on the verge of liminality; not fully part of Malaysian society, but also feel alienated from their homeland (Indonesia) which they have rarely or never visited.

c. SB At-Tanzil as a "Buffer Zone"

In these pressing sociological conditions, SB At-Tanzil is present not merely as a classroom, but as a social defense mechanism:

- **Deconstructing Stigma:** Within the studio, the status of "illegal" or "poor" is eliminated. They are accepted as equals, which helps restore self-esteem.
- **Mechanical Solidarity:** A shared destiny creates strong social bonds among students. They build a community that serves as a psychological buffer against the pressures of the outside world.

The conditions of the children at SB At-Tanzil are a stark reflection of social exclusion. The double stigma they bear is a structural burden that is not their fault, yet directly impacts their future. Without character-based educational interventions like those at SB At-Tanzil, this stigma risks creating a permanent cycle of poverty and marginalization (intergenerational poverty).

The children who study at SB At-Tanzil are sons and daughters of PMI who live in the Ampang area, Selangor. They come from various regions in Indonesia, West Java, Central Java, East Java and Sumatra, creating unique social dynamics within the community. Economically, their family is at the lower middle level with work in the informal sector.

The most crucial sociological condition is immigration status. Most parents are undocumented or illegal, causing children to grow up in a vortex of legal uncertainty.

Malaysia's national education system requires valid residency documents as a prerequisite for enrollment. As a result, thousands of Indonesian children are structurally excluded from the most fundamental right to education—a humanitarian crisis with far-reaching consequences.

One of the most moving findings was the stark contrast between the limited physical facilities and the students' high enthusiasm for learning. They viewed the studio not just as a place to learn, but as a safe space to build character and strengthen their identity as part of the Indonesian nation. This phenomenon teaches us that intrinsic motivation to learn doesn't always stem from luxurious facilities, but from real need and personal meaning.

2. The Effectiveness of the Five Pillars of the Islamic Values Internalization Program

a. The Value of Monotheism: As the Foundation of Mental Resilience.

Tawhid (monotheism) is at the heart of the entire educational process at SB At-Tanzil. PMI children often feel "small" and "insignificant" in the face of a legal system that persecutes them or a social structure that marginalizes them.

- Transformation: Instilling values is aimed at making children aware that the highest authority is God, not administrative status.
- Sociological Impact: This eliminates the inferiority complex. They are taught that dignity (izzah) does not depend on a passport or their parents' work permit, but rather on the quality of their relationship with their Creator. This creates inner peace in the face of the uncertainties of life abroad.

b. Moral Values: As a Social Shield

Migrant workers' residential environments are often harsh and exposed to negative influences. Internalizing morals (ethics) is a crucial tool for distancing themselves from deviant behavior.

- Transformation: Children are introduced to the concept of good deeds in simple forms, such as honesty, politeness, and discipline.
- Sociological Impact: With good morals, the stigma that "migrant children are naughty or disorderly" can be broken. Morals serve as a moral identity card that makes them more accepted by the wider social environment and creates a positive image for the Indonesian migrant worker community as a whole.

c. The Value of Ukhuwah (Brotherhood): Building Social Capital

Children at SB At-Tanzil often feel isolated. Internalizing the values of brotherhood transforms the studio into a "big house" that replaces the extended family that has been left behind in Indonesia.

- Transformation: Emphasis on the verse *Innamal mu'minuna ikhwatun* (indeed, believers are brothers). They are taught to protect each other, especially when there are external threats (such as raids or discrimination).
- Sociological Impact: This creates organic solidarity. When they feel like they have siblings, social anxiety is reduced, and they have a strong support system to persevere through the educational process.

d. The Value of Jihad Thalabul 'Ilmi: Redefining Struggle

For migrant workers (PMI) children, attending school is both a luxury and a physical challenge due to the distance and transportation costs. The value of jihad is used to give spiritual meaning to their fatigue.

- Transformation: Learning was not seen as a burden, but as the highest form of worship (jihad). SB At-Tanzil instilled in them that their pens were weapons to change their families' destinies.
- Sociological Impact: This value fosters an academic work ethic. Children become more diligent and develop a high adversity quotient. They learn to persevere despite limited studio facilities, believing that every effort made in learning is rewarded by God.

e. The Values of Patience and Gratitude: Psychological Conflict Management

The reality of being an undocumented migrant worker is fraught with psychological stress. The values of patience and gratitude are the most effective stress management tools.

- Transformation: * Patience: Taught as the ability to remain steadfast in God's rules even in difficult situations.
 - Gratitude: Taught to see opportunities in the midst of adversity—appreciating that they can still study at SB At-Tanzil compared to other children who have to work in the fields.
- Sociological Impact: The combination of patience and gratitude prevents the emergence of apathy and resentment toward social structures. This produces individuals who are emotionally stable, not easily provoked, and remain optimistic about the future even though their current actions are limited by legal barriers.

These five internalizations of Islamic values constitute the "Spiritual Immunization" strategy implemented by SB At-Tanzil. Through Tawhid (Oneness of God), Morals, Brotherhood (Ukhuwah), Jihad (Jihad), and Patience and Gratitude, education here produces not only cognitively intelligent children but also individuals with strong mental resilience.

Islamic education at SB At-Tanzil is a tool of emancipation that frees PMI children from the shackles of stigma, while also preparing them to return to Indonesia (or stay in Malaysia) as citizens with integrity and strong character.

Worship Practices and Consistent Routines. The practice of morning worship, held every 8:00 a.m., including congregational Dhuha prayer, recitation of Surah Al-Waqi'ah and Al-Mulk, wirid, and salawat, has been empirically proven to create a strong structure of discipline. Children who initially appeared reluctant and late, within the first two weeks, began arriving earlier, performing ablution independently, and lining up in orderly rows.

This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to form new neural pathways in response to repeated experiences. From an Islamic educational perspective, this process is known as ta'wid (habituation), which is one of the primary methods in moral education. Classical scholars refer to it as the stage from takhalli (emptying of bad behavior) to tahalli (filling with noble behavior), culminating in tajalli (radiating morality in everyday life).

Tahsin, Tajweed, and Tartil Al-Qur'an. The tahsin and tajweed program is implemented interactively during the post-Maghrib session using the talaqqi method. Students are able to recognize basic tajweed rules such as nun sukun, mad, and qalqalah.

The main pedagogical innovation is the application of the *naghham* method, the art of reciting the Qur'an with beautiful tones. *Naghham* is not merely an aesthetic ornament; it is part of the *tilawah* tradition that has been passed down through *mutawatir* since the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

From a neuroaesthetic perspective, Stefan Koelsch (2010) demonstrated that music processing activates a broader neural network than language processing alone, encompassing areas of memory, emotion, and the brain's reward system. This explains why children taught to recite the Quran with *naghham bayati* or *nahawand* tend to remember and retain memorization more easily. When a child who was previously only able to spell the *hijaiyah* letters succeeds in reciting Surah Al-Waqi'ah melodiously, the transformation that occurs is not merely a skill, but a reconstruction of self-perception.

Creed and Morals and Character Building. Creed and morals learning is conducted in the afternoon session (2:00 PM–4:00 PM), covering daily etiquette, Arabic script writing practice, and reading Arabic texts. Character achievement is measured by changes in students' social behavior and discipline. Students demonstrate a good understanding of etiquette toward teachers and peers, and a collective awareness of cleaning up the classroom after activities is an indicator of a growing sense of responsibility.

The Art of Batik. The batik program serves as a cultural bridge connecting Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) children with the richness of Indonesian civilization. Batik is not simply a patterned fabric, but a reflection of the philosophy and collective identity of the Indonesian people. When PMI children learn to make batik, they are claiming their cultural heritage in a foreign country. The program's 100% success rate reflects the participants' enthusiasm.

3. Psychological and Spiritual Impact

The most obvious psychological impact is the reconstruction of self-esteem in the students. According to Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, mastery experiences are the most powerful source of self-confidence. The Ramadan Festival is designed as a structured stage for self-actualization. When a student stands before the congregation and confidently calls the *adhan*, he or she is claiming space in a world that has previously denied them.

A structured daily routine also builds emotional stability. John Bowlby (1988) explained in his attachment theory that individuals who grow up without a secure base tend to develop chronic anxiety. SB At-Tanzil's daily rhythms serve as a psychological anchor for children living in uncertain conditions—a predictable world that provides a sense of security.

A visit to the Rumah Kasih Ibu orphanage resulted in increased empathy and social maturity. What made this activity incredibly pedagogically effective was its contextual relevance: the Indonesian migrant workers who visited the orphanage were in similar circumstances. The empathy that emerged wasn't one of distant pity, but rather a solidarity born of shared experience.

For student servants, this program serves as an educational laboratory that cannot be replicated in the classroom. Through Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and then trying again, they experience accelerated pedagogical maturity and an appreciation of the meaning of sincerity in preaching.

4. Islamic Constructivism Approach as a Pedagogical Foundation

The successful internalization of Islamic values at SB At-Tanzil cannot be separated from the pedagogical approach implicitly implemented. When analyzed through the lens of contemporary educational theory, this approach strongly aligns with the constructivist paradigm (Jonassen, 1991), in which knowledge must be actively constructed by students through direct experience.

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is evident in learning patterns. The peer-teaching system, where more advanced students guide their peers at the basic level, is a direct implementation of the ZPD in the context of non-formal Islamic education.

However, constructivism in the context of Islamic education does not stand without a foundation of values. Abdurrahman Salih Abdullah (1982) emphasized that human reason, as an instrument of knowledge, must always be guided by the light of revelation to avoid being lost in relativism. This is what distinguishes the SB At-Tanzil model: every experience a student undergoes is always reinterpreted in terms of divine values and Islamic morality, so that the learning process produces not only competence but also character.

5. Supporting Factors, Inhibitors, and Efforts to Overcome Them

The main supporting factors include: (a) full support from the cooperative and open management of SB At-Tanzil; (b) solidarity of the student team in carrying out a busy daily schedule; (c) varied and interactive learning methods; and (d) emotional closeness and a family atmosphere that makes students confident in appearing in competitions.

The main inhibiting factors include: (a) inconsistency due to changing teachers every period; (b) very striking heterogeneity in the abilities and ages of students; (c) participant fatigue due to a very tight schedule; (d) health problems of teachers and the lack of loudspeakers; and (e) limited learning space.

The implemented remedial measures include: developing standard learning modules to maintain consistency; implementing a peer-teaching system; time management with ice-breaking sessions; rearranging learning spaces; and age-based grouping for more effective student conditioning.

6. Implications for the Development of Islamic Education Models for Migrant Communities

The findings of this community service program have broad implications for policy and the development of Islamic education models. SB At-Tanzil fills a gap that should be filled by a comprehensive bilateral policy. Indonesia, as the largest migrant worker-sending country in the ASEAN region, has a constitutional responsibility, as stipulated in Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution, to ensure the fulfillment of its citizens' educational rights abroad.

The most relevant policy step is the formalization and official recognition of non-formal educational institutions such as SB At-Tanzil as part of Indonesia's overseas education system. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs can establish minimum curriculum standards, provide standardized teaching materials, and facilitate regular teacher deployment programs.

Academically, the experience of SB At-Tanzil provides evidence that the effectiveness of Islamic education is not determined by the sophistication of facilities, but rather by the depth of educator commitment, the relevance of contextual approaches, and the

strength of community social networks. This challenges the assumption that quality Islamic education can only be achieved in institutions with adequate infrastructure, in line with Paulo Freire's (2000) view that true education always arises from, by, and for the community concerned.

Conclusion

SB At-Tanzil is a non-formal institution that is crucial as an alternative educational beacon for PMI children who are excluded from the formal system. Internalization of Islamic values through five program pillars, especially through the habituation method (ta'wid), Al-Qur'an recitation, and contextual learning, has proven effective in forming students' discipline, self-confidence, and Islamic character. This program has a significant psychological impact, especially in reconstructing students' self-esteem and building emotional stability through structured routines. The integration of Islamic and national identities has succeeded in strengthening the identity of diaspora children who are vulnerable to identity crises.

The theoretical implications of this research confirm that the Islamic constructivist model, which combines an active, experience-based approach with a normative framework based on revelation, is an appropriate pedagogical foundation for Islamic education in marginalized communities. Practical implications encourage the formalization of PMI non-formal educational institutions, the development of standardized curricula, and the strengthening of long-term partnerships between Indonesian Islamic universities and diaspora communities. Further research using mixed methods designs and longitudinal studies is needed to generate stronger evidence.

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