

Strengthening Islamic Religious Literacy and Children's Communication Skills through Inter-Qur'anic Education Center Competition Activities

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Abstract. Inter-Qur'anic Education Center (Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an/TPA) competition activities represent a form of student community service in the fields of education and religion. Low levels of Islamic religious literacy and limited communication skills among children in TPA remain prevalent, particularly with regard to basic understanding of Islamic teachings, social relationships, and interpersonal interaction. These conditions are closely related to the continued use of conventional and less varied learning methods. This community service program was implemented through inter-TPA competition activities aimed at strengthening children's Islamic religious literacy, fostering social interaction, and enhancing communication between students (*santri*) and instructors (*ustadz*). The program employed a participatory and collaborative approach, implemented through several stages, including planning, coordination with TPA administrators, execution of competition activities, and evaluation of outcomes. Data were collected through observation, discussion, and documentation, while data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive method. The results indicate that the program successfully increased children's motivation to learn Islamic teachings, strengthened solidarity among TPAs, and fostered Islamic values among participants. Therefore, inter-TPA competition activities can be considered an effective method for strengthening Islamic religious literacy and improving children's communication skills.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Literacy; Children's Communication Skills; Inter-TPA Competition Activities.

1. Introduction

Religious education serves as a fundamental foundation in shaping the character and moral values of younger generations. Amid the rapid pace of modernization and globalization, the role of religious education has become increasingly vital in preserving moral, spiritual, and social values within society. One grassroots institution that plays a strategic role in fostering children's religious character is the Qur'anic Education Center (Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an/TPA). TPAs function not only as places for learning to

read and understand the Qur'an, but also as spaces for moral development, cultivation of worship discipline, and reinforcement of social values and togetherness among children. However, in practice, learning activities in TPAs often face various challenges, including limited facilities, a lack of variation in teaching methods, low learning motivation among children, and minimal active participation due to monotonous, conventional learning approaches.

Preliminary observations conducted at the community service site revealed that many TPA children still demonstrate limited understanding of basic Islamic teachings, low self-confidence, and minimal engagement in communication with instructors (ustaz) and peers. The continued reliance on conventional teaching methods – primarily rote memorization and lecture-based instruction – has constrained two-way interaction and hindered the development of children's communication skills. Consequently, these conditions have contributed to reduced learning motivation and passive participation in religious learning activities.

Within this context, inter-TPA competition activities emerge as a creative and educational innovation. Through competition-based activities, religious learning can be presented in a more engaging and stimulating manner while simultaneously strengthening social interaction between students and educators. The quiz competition (*cerdas cermat*) and the five-daily-prayer competition implemented in this program represent concrete efforts by university students to enhance Islamic religious literacy among TPA children. The quiz competition encourages children to understand Islamic teachings both cognitively and applicatively, whereas the prayer competition aims to cultivate discipline in worship and reinforce spiritual values in daily life. These activities were selected due to their relevance to children's foundational Islamic education and their feasibility using simple resources with substantial motivational impact.

This program was also conducted as part of the *Kuliah Kerja Nyata* (KKN), a compulsory community service program that positions university students as agents of change and implementers of community engagement initiatives. Students functioned not only as facilitators, but also as program designers who adapted activities to local community needs through a participatory approach. As noted by Hidayat (2021), community service activities constitute a tangible form of academic engagement in enhancing social capacity through education, mentoring, and empowerment. Therefore, the inter-TPA competition served not merely as a competitive event, but also as a social learning platform for students to understand community dynamics, develop leadership skills, and foster empathy and social responsibility.

Beyond its impact on participants and students, this program also functioned as an effective medium for strengthening relationships among informal religious education institutions. In socio-religious contexts, relationships between TPA administrators, instructors, and parents are often fragmented due to geographical distance or differences in teaching systems. Through joint activities such as inter-TPA competitions, meaningful communication and harmonious collaboration among these stakeholders were fostered. This aligns with the findings of Sari and Yuliani (2022), who argue that religion-based

collaborative activities can enhance social solidarity and reinforce collective values within communities. Accordingly, the competition activities contributed not only to improving children's religious competencies, but also to strengthening social networks among TPAs at the local level.

Inter-TPA competition activities also made a significant contribution to strengthening children's religious literacy. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (2020), religious literacy encompasses the ability to understand, internalize, and practice religious values in everyday life. In practice, religious literacy extends beyond memorization or textual comprehension to include moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. The quiz and prayer competitions functioned as experiential learning tools that fostered religious awareness through direct engagement and healthy competition. As such, these activities can be viewed as an alternative participatory learning model that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning.

In addition to educational outcomes for children, the program also generated broader social benefits for the community. The presence of university students injected new energy into the local environment, strengthened social interaction, and enhanced the spirit of mutual cooperation. Active community participation in supporting the program reflects a collective awareness of the importance of early religious education. Consistent with Lestari (2021), community-based initiatives involving collaboration between students and local residents can strengthen social capital and accelerate character development among children. Thus, inter-TPA competition activities represent not merely ceremonial programs, but a manifestation of synergy between academia and society in pursuit of broader educational objectives.

Through this collaborative approach, students did not merely fulfill academic requirements, but also internalized values of service, empathy, and social responsibility. The program functioned as a social laboratory in which students honed communication skills, activity management, and problem-solving abilities in real-world contexts. In the long term, initiatives such as this are expected to contribute to the development of a younger generation that is not only intellectually capable, but also socially and morally conscious. Therefore, inter-TPA competition activities can serve as an effective and sustainable model of community service practice, as they successfully bridge academic, social, and spiritual interests in a balanced and meaningful manner.

2. Methodology

The inter-Qur'anic Education Center (TPA) competition activities were implemented as part of a student community service program focusing on educational and religious development. The implementation method was designed using a participatory, collaborative, and educational approach that actively involved local community members, TPA administrators, instructors (*ustaz/ustazah*), and students (*santri*). This participatory-collaborative approach positioned university students not merely as program organizers, but also as facilitators who encouraged active community involvement at every stage of the program. Consequently, the activities functioned as a

two-way learning process: students gained insights into local social conditions and community needs, while the community benefited directly from student engagement and contributions.

Overall, the program implementation was structured into four main stages: planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation. Each stage was designed with specific objectives and strategies to ensure effective execution and meaningful outcomes.

2.1 Planning Stage

The planning stage began with field observations aimed at identifying local conditions and community needs, particularly those of TPA children in the target area. Observations were conducted informally through visits to TPA administrators, discussions with instructors (*ustaz/ustazah*), and direct observation of students' learning activities. Based on these observations, the student team formulated relevant activities, namely an Islamic knowledge quiz competition (*cerdas cermat*) and a five-daily-prayer competition.

The selection of these two competitions was based on the identified need to strengthen basic Islamic literacy and enhance children's discipline in religious practices. In addition, the planning stage involved preparing an activity proposal, distributing tasks among team members, and determining the schedule and venue for the activities. The activity plan was also communicated to community leaders and TPA administrators to obtain support and constructive feedback. Community participation was emphasized at this stage to ensure that the program was not implemented in a top-down manner, but instead emerged from local needs and gained broad acceptance among stakeholders.

2.2 Coordination Stage

The coordination stage focused on strengthening collaboration between students and the community. Intensive coordination was conducted with TPA administrators to discuss technical aspects of the competitions, including assessment mechanisms, number of participants, and judging criteria. Responsibilities among students were also clearly divided, covering areas such as event coordination, logistics, consumption, documentation, and public relations.

Coordination extended to community members, particularly parents and religious leaders, to secure moral and material support for the activities. Several community members contributed by providing basic equipment, such as mats, stationery, and prizes for participants. This collaborative engagement not only facilitated smooth program implementation, but also strengthened social relationships between students and local residents. At this stage, interpersonal communication played a crucial role, with students acting as a bridge between academic initiatives and community realities.

2.3 Implementation Stage

The implementation stage constituted the core of the community service activities. The inter-TPA competitions were conducted in an enthusiastic and vibrant atmosphere, involving children from several TPAs within the same locality. The Islamic

knowledge quiz competition was organized using a team-based system, with each team representing one TPA. The questions covered various aspects of Islamic knowledge, including daily prayers, tajwid, the pillars of Islam, the pillars of faith, prophetic history, and ethical conduct in daily life. Through this competitive format, children were encouraged not only to recall information, but also to develop a deeper and more practical understanding of Islamic values.

The five-daily-prayer competition was conducted individually, with an emphasis on accuracy of movements, recitations, and comprehension of meaning. The competition was assessed by local *ustaz* and *ustazah* with recognized competence in religious practices. Activities were carried out in an orderly manner and were interspersed with religious advice and motivational messages from judges and students. High participant enthusiasm and strong community support demonstrated the program's ability to foster a positive and inspiring religious atmosphere.

In addition to the competitions, students provided brief educational sessions emphasizing the importance of worship discipline and deepening religious understanding. These moments facilitated warm interactions among students, children, and community members, reinforcing values of social bonding and togetherness.

2.4 Evaluation Stage

The evaluation stage was conducted after the completion of activities to assess program effectiveness and its impact on participants and the community. Evaluation was carried out through direct observation of participant and community responses, as well as reflective discussions among student team members. The evaluation results indicated that the program was implemented successfully and received positive responses from various stakeholders. Children appeared motivated and enthusiastic, while community members expressed pride in seeing their children participate in educational and religious activities.

Internal evaluations also focused on team performance, including time management, coordination among members, and communication effectiveness with the community. Several improvement notes were identified for future implementation, such as the need for longer preparation time and additional instructional materials. Nevertheless, overall evaluation findings suggest that the program effectively achieved its objectives, both in enhancing children's Islamic religious literacy and in strengthening social relationships between students and the community.

The community service program employed a participatory and collaborative method, with participants consisting of TPA children involved in the competitions, TPA instructors, administrators, and community members. Data were collected through observation during activity implementation, discussions with TPA administrators and community members, and activity documentation. Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach to illustrate the impact of the program on strengthening Islamic religious literacy and improving children's communication skills.

3. Results and Discussion

The implementation of the inter-Qur'anic Education Center (TPA) competition activities produced several significant outcomes, particularly in terms of enhancing children's Islamic religious literacy, strengthening community social relations, and developing students' competencies in community engagement. The findings indicate that the program successfully created an enjoyable learning environment, fostered closer relationships among TPAs, and reinforced Islamic values through healthy and educational competition. This section analyzes the results from four main dimensions: (1) impact on participants and the enhancement of Islamic religious literacy, (2) social impact on the community and TPA institutions, (3) reflective learning outcomes for students, and (4) program sustainability analysis.

3.1 Impact on Participants and the Enhancement of Islamic Religious Literacy

Islamic literacy refers to the process of learning the knowledge revealed by Allah SWT to the Prophets and Messengers and subsequently transmitted to the Companions and believers, encompassing an understanding of the Qur'an, Hadith, and the values contained therein (Utami, Y., 2025). The inter-TPA competition activities had a direct and positive influence on children's learning motivation in understanding Islamic teachings. Field observations revealed high levels of enthusiasm among participants throughout the activities. Children actively engaged in answering questions during the Islamic knowledge quiz competition and demonstrated their best performance during the five-daily-prayer competition. This enthusiasm suggests that competition-based learning activities can serve as an effective medium for increasing children's interest in religious learning.

The quiz competition proved effective in sharpening children's knowledge across various aspects of Islam, including memorization of daily prayers, *tajwid*, and the history of the Prophets. Participants were challenged not only cognitively, but also in their ability to comprehend meanings and apply Islamic teachings in everyday life. Through this activity, children learned that religious knowledge is not merely to be memorized, but also to be practiced through attitudes and behavior.

Meanwhile, the five-daily-prayer competition provided a learning experience that emphasized psychomotor and affective domains. Children were trained to pay close attention to the accuracy of movements, recitations, and intentions in performing prayers. Based on judges' assessments, most participants were able to perform prayers correctly in accordance with Islamic guidelines. This finding indicates that practical religious activities presented in a competitive format can effectively enhance children's discipline in worship practices.

Beyond cognitive and spiritual aspects, the activities also fostered social values such as sportsmanship, cooperation, and self-confidence. Children learned to accept outcomes gracefully, respect their peers, and develop a sense of togetherness within the framework of *ukhuwah Islamiyah*. As argued by Rahman (2021), competition-based activities oriented toward religious values can strengthen children's moral character

formation while cultivating social responsibility. Direct observations further revealed a notable increase in children's participation and engagement in religious learning. Prior to the competitions, only a small number of children actively participated in question-and-answer sessions or appeared confident speaking in public. Following the implementation of the program, participation increased significantly, with nearly 90% of children willing to speak publicly, respond to questions, and interact with peers. Similarly, approximately 80% of participants were able to perform prayer practices with correct recitations and movements according to basic Islamic standards. These data demonstrate that inter-TPA competition activities generated measurable positive outcomes.

The increased level of participation reflects improvements in children's self-confidence and communication skills. From the perspective of Islamic education, communication holds a central role in the learning process, as it enables two-way interaction and encourages learners to actively engage in educational activities (Rizky & Iryanti, 2024). Therefore, inter-TPA competition activities can be regarded as a learning method that not only transmits religious knowledge, but also shapes participants' religious and social character.

3.2 Social Impact on the Community and TPA Institutions

In addition to benefiting individual participants, the inter-TPA competition program generated substantial positive impacts on the broader social environment, particularly in strengthening community cohesion and enhancing the institutional capacity of Qur'anic Education Centers (TPAs). One of the most tangible and immediate outcomes was the revitalization of togetherness among TPAs that had previously operated independently with minimal interaction. Prior to the program, TPAs tended to function in isolation due to differences in geographical location, instructional approaches, and limited opportunities for inter-institutional collaboration (Rahman et al., 2024). Through the implementation of joint competition activities, these institutional boundaries were gradually reduced, creating a shared social space that encouraged communication, mutual recognition, and collective engagement.

The competition activities provided a platform where TPA administrators, instructors (*ustaz/ustazah*), parents, and community members could interact in a familial and cooperative atmosphere. Informal discussions during preparation and implementation stages enabled stakeholders to exchange ideas, experiences, and best practices related to religious education and child development. This interaction fostered a sense of shared responsibility for nurturing children's religious and moral growth, thereby strengthening social bonds among community members who might otherwise have limited interaction. Such social cohesion is particularly important in grassroots religious education contexts, where sustainability often depends on collective commitment rather than formal institutional support.

Community participation in the program was notably high, reflecting strong local ownership and acceptance of the initiative. Many parents actively attended the

activities to support their children, assist with logistical arrangements, and contribute resources such as equipment and prizes. Their involvement extended beyond passive observation, as they also engaged in informal supervision and encouragement of participants. This level of participation indicates that religion-based community service programs continue to be highly relevant and responsive to local needs. As emphasized by Lestari (2020), community engagement in non-formal education plays a crucial role in character development, as learning processes are deeply embedded within social and cultural environments rather than confined to formal educational settings. The program thus functioned as a catalyst for reinforcing the role of families and communities as active partners in children's religious education.

From an institutional perspective, the program significantly strengthened the visibility and legitimacy of TPAs as essential providers of early Islamic education within the community. The competitions served as a positive public platform that showcased the educational role of TPAs and highlighted their contributions to children's moral and spiritual development. This increased visibility helped raise public awareness of the importance of non-formal religious education and encouraged broader community support for TPA activities. Moreover, the collaborative nature of the program fostered more harmonious and communicative relationships among TPAs, enabling them to share instructional strategies, address common challenges, and explore opportunities for future collaboration (Hardivizon et al., 2024; Hasyim et al., 2025). Such inter-institutional networking holds strategic value for socio-religious development at the community level, as it contributes to a more integrated and resilient educational ecosystem.

Furthermore, the program effectively demonstrated the role of university students as active and constructive members of society. Through their involvement, students were perceived not merely as academic learners fulfilling curricular requirements, but as partners who contributed knowledge, energy, and organizational skills to community-based initiatives. Their presence helped bridge the gap between academic institutions and local communities, fostering mutual trust and cooperation. The success of the program illustrates that meaningful collaboration between students and community stakeholders can generate social impacts that extend beyond short-term activities, contributing to long-term community empowerment and social sustainability. In this sense, the inter-TPA competition program exemplifies how student-led community service initiatives can strengthen social capital, reinforce institutional relationships, and support holistic socio-religious development at the grassroots level.

3.3 Reflective Learning Outcomes for Students

For university students, the inter-TPA competition program offered highly valuable experiential learning opportunities that extended beyond conventional academic instruction. Participation in community service activities not only enhanced students' academic and managerial competencies, but also cultivated essential soft skills, including empathy, leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal communication. Throughout the program implementation, students were required to engage directly

with community members, plan and coordinate activities, manage limited resources, and respond to dynamic field conditions. These responsibilities provided a practical learning environment in which students were challenged to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts.

During the implementation process, students encountered various challenges, such as coordinating with diverse community stakeholders, managing time effectively, and organizing activities in a manner that accommodated local cultural norms and expectations. Differences in communication styles, schedules, and decision-making processes required students to exercise patience, adaptability, and problem-solving skills. Rather than hindering the program, these challenges became valuable learning experiences that contributed to students' personal and professional development. Through reflective practice, students learned to become more resilient, flexible, and solution-oriented—qualities that are essential for future professionals working in complex social environments.

The program also significantly broadened students' understanding of social realities, particularly in the context of grassroots religious education. By engaging directly with TPAs and local communities, students gained firsthand insights into how religious education for children is managed despite limitations in infrastructure, funding, and human resources. They observed how Islamic values are preserved, practiced, and transmitted through daily routines, informal instruction, and communal interactions. Such experiential exposure deepened students' appreciation of the role of community-based institutions in sustaining religious and moral education, while simultaneously enhancing their social and spiritual awareness. These dimensions of learning are difficult to achieve through classroom-based instruction alone, as they require direct interaction with lived social realities.

Reflective evaluations conducted among participating students further indicate that the program strengthened their sense of social responsibility as an integral component of the *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*, particularly in the domain of community service. Through direct engagement with children, parents, instructors, and community leaders, students learned to translate academic knowledge, ethical values, and disciplinary expertise into concrete social contributions. This process reinforced the understanding that higher education is not solely oriented toward intellectual achievement, but also toward societal engagement and service. In line with the findings of Siregar and Nurhaliza (2022), student involvement in religion-based community service initiatives plays a significant role in fostering social leadership and strengthening the moral identity of younger generations.

Moreover, the program reaffirmed the notion that community service should not be perceived merely as an academic obligation, but as a meaningful process of humanitarian learning. Students were exposed to fundamental values such as simplicity, mutual cooperation, respect, and collective responsibility. They came to recognize that social transformation does not always require large-scale interventions or substantial financial resources; rather, it can begin with small, contextually relevant initiatives that

respond directly to community needs. This realization encouraged students to view themselves as active agents of change capable of contributing positively to society, regardless of scale.

In this regard, the inter-TPA competition activities symbolize a productive synergy between educational institutions and local communities in their shared efforts to educate, empower, and morally develop younger generations. For students, the program served as a reflective learning space that integrated academic knowledge with social practice, spiritual values, and civic responsibility. Such experiences are essential in shaping graduates who are not only intellectually competent, but also socially sensitive, ethically grounded, and committed to contributing to the well-being of society.

3.4 Program Sustainability Analysis

One of the key strengths of the inter-TPA competition program lies in its strong sustainability potential. Evaluation findings indicate that both community members and TPA administrators expressed a high level of enthusiasm and commitment toward the continuation of similar activities on a regular, annual basis. This positive response suggests that the program was not perceived as a short-term or externally imposed intervention, but rather as a meaningful and relevant initiative that aligns with local educational and religious needs. The willingness of stakeholders to sustain the program reflects a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, which are critical factors in ensuring the long-term viability of community-based initiatives.

The sustainability of the program is further supported by its reliance on locally available resources and community participation. The competition activities were designed to be simple, cost-effective, and adaptable, allowing them to be implemented without heavy dependence on external funding or complex infrastructure. This resource-efficient approach enhances the feasibility of replication and continuity, particularly in rural or semi-urban settings where financial and institutional support may be limited. Moreover, the active involvement of parents, instructors, and community leaders throughout the program contributed to the development of shared commitment and trust, which serve as social capital for future initiatives.

To strengthen program sustainability, the establishment of an inter-TPA communication forum is proposed as a strategic mechanism for coordination and collaboration. Such a forum could function as a platform for sharing information, planning joint activities, and addressing common challenges related to children's religious education. By facilitating regular communication among TPA administrators, instructors, and community representatives, the forum would help institutionalize collaborative practices and ensure continuity beyond the initial implementation. In the long term, this network-based approach could expand the scope of activities and foster a more integrated system of non-formal Islamic education at the community level.

Program sustainability may also be enhanced through diversification and innovation in activity design. While the current competitions focused on Islamic knowledge quizzes and prayer practices, future iterations could incorporate additional

activities such as short surah memorization, *adhan*, *tilawah*, and Islamic storytelling. These variations would not only maintain participant interest, but also address diverse dimensions of Islamic education, including cognitive, spiritual, and artistic expression. Importantly, such diversification should remain aligned with the overarching goal of strengthening Islamic values and character formation, ensuring that program expansion does not compromise its educational integrity.

From an academic standpoint, the program demonstrates strong potential as a replicable model of character education-based community service. Higher education institutions may adopt similar initiatives as part of structured community service or service-learning courses, tailoring themes, methods, and target groups to suit local contexts. Integrating such programs into the academic curriculum would contribute to institutional sustainability by ensuring continuity through successive student cohorts. Additionally, systematic documentation and evaluation of program outcomes could support evidence-based refinement and facilitate dissemination of best practices within academic and practitioner communities.

Ultimately, the inter-TPA competition program illustrates how community service initiatives can generate reciprocal benefits for both students and communities while maintaining long-term relevance and impact. By combining participatory approaches, local resource utilization, and academic engagement, the program offers a sustainable framework for strengthening religious literacy, social cohesion, and character development. As such, it represents a promising model for sustainable community engagement that bridges educational, social, and spiritual dimensions in a mutually reinforcing manner.

4. Conclusion

The inter-TPA competition activities implemented as part of the university students' community service program generated broad and positive impacts on participants, the community, and the students themselves. The program successfully enhanced children's Islamic religious literacy while simultaneously improving their communication skills, both among participants from different TPAs and within the wider community context. Through the two main activities—namely the Islamic knowledge quiz and the five daily prayers competition—children were provided with meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences. These activities enabled them not only to understand Islamic values at a theoretical level, but also to practice those values concretely through worship and everyday behavior.

From a social perspective, the program functioned as an effective medium for strengthening children's communication abilities, fostering togetherness among TPAs, and reinforcing relationships between students and community members. The activities created a shared space for interaction, collaboration, and mutual support among TPA administrators, instructors, parents, and local residents. The high level of community participation reflects a strong collective awareness of the importance of early religious education and character formation. This finding underscores the relevance of

participatory, religion-based community service initiatives as a means of promoting social cohesion and moral development at the grassroots level.

For the students, the program served as a valuable form of social and experiential learning. Through direct engagement with children and community members, students developed practical skills in communication, coordination, and program management. More importantly, they internalized essential social values such as empathy, mutual cooperation, and social responsibility. The community service experience allowed students to move beyond theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom and apply their academic competencies in real-life social contexts. In this regard, the program contributed meaningfully to the realization of the *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*, particularly in the domain of community service.

Overall, the collaborative and participatory approach adopted in the inter-TPA competition program proved effective in achieving its primary objectives: strengthening Islamic religious literacy, enhancing children's communication skills, fostering social solidarity, and nurturing Islamic values among younger generations. The program demonstrates that relatively simple, community-based activities—when designed inclusively and implemented collaboratively—can produce tangible and sustainable social change. Therefore, this initiative may serve as an implementable and replicable model for higher education institutions seeking to develop community service programs grounded in religious education and character development. By integrating academic engagement with local wisdom and community participation, such programs hold significant potential to contribute to holistic community empowerment and the moral development of future generations.

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