

ISLAMIC LITERACY TRAINING AND CHARACTER BUILDING FOR STUDENTS AT THAMISLAM FOUNDATION SCHOOL, NONTHABURI, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT Muslim minority communities in Thailand face persistent challenges in maintaining Islamic literacy and shaping religious character among the younger generation, particularly in non-southern provinces such as Nonthaburi where Islamic educational resources are limited. This community engagement program aimed to strengthen the Islamic literacy and character of students at Thamislam Foundation School, Nonthaburi, Thailand, through structured virtual training delivered by lecturers from Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Minhaajurrosyidiin, Jakarta. The activity was conducted online via the Zoom Meeting platform, employing a participatory action approach that combined lectures, interactive question-and-answer sessions, group discussions, and reflective practice. The training involved 46 to 47 secondary-school students together with school teachers and accompanying facilitators across two main sessions, with thematic content focused on the foundations of Islamic literacy, the reading and understanding of religious texts, and the cultivation of noble character grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Pre- and post-activity observations, supplemented by participant reflection forms, showed a clear improvement in students' understanding of basic Islamic literacy concepts, increased motivation to study religious texts, and stronger awareness of character values such as honesty, discipline, respect, and responsibility. Teachers reported that the training also offered a useful model for cross-border Islamic education collaboration. The program demonstrates that well-designed online community engagement can effectively bridge geographic distance to support Islamic education in Muslim minority settings, and recommends sustained partnerships, locally adapted modules, and continued mentoring as next steps.

KEYWORDS: *Character Building; Islamic Literacy; Muslim Minority; Thailand; Virtual Training*

1. INTRODUCTION

Islam in Thailand is the religion of a sizeable minority that has long contributed to the social and cultural mosaic of the country. Although the Muslim population is concentrated in the southern provinces, growing communities also live in the central region, including in Bangkok and its neighbouring province of Nonthaburi. For these central-region Muslims, access to formal Islamic education that integrates language, literacy, and character formation remains limited compared to the resources available in Muslim-majority settings. The Thamislam Foundation School in Nonthaburi is one of the institutions that has emerged to serve this need, providing both general subjects and Islamic studies for school-age students from surrounding communities.

Islamic literacy is widely understood as the ability to read, comprehend, and apply core Islamic knowledge sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and basic religious texts in Arabic and the local language. It is more than a technical reading skill; it is a foundation for shaping worldview, ethics, and daily conduct. Studies on Muslim minority education in Southeast Asia have repeatedly shown that limited exposure to Islamic literacy contributes to weaker religious identity, lower confidence in religious practice, and increased vulnerability to misinformation about Islam among adolescents. In settings where Islamic schools operate with constrained funding, small teaching staff, and limited curriculum support, students often miss opportunities to engage deeply with both the textual and ethical dimensions of their faith.

At the same time, character education has become a central concern of contemporary educational policy in many countries, including Indonesia and Thailand. In the Islamic tradition, character building (akhlaq) is inseparable from the study of revelation and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. Values such as honesty (sidq), trustworthiness (amanah), discipline, respect, and responsibility are taught not as abstract virtues but as practices that must be modelled, repeated, and reflected upon. Contemporary research suggests that character formation is most effective when classroom learning is reinforced by mentoring, role models, and regular reflective practice. For minority Muslim students, character education that is firmly anchored in Islamic literacy can also strengthen religious confidence and resilience in pluralistic environments.

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Minhaajurrosyidiin (STAI Minhaajurrosyidiin), Jakarta, has a strategic interest in extending its tridharma activities, especially community engagement, beyond the national borders of Indonesia. As an Islamic higher education institution with a Department of Islamic Family Law, the institution carries both academic expertise in Islamic studies and a commitment to social service. Building partnerships with Islamic schools in neighbouring countries provides an opportunity to share knowledge while learning from the educational realities of Muslim minority communities. Initial communication with the Thamislam Foundation School identified two

convergent needs: strengthening students' Islamic literacy and supporting the school's character-building program with structured input from external resource persons.

The development of digital infrastructure and the normalization of online meetings since the COVID-19 period have significantly reduced the cost of cross-border educational collaboration. Virtual platforms such as Zoom Meeting now allow lecturers in one country to deliver structured training to students in another with relative ease, provided that bandwidth, scheduling, and pedagogical adaptation are carefully managed. Several recent community engagement studies have documented the effectiveness of such online programs in delivering religious and language training, particularly when content is adapted to the participants' age, language proficiency, and cultural context.

Within this context, the present community engagement program was designed with three objectives. First, to introduce and strengthen basic Islamic literacy among students at Thamislam Foundation School, particularly the ability to recognize, read, and understand fundamental religious texts. Second, to build students' awareness and practice of Islamic character values in their daily lives at school, at home, and in the wider community. Third, to model a workable mechanism for sustained, low-cost, cross-border Islamic education collaboration between an Indonesian Islamic college and a Thai Islamic foundation school. Participation took the form of two-way interaction in which students, teachers, and the lecturer team contributed jointly to the learning process, and feedback from school staff was integrated into the design of subsequent sessions.

2. METHOD

The community engagement program was conducted between February and March 2026, with two synchronous training sessions held one week apart, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The activity was carried out fully online via the Zoom Meeting platform, with the lecturer team broadcasting from STAI Minhaajurrosyidiin in Jakarta, Indonesia, while participants joined from a classroom equipped with a projector, laptop, and webcam at Thamislam Foundation School, Nonthaburi, Thailand. The choice of an online format was determined by the geographic distance between the two institutions, the limited budget available for international travel, and the school's preference for an on-site collective learning experience for the students.

The beneficiaries of the program were 46 to 47 secondary-school students of Thamislam Foundation School, accompanied by their classroom teachers and a facilitator from the school's administration who coordinated the technical setup and translated short clarifications when necessary. The participating students were predominantly male, aged between approximately 13 and 17 years, and represented mixed levels of prior exposure to formal Islamic studies. The lecturer team consisted

of six members of the Department of Islamic Family Law of STAI Minhaajurrosyidiin who shared responsibilities for content delivery, moderation, documentation, and evaluation.

The program adopted a participatory community engagement approach, which combines structured input from external experts with active involvement of the target community in shaping content, delivery, and follow-up. This approach is consistent with the framework discussed by Sumardjo et al. (2022) for community empowerment in education-related programs, and with the method of cross-cultural Islamic teaching adapted by Frimpong and Paintsil (2022) for community-based interventions in cross-border settings. The approach was modified to fit a synchronous online context as follows. First, the school principal and a senior teacher were consulted prior to the activity to identify the most relevant topics and the language of delivery. Second, materials were prepared in Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic with English support, given that some Islamic terms are commonly understood across the Malay-Thai-Indonesian Muslim cultural sphere. Third, each session was structured to include a short opening reflection, a 25- to 30-minute thematic lecture, an interactive question-and-answer block, a small-group reflection guided by the classroom teacher, and a closing summary.

The thematic content was organized around two pillars. The first pillar covered Islamic literacy, including the introduction to basic Qur'anic reading skills, the importance of understanding the meaning of recited verses, the role of Hadith in daily practice, and an introduction to simple Arabic religious vocabulary. The second pillar covered character building, focusing on five core values selected with the school's input: honesty, discipline, respect for parents and teachers, responsibility in learning, and brotherhood among Muslims. Each character value was illustrated with a Qur'anic verse, a relevant Hadith, and a contextual example drawn from the daily life of Thai Muslim adolescents.

Data for evaluation were gathered through three complementary instruments. The first was direct observation by the lecturer team and the classroom teacher during each session, focusing on student attention, participation in question-and-answer activities, and engagement during reflection. The second was a brief reflection form distributed at the end of each session, asking students to describe in one or two sentences what they had understood and which value they intended to practise during the following week. The third was a short discussion with the accompanying teachers after each session, used to capture qualitative feedback on the relevance of the materials and the appropriateness of the delivery for the students' level. The data were then analysed descriptively and triangulated to assess the change in understanding and engagement before and after the program.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The community engagement program at Thamislam Foundation School ran successfully across both planned sessions, with strong attendance and active participation from the students, teachers, and the lecturer team. The Zoom Meeting platform was used as the main channel for synchronous interaction, supported by a classroom projector at the Thailand site so that all students could see and hear the lecturer team simultaneously. The general flow of the program, the cross-border participant configuration, and the quality of student engagement are discussed in the following subsections.

3.1 Implementation of the online cross-border training

The first session opened with a recitation of the Qur'an and a brief introduction by the head of the school, followed by an opening message from the lecturer team. The participants list of the Zoom session showed a balanced configuration of facilitators, lecturers, and observers from both Indonesian and Thai sides, including academic colleagues who joined as supporting participants. Figure 1 presents a screenshot of the Zoom participants grid taken during one of the sessions, which illustrates the cross-institutional and cross-border character of the activity.

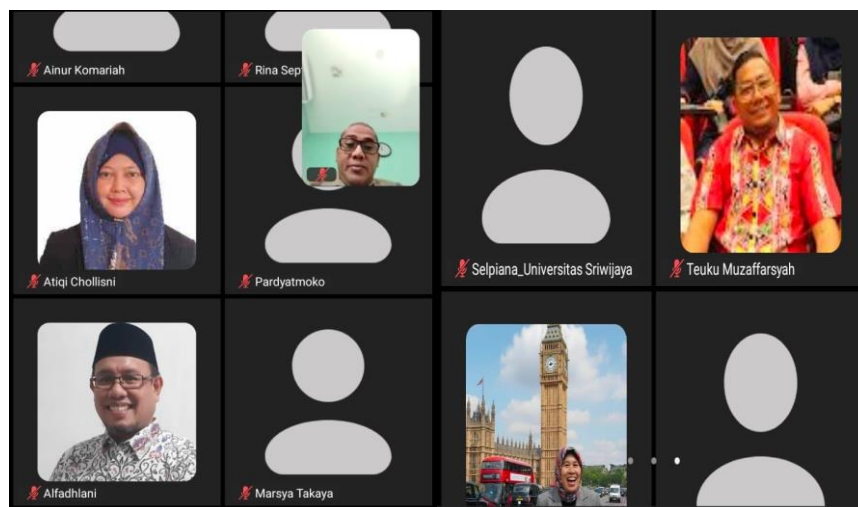


Figure 1. Cross-border participation in the online training session via Zoom Meeting, showing facilitators, lecturers, and supporting participants joining from Indonesia and Thailand.

Throughout both sessions, the Zoom Meeting interface displayed between 46 and 47 active participant connections, the great majority of which corresponded to a single shared classroom screen at Thamislam Foundation School, with the remaining connections used by the lecturer team and observers. The bilingual moderation strategy, in which the lecturer occasionally repeated key terms in Arabic and English, helped reduce comprehension barriers; classroom teachers at the Thailand site provided short clarifications in Thai when needed.

3.2 Engagement and learning environment at the school

Direct observation during the sessions indicated a high level of student attention and orderly classroom behaviour. As shown in Figure 2, the students were arranged in rows facing a teacher who managed the on-site interaction, with the laptop and webcam placed at the front to capture the classroom view for the lecturer team in Indonesia. The presence of a tripod-mounted camera enabled the lecturers to read the body language and non-verbal responses of the students, which is a known challenge in fully online community engagement programs.



Figure 2. Classroom view at Thamislam Foundation School during the Islamic literacy session, showing orderly student arrangement and on-site teacher facilitation.

When compared to the pre-activity description provided by the school, in which routine Islamic studies sessions are largely teacher-led and lecture-based, the introduction of an external lecturer team via Zoom appeared to add a sense of novelty and motivation. Students who, according to the teachers, are normally quiet during religious classes were observed to raise their hands more often during the question-and-answer block of the second session. This is consistent with research showing that the involvement of new resource persons, including those joining online, tends to increase student curiosity and willingness to engage in classroom discussion (Amalia, 2020).

3.3 Delivery of Islamic literacy and character content

The substantive sessions began with a short presentation by the lead lecturer, who introduced himself, explained the goals of the program, and provided an overview of the core literacy themes. As shown in Figure 3, the on-site teacher remained close to the lecturer's screen and supported the

students' interaction with the materials by pointing to key terms displayed on the projector and inviting selected students to read sample verses and translations aloud. This pairing of an external resource person with an on-site facilitator proved particularly important for managing pace, ensuring inclusion, and bridging language differences.



Figure 3. On-site teacher and student interacting with the projected lecture material during the character-building module, illustrating the pairing of external lecturer input with on-site facilitation.

The Islamic literacy module covered three sub-themes: the position of the Qur'an as the primary source of guidance, the role of the Sunnah as its practical explanation, and the importance of approaching religious texts with both reverence and understanding. Students were invited to read short verses together with the lecturer, and selected students explained in their own words what they understood from each verse. In the character-building module, the five values selected with the school were unpacked through stories from the Prophet's life and short discussions about how each value applies to the students' daily routines, including how to behave at home, in the school, on the road, and on social media. According to Sholihin (2021), embedding character education within concrete daily contexts is one of the most effective strategies for ensuring that values are not perceived as abstract slogans but as lived practice.

3.4 Changes observed before and after the program

Triangulation of observation, reflection forms, and post-session discussion with the teachers indicated several positive changes between the pre- and post-program conditions. First, a clear improvement was observed in the students' ability to articulate basic concepts in Islamic literacy. In the reflection forms collected after the second session, the majority of students were able to identify the Qur'an and Hadith as primary sources of guidance and to mention at least one verse or Hadith

they had encountered during the program. Before the activity, classroom teachers reported that such articulation was rarely volunteered by the students.

Second, the students' motivation to engage with religious texts appeared to increase. During the closing of the second session, several students asked whether further sessions could be held and requested guidance on simple references they could read at home. This kind of self-initiated request is a meaningful indicator of motivation in community engagement contexts, as discussed in studies on participation in religious education programs (Stegmeir, 2016).

Third, awareness of character values strengthened, particularly in relation to honesty, respect for parents and teachers, and responsibility for one's own learning. In the post-program discussion, the school's teachers reported that during the week between the two sessions they had observed concrete behavioural examples consistent with the values introduced, including students reminding each other to greet teachers and to keep promises about completing assignments. While such anecdotal evidence cannot replace longitudinal measurement, it is consistent with the expected short-term outcomes of structured character-education interventions in school settings.

Fourth, the program produced an unintended but valuable result on the institutional side. The teachers expressed interest in continuing the partnership and asked whether the lecturer team could share the slide materials and the value-based reflection prompts for use in their own classes. This indicates that the program achieved a degree of innovation adoption by the host community, with the methods and materials being absorbed into the school's regular practice. According to Bedenel et al. (2020), the adoption of new methods by community partners is one of the strongest indicators of the sustainability of a community engagement program.

3.5 Strengths, limitations, and broader relevance

The main strength of the program was its ability to deliver a substantive Islamic literacy and character intervention across an international border at a very low cost, leveraging widely available video conferencing technology. The shared-classroom configuration in Thailand allowed the program to reach a full class of students at once while still benefiting from external expertise. The bilingual approach to terminology and the pairing of external lecturer input with on-site teacher facilitation were also key enabling factors. These results are aligned with the broader findings of community engagement scholarship, which emphasizes that external expertise is most effective when it is intermediated by local actors who understand the cultural and linguistic context of the participants (Frimpong & Painsil, 2022).

The program also faced limitations. Bandwidth fluctuations affected audio clarity at certain points and required the lecturer to repeat key explanations. The fully online format limited the depth

of personal mentoring that is often crucial in character formation, since the lecturer team could not interact with students individually outside the structured sessions. The reliance on short reflection forms and qualitative observations also means that the evaluation cannot claim measurable impact in the strict quantitative sense; future iterations would benefit from a simple pre- and post-knowledge questionnaire and a longer-term follow-up of behaviour.

In terms of broader relevance, the experience suggests that a similar model could be replicated for other Islamic minority schools in the region, especially those that are open to receiving online support but lack stable connections to external institutions. The model is particularly suited for thematic, short-cycle interventions that can be tightly aligned with the host school's curriculum. Generalization to very young learners or to fully unsupervised online settings should, however, be approached cautiously.

4. CONCLUSION

The community engagement program achieved its three main targets. The students of Thamislam Foundation School in Nonthaburi, Thailand, gained a stronger foundation in basic Islamic literacy, including the ability to recognize the Qur'an and Hadith as primary sources of guidance and to read and reflect on selected verses. Their awareness and stated commitment to core character values, namely honesty, discipline, respect, responsibility, and brotherhood, also improved over the course of the program, supported by the active facilitation of their classroom teachers. The synchronous online format implemented through Zoom Meeting proved well matched to the geographic, financial, and curricular constraints of the partnership, demonstrating the feasibility of low-cost cross-border Islamic education collaboration. The fact that the host school requested the slide materials and reflection prompts for continued use indicates that the methods and content were successfully adopted into the school's own practice. For follow-up, it is recommended that the partnership be sustained through a regular series of short modules, that the materials be progressively localized through input from Thai Muslim educators, and that future cycles incorporate simple pre- and post-knowledge instruments and longer-term mentoring to deepen impact.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could be perceived as a conflict of interest in relation to this community engagement program. The activity was carried out as part of the regular community service mandate of the Department of Islamic Family Law, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Minhaajurrosyidiin, Jakarta, with full operational independence from any external commercial or political interests.

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