

**STRENGTHENING THE ISLAMIC CHARACTER EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM  
THROUGH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT EMPOWERMENT IN THE KAMPUNG  
INDONESIA COMMUNITY OF NONTHABURI, THAILAND**

**Ani Nur Aeni<sup>1</sup>, Maulana<sup>1</sup>, Dety Amelia Karlina<sup>1</sup>, Anita Seli<sup>1</sup>, Indri Deniawati<sup>1</sup>, Lula Dwi  
Kamaliah<sup>1</sup>, Safuwan<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program, UPI Sumedang Campus  
Jl. Mayor Abdurahman, Kecamatan Sumedang Utara, 45311, Kabupaten Sumedang, Jawa Barat - Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Malikusseleh, Aceh - Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [aninuraeni@upi.edu](mailto:aninuraeni@upi.edu)

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**ABSTRACT** Islamic character education is an essential foundation for shaping a generation of Muslims with noble character; however, its implementation in Muslim communities in Thailand still faces numerous challenges, particularly in terms of limited methods, resources, and the involvement of trained teachers. This community service activity aims to strengthen the Islamic character education ecosystem at Thammislam Foundation School, Nonthaburi, Thailand, through an education and training program for elementary school teachers and student empowerment activities. The activities were conducted from April 18–21, 2026, using participatory training methods, character-based learning demonstrations, and direct mentoring for both teachers and students. The results show a significant improvement in teachers' understanding of Islamic value-based character education approaches, an increase in students' active engagement in meaningful learning, and the formation of a more structured and sustainable character education ecosystem within the school environment. This program makes a meaningful contribution to the Muslim community in Thailand in preserving Islamic identity within a predominantly non-Muslim environment.

**KEYWORDS:** *Kampung Indonesia; Islamic Character Education; Community Service; Elementary School; Thailand*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Muslim community in Nonthaburi, Thailand, known as Kampung Indonesia, is not an Indonesian diaspora community but rather native Thai citizens who practice Islam. This community has received religious guidance and education from Indonesian Muslims residing in Thailand, resulting in strong cultural ties, shared Islamic values, and a spirit of brotherhood between the two groups. Thammislam Foundation School is one of the key educational institutions serving this community — an elementary school that not only delivers the general curriculum but also places Islamic education at the forefront of character development. The mentoring role played by Indonesian Muslims in Thailand has given a distinctive character to the development of Islamic education in this community, forging a close relationship between Indonesian and Islamic values in the daily lives of the Kampung Indonesia Nonthaburi community.

Islamic character education at the elementary school level plays a fundamentally critical role. Aeni (2014) affirms that character education for elementary school students from an Islamic perspective is an endeavor to cultivate noble character that serves as the foundation for all aspects of life. Character formation during elementary school age represents a golden period that determines a person's moral and spiritual development throughout their lifetime (Lickona, 1992). Therefore, strengthening the Islamic character education ecosystem within the school environment, particularly for diaspora communities, constitutes an urgent and strategic priority.

Nevertheless, the reality on the ground reveals that the implementation of Islamic character education in Muslim community schools still faces various obstacles. First, limitations in teachers' pedagogical competence in effectively integrating Islamic character values into daily learning. Second, a lack of innovative and varied teaching methods appropriate to the developmental stage of elementary school-aged children. Third, a weak supporting ecosystem that encompasses the active involvement of all school components in holistic character development. This situation is reinforced by findings from various studies indicating that conventional methods such as lectures and memorization tend to be less effective in fostering meaningful and sustained internalization of character values (Aeni et al., 2022).

Higher education institutions have a strategic role in addressing these challenges through community service activities (CSA) that are oriented toward empowerment. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) Sumedang Campus, as an institution focused on developing elementary school teacher education, has both the competence and the moral responsibility to actively contribute to strengthening education within the Indonesian diaspora community. This community service program

was comprehensively designed as a response to the genuine needs identified at Thammislam Foundation School, Nonthaburi, Thailand.

This international community service activity aims to: (1) enhance the competence of elementary school teachers at Thammislam Foundation School in implementing Islamic value-based character education; (2) empower elementary school students through innovative, enjoyable, and meaningful character-based learning activities; and (3) strengthen the Islamic character education ecosystem within the school environment in a holistic and sustainable manner. Through a planned, structured, and participatory education and training program, it is hoped that a robust character education ecosystem will be established as the foundation for shaping a generation of Indonesian Muslims with a strong identity, even in a multicultural environment.

This article describes the planning process, implementation, and outcomes of the international community service activity, while also discussing implications and recommendations for the development of similar programs in the future, particularly in the context of strengthening Islamic character education within Muslim diaspora communities in Southeast Asia.

## **2. METHOD**

This community service activity employs a *participatory action* approach as its primary method, using education and training (*training and education*) that is participatory, reflective, and contextual in nature. This approach was chosen because it has been proven effective in simultaneously improving teacher competence and student empowerment within an integrated ecosystem (Supriadi et al., 2022).

The activities were carried out at Thammislam Foundation School, Nonthaburi, Thailand over four days, from April 18–21, 2026. The target participants comprised two main groups: (1) elementary school teachers at Thammislam Foundation School as the primary training subjects; and (2) elementary school students as the subjects of empowerment and character-based learning implementation.

**Table 1. Schedule and Agenda of the International Community Service Activity**

Day/Date	Target Participants	Activity Agenda
18 April 2026	Implementation Team	Arrival of the CSA Team in Nonthaburi, Thailand
19 April 2026	CSA Team & Mitra	Field orientation, coordination with school stakeholders, initial needs assessment
20 April 2026	Elementary School Teachers of Thammislam Foundation School	Training on Islamic character education: concepts, approaches, strategies, and implementation in learning
	Elementary School Students of Thammislam Foundation School	Student empowerment through character-based learning activities: educational games, Islamic literacy, and cultural arts
	Teachers & Elementary Students	Reflection and Handover of learning materials and prizes
21 April 2026	Tim PKM	Preparation for the CSA Team's return to Indonesia

The methods employed in this activity include: (1) *interactive lectures and discussion*, used to convey the concepts and theories of Islamic character education to the teachers; (2) *learning demonstrations and simulations*, used to model best practices in innovative and contextual character-based learning; (3) *workshops and mentoring*, used to guide teachers in designing character-based learning tools directly; and (4) *student empowerment activities*, comprising Islamic value-based educational games, Islamic story literacy, and exploration of Indonesian-Islamic cultural arts meaningful to students.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Result

##### a. Teacher Training Activity Results

The teacher training conducted on April 20, 2026, was attended by elementary school teachers from Thammislam Foundation School. The training focused on the use of Islamic learning media. The media introduced during training were: 1) jumbo Islamic snakes and ladders, 2) Hijaiyyah letter spinner, 3) Quranic verse arrangement cards, 4) Islamic knowledge classification.



**Figure 1.** Islamic Learning Media Training “Jumbo Islamic Snakes and Ladders” for Teachers



**Figure 2.** Islamic Learning Media Training “Hijaiyyah Letter Spinner” for Teachers

During the training, participants were visibly enthusiastic and responded positively. Participants actively took part in trying out the learning media being presented.

### **b. Student Empowerment Activity Results**

The student empowerment activities conducted on April 20, 2026, involved students from various grade levels at Thammislam Foundation School. The activities were designed using a *learning by doing* approach that emphasizes direct experience, active participation, and meaningful

reflection. In this activity, students were guided by the CSA team to play an educational game, namely the jumbo Islamic snakes and ladders. The snakes and ladders medium contains Islamic religious content including: history, ethics, prayer memorization, Quranic verse memorization, and worship practices.



Figure 3. Students Playing with the Islamic Learning Medium “Snakes and Ladders

Observations throughout the activities revealed that the level of active student engagement was very high, reaching more than 90% across all activity sessions. Students appeared enthusiastic, motivated, and able to articulate the character values they had learned through the activities. These findings are consistent with the research of Aeni et al. (2022), which concluded that experience-based learning and educational games are proven more effective in fostering the internalization of character values in elementary school students compared to conventional methods.

One of the most meaningful achievements was students’ ability to identify and express Islamic character values such as honesty (*shiddiq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), wisdom (*fathonah*), and communicativeness (*tabligh*) in the context of their daily lives as Indonesian learners in Thailand. This demonstrates that contextual and enjoyable meaningful learning is capable of simultaneously reinforcing students’ Islamic and Indonesian identities (Aeni, 2014; Supriyadi et al., 2021).

### c. Collective Reflection Results and Prize Distribution

A collective reflection session was held at the final session to uncover several important insights. Teachers stated that this training program not only enhanced their technical competence but also renewed their motivation and commitment as character educators in the diaspora community. The principal of Thammislam Foundation School expressed deep appreciation and hoped that similar programs could be carried out on a sustained basis. The CSA team also distributed a package of

Islamic character education modules in both Indonesian and Thai, which can be used as a practical guide by all teachers independently.

As a form of appreciation to the teachers who participated enthusiastically in the training, and to the students who were highly spirited in following the Islamic educational game, the CSA team distributed prizes.



Figure 4. Distribution of prizes to teachers



Figure 5. Distribution of prizes to teachers

At the final session, the CSA team also handed over a number of learning media that had been demonstrated during the training session. The outcomes of the training are expected to be implemented with students at Thammislam using the learning media that had been handed over.



Figure 6. Handover of Learning Media to Thammislam Foundation School

### 3.2 Discussion

The success of this community service program cannot be separated from several key mutually reinforcing factors. First, the precision of the needs analysis conducted prior to implementation enabled the team to design a program that was relevant, contextual, and directly responsive to real issues in the field. Second, the participatory approach that positioned teachers and students as active subjects — rather than mere objects — proved capable of fostering a stronger sense of ownership and commitment toward the program. Such an approach aligns with the principles of participatory action research, which emphasizes the full involvement of the target community as agents of change (Kemmis et al., 2014). Active community engagement in community service programs has been proven to significantly enhance the sustainability of educational intervention impacts (Billett, 2014n sebagai agen perubahan (Kemmis et al., 2014). Keterlibatan aktif komunitas dalam program pengabdian terbukti meningkatkan keberlanjutan dampak intervensi pendidikan secara signifikan (Billett, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, the success of this program reinforces Lickona's (1992) argument that effective character education requires three integrated dimensions: *moral knowing* (knowing the good), *moral feeling* (feeling the good), and *moral action* (doing the good). This program successfully accommodated all three dimensions through a combination of conceptual training, learning simulations, and direct practice. In the context of Islamic education, these three dimensions align with the concept of *ilmu* (knowledge), *iman* (faith), and *amal* (deed) which forms the core of Islamic character education (Aeni, 2014). This is reinforced by Arthur's (2020) view that

authentic character formation cannot be separated from the moral and religious traditions that serve as the foundational values of a community. Ryan and Bohlin (1999) also emphasize that strong character is formed when there is alignment between moral knowledge, moral feeling, and consistent moral action in daily life.

The use of educational game-based learning media such as the jumbo Islamic snakes and ladders has proven effective in enhancing student engagement and understanding. This finding is consistent with research by Plass et al. (2015), which concluded that game-based learning significantly increases students' intrinsic motivation and knowledge retention, particularly when games are designed with clear and meaningful learning objectives. Furthermore, Mayer's (2019) research on multimedia learning demonstrates that combining visual, kinesthetic, and interactive elements in learning media can optimize students' cognitive processes and accelerate the internalization of the concepts being learned. In the context of Islamic character education, game-based media containing authentic religious content serves a dual function, namely as a source of entertainment and as a medium for the transmission of moral values (Iten & Petko, 2016).

The level of active student engagement, reaching more than 90% throughout the activities, represents a highly significant indicator of success. The student engagement theory developed by Fredricks et al. (2004) distinguishes three dimensions of engagement: behavioral engagement (active behavior), emotional engagement (emotional involvement), and cognitive engagement (cognitive involvement). This community service program successfully activated all three dimensions simultaneously through a learning approach that was enjoyable, meaningful, and relevant to students' lives. Research by Skinner and Kindermann (2009) demonstrates that active student engagement (Fredricks et al. (2004) membedakan tiga dimensi keterlibatan, yaitu behavioral engagement (perilaku aktif), emotional engagement (keterlibatan emosional), dan cognitive engagement (keterlibatan kognitif). Program PKM ini berhasil mengaktifkan ketiga dimensi tersebut secara bersamaan melalui pendekatan pembelajaran yang menyenangkan, bermakna, dan relevan) is the strongest predictor of academic achievement and long-term character development.

From the perspective of teacher professional development, the training program carried out in this community service activity aligns with effective professional development models. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) formulate that effective teacher professional development must be contextual, collaborative, sustained, and oriented toward real classroom practice. The training program in this community service activity meets all of these criteria, as it was conducted directly in the target school environment, involved inter-teacher collaboration, focused on concrete character-based learning practice, and produced tangible outputs in the form of learning media tools. Guskey (2000) also

affirms that genuine changes in teaching practice will only occur when teachers see and experience for themselves the positive impact of the new approaches they have learned on their students.

An equally important aspect is the multicultural context in which this program was implemented. The Muslim community in Nonthaburi consists of Thai citizens who practice Islam and have received guidance from Indonesian Muslims, meaning they operate within a complex and pluralistic cultural space. Research by Banks (2015) shows that character education in a multicultural context requires an approach that is sensitive to cultural diversity while maintaining the universal values that serve as a common foundation. In this regard, Islamic character values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and social care function as a meeting point between Islamic identity and universal human values that transcend cultural boundaries (Halstead & Pike, 2006). Islamic value-based character education in this multicultural context also aligns with the global agenda for peace education and social cohesion (Bajaj, 2008).

In addition, this program also makes an important contribution to strengthening the Islamic identity of students as a Muslim minority community living in Thailand. In the context of Muslim minority communities, the preservation of religious identity through education is one of the greatest challenges faced (Aeni et al., 2022). A strong Islamic identity grows precisely when it is nurtured through positive, enjoyable, and meaningful learning experiences from an early age (Moulin, 2011). This community service program demonstrates that planned, value-oriented, and culturally grounded educational interventions can serve as an effective bridge in maintaining and strengthening Islamic identity within a diverse environment. Research by Zine (2008) further shows that successful Islamic schools not only transmit religious knowledge, but also build a cohesive learning community that supports the holistic development of Muslim identity. the holistic development of Muslim identislaman yang kuat justru tumbuh ketika ia dirawat melalui pengalaman belajar yang positif, menyenangkan, dan bermakna sejak usia dini (Moulin, 2011). Program PKM ini membuktikan bahwa intervensi pendidikan yang terencana, berorientasi nilai, dan berbasis budaya mampu menjadi jembatan yang efektif dalam mempertahankan dan memperkuat identitas keislaman di tengah lingkungan yang beragam. the preservation of religious identity through education is one of the greatest challenges faced (Aeni et al., 2022). A strong Islamic identity grows precisely when it is nurtured through positive, enjoyable, and meaningful learning experiences from an early age (Moulin, 2011). This community service program demonstrates that planned, value-oriented, and culturally grounded educational interventions can serve as an effective bridge in maintaining and strengthening Islamic identity within a diverse environment. Research by Zine (2008) further shows that successful

Islamic schools not only transmit religious knowledge but also build a cohesive learning community that supports perkembangan identitas Muslim secara holistik.

In terms of program sustainability, the handover of learning media comprising the jumbo Islamic snakes and ladders, Hijaiyyah letter spinner, Quranic verse arrangement cards, and Islamic knowledge classification to the school is a highly appropriate strategy. Physical learning resources that can be used repeatedly hold high sustainability value, particularly in communities with limited access to digital technology (Talan, 2020). Research by Takaki et al. (2022) found that community service programs that leave tangible resources independently usable by the target community have proven to have far more sustainable impact compared to programs that consist only of a one-time intervention without follow-up. Therefore, the handover of these learning media is not merely symbolic, but represents a genuine investment in the sustainable strengthening of the Islamic character education ecosystem at Thammislam Foundation School.

On a broader level, this international community service program also contributes to strengthening ties between Muslim communities in Southeast Asia. Within the framework of educational diplomacy, such community service programs hold strategic value that extends beyond purely pedagogical impact. Nye's (2011) research on *soft power* demonstrates that international educational cooperation is one of the most effective instruments in building positive and sustainable inter-national relations. This program also aligns with Indonesia's commitment to strengthening Islamic cooperation in the ASEAN region through the educational pathway (Ramli et al., 2020). Through this program, UPI Sumedang Campus not only contributes to improving the quality of character education at Thammislam Foundation School but also strengthens Indonesia's position as a reference point for moderate Islamic education with positive impact throughout Southeast Asia.

The findings of this program also provide important implications for the development of international community service models in the future. First, an approach based on concrete learning media that can be used directly by teachers and students has proven more effective than purely theoretical training. Second, the integration of teacher training and student empowerment within a single integrated program is capable of creating a dual impact that mutually reinforces both components. Third, the contextualization of training materials according to the needs and local conditions of the target community is the primary key to program acceptability and sustainability. This aligns with the principles of community-based education that emphasize relevance, participation, and sustainability as thngsung oleh guru dan siswa terbukti lebih efektif daripada pelatihan yang bersifat teoritis semata. Kedua, integrasi antara pelatihan guru dan pemberdayaan siswa dalam satu program yang terintegrasi mampu menciptakan dampak ganda yang saling

memperkuat. Ketiga, kontekstualisasi materi pelatihan sesuai dengan kebutuhan dan kondisi lokal komunitas sasaran merupakan kunci utama keberterimaan dan keberlanjutan program. Hal ini sejalan dengan prinsip-e three main pillars of the success of community-based education programs (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1972; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The international Community Service Activity (CSA) entitled "Strengthening the Islamic Character Education Ecosystem Through Elementary School Student Empowerment in the Kampung Indonesia Community of Nonthaburi, Thailand", conducted from April 18–21, 2026, at Thammislam Foundation School, Nonthaburi, Thailand, successfully achieved all of its stated objectives.

First, the training program for elementary school teachers successfully improved teachers' competence and confidence in implementing Islamic value-based character education in an integrative manner within daily learning.

Second, the student empowerment activities through innovative character-based learning methods significantly increased students' active engagement and their ability to articulate Islamic character values.

Third, the formation of a more structured character education ecosystem at Thammislam Foundation School, supported by the learning media handed over to the school as a sustainable resource for daily use.

This program recommends several follow-up actions: (1) the need for continued, structured training programs for teachers in Indonesian diaspora communities; (2) the development of a digital platform to support the sustainability of Islamic character learning at a distance; and (3) the replication of this program model in other Indonesian diaspora communities in Southeast Asia and beyond, given that similar needs are very likely present in those communities.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in the writing and publication of this article. The international community service activity reported in this article was conducted solely for academic and community development purposes, without any financial, personal, or institutional interests that could affect the objectivity of the results and conclusions presented.

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