

The Contribution of the Free Reading to the Formation of Literacy Character and Religious Values of Reading Community Members in Lamongan

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Abstract: The low level of reading literacy and character development in Indonesia has become a serious challenge in contemporary Islamic education, particularly in Lamongan City. This study aims to analyze the contribution of free reading activities in shaping literacy character and religious values among members of the *moco.bareng* reading community at Lamongan Town Square. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with community members, and field documentation. The results indicate that the *moco.bareng* community plays a significant role in transforming the character of its members through three main dimensions: cognitive (information analysis skills), professional (public speaking and managerial skills), and religiosity (internalization of spiritual values in literacy activities). Therefore, this community demonstrates that public spaces can effectively function as laboratories for character education that integrate intellectual intelligence with religious values within a non-formal education context.

Keywords: Non-Formal Education; Moco.bareng Community; Religious Values; Literacy Character.

Abstrak: Rendahnya tingkat literasi baca dan pembentukan karakter di Indonesia menjadi tantangan serius dalam pendidikan Islam kontemporer, khususnya di Kota Lamongan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kontribusi kegiatan membaca bebas dalam membentuk karakter literasi dan nilai-nilai religius anggota komunitas membaca *moco.bareng* di Alun-Alun Lamongan. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan jenis studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data

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dilakukan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam terhadap anggota komunitas, serta dokumentasi lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunitas *moco.bareng* berperan signifikan dalam mentransformasi karakter anggotanya melalui tiga dimensi utama, yaitu dimensi kognitif (kemampuan analisis informasi), dimensi profesional (keterampilan public speaking dan manajerial), serta dimensi religius (internalisasi nilai-nilai spiritual dalam aktivitas literasi). Dengan demikian, keberadaan komunitas ini membuktikan bahwa ruang publik dapat berfungsi secara efektif sebagai laboratorium pendidikan karakter yang mengintegrasikan kecerdasan intelektual dengan nilai-nilai religius dalam konteks pendidikan non-formal.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Non-Formal; Komunitas *moco.bareng*; Nilai Religiusitas; Karakter Literasi.

A. Introduction

Literacy is the primary foundation for character development and national intelligence, extending beyond reading ability to encompass an individual's understanding of social realities. A culture of literacy plays a crucial role in strengthening character education. Through consistent literacy habits, students' personalities can develop in a more positive manner. This aligns with the principles of character education, which optimize the development of thought patterns, behavior, and psychological development (Irwan & Kamarudin, 2021).

The current of state of literacy in Indonesia is Verry Worrying internationally. According to the report *Programme for International Student Assesmen (PISA)* in 2018 and 2022, Indonesia was ranked last out of 40 countries in reading achievement with the total reading literacy score of students bellow the OECD average (Amir Johar, Dalle Ambo, Dj Sulastriningsih, 2023). Meanwhile, the results of the 2024 East Java Province Community Literacy Development Index (IPLM) showed a score of 78,60, placing the province in the moderate category Lamongan City's score of 65,76 places if in the moderate category among cities in East Java (Nasional, 2024). According to the IPLM (Community Literacy Development Index) data, East Java Province, specifically

Lamongan City shows that its position is in the middle of the assessment scale, meaning that the literacy of the Lamongan Community is quite good. However, people living in remote areas still have low levels of literacy culture within the community.

In response to this challenge, the moco.bareng community emerged as a community response to the literacy crisis. Moco.bareng integrates religious values to encourage reading interest. This integration is crucial because the Lamongan community is known for its strong religiosity, so a literacy approach that taps into spiritual aspects is expected to foster stronger character.

In essence, reading is the storehouse of knowledge or the window to the world. The more you read, the more knowledge and insight you gain. Islam commands all Muslims to read, as in surah al-Alaq verse 1 which was the first revelation sent down to Prophet Muhammad SAW :

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

Meaning: "Read in the name of your lord."

Reading command (read) was mentioned repeatedly by the Angel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad SAW when he received his first revelation. Reading is the key to knowledge.

There are several factors that cause low literacy in Indonesia, internal factors, namely the lack of motivation from within to learn through reading activities, as well as the difficulty of understanding long texts that are considered boring, are factors that hinder children from enjoying reading activities (Surya, 2025). Meanwhile, external factors include limited resources, especially in remote areas where availability and access are still minimal. Furthermore, parental attention is also crucial; as parents, we must support and motivate our children. Introducing a reading culture from an early age is crucial. Nowadays, parents are more preoccupied with gadgets and focused on their own affairs without paying attention to their children's activities. In the school environment, teacher skills are also a contributing factor to low student literacy. In the learning process, teachers are a crucial component of education, including teaching methods, procedures, and teacher skills (Rusti, 2023). The quality and system of education are factors for students. Learning systems that still focus on memorization

rather than deep understanding lead students to believe that reading is merely for exam purposes, not as a necessity or habit. Furthermore, lack of varied learning methods and minimal critical reading practice make it difficult for students to comprehend long texts, analyze their reading content, and draw conclusions.

The final factor is that the current problem is that society has been presented with sophisticated technology that can be accessed by all groups from children to adults, so that their time is only spent playing games and *scroll* less useful content.

In addition to a lack of literacy, the public, especially students, also lacks awareness of the importance of literacy in developing a religious character. Reading is not only a source of information, but in a religious context, it can provide an understanding of religious values. It encompasses moral, religious, and social learning. The primary character trait that needs to be instilled is religious character, with attitudes and behaviors that reflect religious values (Hasibuan, 2025). From an early age, children must be introduced to Islamic values in an interesting and meaningful way. Through activities such as reading stories of the Prophet, introducing hijaiyah letters and daily prayer books.

Literacy skills are not just reading and writing, but also the ability to think critically, understand, and apply the values of ideas constructively (Yanti et al., 2025). With literacy as a medium for internalizing religion, it goes from being merely academic knowledge to becoming part of a person's personality.

Efforts to create an intelligent and critical generation involve creating a literate learning environment. The Free Reading program is a concrete step toward bringing reading materials and the habit of reading closer to the community. According to Welly, a reading corner is a space located in the corner of a room equipped with a collection of books (Anugrah et al., 2022). The Reading Corner program is a literacy movement outside the school environment, organized by a group of reading community members in Lamongan City. The Reading Corner program not only serves as an alternative to developing reading interest but also serves as a non-formal learning medium to encourage the development of literacy character traits such as reading habits, curiosity, responsibility, and reflective skills.

Based on previous research written by Pat Kurniati in her research on the use of Philanthropy reading corners for children at the Al-Amin Garut Orphanage which focuses on developing literacy character, responsible attitudes and discipline in foster children at the orphanage through reading activities and social interaction (Fitriani & Yuliani, 2016).

This study discusses the impact of the reading corner program on developing the character of the reading community members themselves in terms of literacy and religious values. The *moco.bareng* community exists as a grassroots literacy movement (*grassroots*) community-based organization in the Lamongan region. As a collective, this community positions itself not only as a book provider but also as an inclusive intellectual meeting space for the community. Its philosophical foundation is the democratization of reading access, where literacy is no longer viewed as an activity exclusive to formal libraries but rather as part of everyday lifestyle in public spaces. This aligns with the principle *personal worship*, where community activists act as role models who first develop their character and personal literacy skills before engaging in educating the wider community.

As a literacy advocate, the *moco.bareng* community exists to bring reading materials closer to the people of Lamongan. To realize this vision, *moco.bareng* implements several strategic, sustainable programs. Its main spearhead is the Reading Corner, which provides a free reading space in the courtyard of Lamongan's town square on Sundays. Beyond simply lending books for free, they also hold discussions that serve as a dialectical platform to transform passive reading into a critical and reflective process.

B. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative research method with a case study approach to explore in depth the process of internalizing literacy character and religious values among community members. Information was collected through a descriptive method. *Purposive* involving active members of the reading community in Lamongan. Data collection techniques were conducted through participatory observation of the activities of reading community members. The tools used were in depth interviews related to the

psychological aspects of Islamic education, as well as documentation studies of members' activities and development records. Data validity was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques as key in the research through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and data analysis and drawing conclusions to reveal the contribution of the free reading program to strengthening the literacy character and religious values of members comprehensively.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Moco.bareng Community Profile

The *moco.bareng* community is a manifestation of a literacy movement that utilizes public spaces as the center of its educational. The name “*Moco.bareng*” derives from the Javanese word “moco” which mean “read” or “reading” philosophically, moco is not simply the act of seeing letter and words, but rather the process of understanding, reflecting, and learning. Meanwhile, the word “bareng” means “together” in a spirit of togetherness and equality. This word not only indicates collective reading but also reflects the values of solidarity, collaboration, and a learning space open to everyone.

This free reading program takes place around Lamongan's town square every Sunday, bringing the people of Lamongan together for health-conscious activities like jogging around the town square and exercising on the field. The *moco.bareng* community has chosen a static reading booth model that consistently stands out among the crowds.

Moco.bareng is a new community in Lamongan formed in October 2025, consisting of 12 people coordinated by Brother Ananta. The idea for the free reading program came from Brother Wafi, they both have the goal of increasing the reading interest of the Lamongan community because they see that people are more dependent on gadgets so they don't spend time reading. The free reading program was formed and is held on Sundays in the courtyard of the Lamongan Square next to the Lamongan Square tower starting from 08.00 to 10.00. By capitalizing on personal books which are then collected, providing several types of books from Fiction, nonfiction, and children's books, such as storybooks and coloring pages. Everyone is welcome to visit and read

the books provided. Reading isn't just for adults; children should also be introduced to books and the culture of reading.



Picture 1. Example of Books Provided

2. Improving Community Member's Literacy and Communication Skill

Literacy is person's ability to process and understand information when reading and writing. According to Annisa, literacy continues to transform with the dynamics of modern development. While previously limited to reading and writing skills, its meaning has now expanded to encompass various specific domains, such as media literacy, computer literacy, science literacy, and even school environmental literacy (Siregar et al., 2022).

The quality and frequency of literacy for each member of a community is greatly influenced by the dynamic circulation of reading materials available at the activity. Through the exchange of reading materials among community members, the barriers to limited access to diverse knowledge and information are reduced. Francis Bacon's slogan, "*Knowledge is power*" (knowledge is power), which explains how important the right knowledge is in empowering individuals and society (Anggara et al., 2023).

Reading is not just a hobby, but a foundation for building intellectual capacity through critical understanding. Through critical reading, information is transformed into cognitive authority, which not only broadens the horizons of knowledge but also empowers individuals and communities to effect social change.

According to Safira, reading is defined as a process of understanding something implied in what is written in a book, because the activity of reading requires more than just understanding what is written (Safira Nur Rahma et al., 2024). Reading is not only a cognitive activity, but is a gateway to developing critical, creative, and reflective thinking skills.

Books are a fundamental investment in individual capacity development, centered on enriching holistic cognitive structures, where intellectual intelligence (IQ) serves as the basis for logical and technical analysis. The effectiveness of IQ also depends heavily on the integration of creativity as a driver of innovation, along with emotional intelligence (EQ) and spiritual intelligence (SQ) as instruments of self-regulation.

The intelligence trilogy which encompasses IQ, EQ, and SQ is a unified whole within the human being, intertwined and inseparable. These three dimensions operate in harmony to build character and are the primary driving force behind every individual's actions. More than simply measuring ability, IQ, EQ, and SQ serve as the foundation of awareness that helps humans recognize their true selves, interact with their social environment, and build a spiritual connection with the Creator (Juliana, Abdullah, 2026). The internalization of these three intelligences is clearly visible in the activities of the *moco.bareng* community, where SQ (*Spiritual Quotient*) is the main basis for members to choose reading material that not only makes the brain smarter, but also calms the soul.

In this era of highly advanced technology, gadgets are designed for speed and interruption, which makes reading patterns shallow. Reading books that require linear reading involves a reverse reading process. per page that creates a calmer heart and brain rhythm, which allows for reflection unlike gadgets that jump around with a single click. In the midst of the onslaught of digitalization, *moco.bareng* is here to offer space *linear reading* helps the brain refocus, a practice that indirectly trains the patience and humility of members.

Being a member of a community inevitably entails a sense of rigorous intellectual responsibility. Community members establish mastery of the material as a prerequisite before disseminating information to the public. This emphasizes that books are not

merely a physical exchange, but rather a process of internalizing knowledge. The community ensures they are agents of change, supported by cognitive competence to ensure the validity of knowledge transfer.

In addition to free reading activities, the moco.bareng community also held book review discussions in collaboration with the Lamongan community. *book party* as internalization of knowledge, so that information is no longer just "passing through." Discussions also increase self-confidence (*self-efficacy*) when dealing with the community. Through discussions, community members are forced to convey points or content contained in books they have read. This activity is a process of honing articulation and rhetoric. Lamongan *book party* This is a branch of the community from Indonesia. *Book Party* (IBP) is one of the largest communities with more than 80 branches in every city and over 200 members. The discussion began with a session *silent reading* where all members are given time to read the book they brought, all members who participate focus on reading without making any sound. After the session *silent reading* After finishing, the session will open *sharing session* This session divides groups into three circles, and each individual is given a place to express or explain what they have read. This routine discussion activity aims to develop skills *public speaking* member.



Picture 2. Session Silent Reading



Picture 3. Sharing Session

3. Internalization of Religious Values in the Free Reading

Learning is not just a brain activity to earn living or status, but a form devotion (worship) to better know the creator. Several times the Quran has explained how important it is to seek knowledge, one of which is in surah al-Mujadalah verse 11 which states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

Meaning: “O you who believe! When it is said to you, “Make room in the gatherings,” then make room, Allah will make room for you. And when it is said, “Stand up,” then stand up, Allah will raise those who believe among you and those who have been given knowledge by degrees. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do.”

This verse was revealed in connection with the Prophet's assembly, when the Companions were taught to give each other space and respect one another. In this context, Allah promised to elevate the status of those who have knowledge as a form of appreciation for their obedience and adherence to His commands (Afra Amelia Azizah & Sarwadi Sulisno, 2025).

The value of Surah al-Mujadalah is implemented by the community *read together* not through formal classroom teaching, but through the creation of an inclusive reading atmosphere in the town square, so that knowledge becomes the right of every member of society and is distributed evenly without regard to social status.

Al-Qurthubi interpreted that this command applies generally to all assemblies of knowledge and dhikr, indicating the importance of social attitudes and respect for knowledge (Pitra Gosha Patriasya et al., 2025).

The free reading program within this community serves as a strategic instrument for the internalization of substantive religious values. This program facilitates cognitive transformation, where the pursuit of knowledge is a manifestation of devotion to God Almighty. Sociologically, the free reading program combines intellectual and spiritual intelligence, shaping the character of community members who are knowledgeable and possess a moral commitment rooted in transcendental values.

Develop a character of discipline and responsibility among members and of course good morals such as good manners because the program implemented is related to the community, the way the members behave in welcoming visitors who come to read and speak during discussions. In addition, this program Increasing gratitude and social awareness. In practice, social awareness is fostered through concrete activities such as community service, community visits, and regular sharing programs. Within the context of these programs, members develop a sense of caring and sharing knowledge with other members and visitors. Social awareness is described in Surah An-Nisa', verse 58, which serves as a foundation for social ethics, emphasizing two main pillars: trustworthiness and justice.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَيْهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا
بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

Meaning: “Indeed, Allah commands you to deliver the trust to its rightful owner. When you judge between people, judge with justice. Indeed, Allah gives you the best advice. Indeed, Allah is All Hearing, All-Seeing.”

Explanation of the verse: The Qur'an teaches that Allah provides a vision of a high quality of life for His servants and all living creatures, emphasizing that every individual or society has a social responsibility towards others (Salsabila et al., 2025)

The principle of trust in this verse is reflected in how community members manage the books they provide and ensure that every piece of information shared in discussions has validity that can be accounted for intellectually.

A caring community recognizes that keeping books to oneself only widens the gap between the information rich and the information poor. Disseminating knowledge is the highest form of trust. The community becomes a "bridge" that ensures God's messages of goodness reach people's hearts through literacy.

principle *personal worship* This principle ensures that transformation begins with the individual becoming a community leader first, so that the impacts felt by the community, such as reading interest and curiosity, have a strong foundation. Thus, the *moco.bareng* community demonstrates that providing inclusive facilities and strengthening Islamic values can be an effective solution in building an intelligent, literate, and character driven generation in today's era.

D. Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, the *moco.bareng* community is not only an alternative platform for borrowing and reading books for free, but also a platform for fostering reading literacy in the community and its members. Through free reading programs and regular discussion, the *moco.bareng* community provides access to reading materials while also creating a space for critical and reflective dialogue for its members.

By strengthening character based on Islamic values, particularly the principle of *ibda' binafsi*. This principle ensures that transformation begins with the individual becoming a community leader first, so that the impacts felt by the community, such as reading interest and curiosity, have a strong foundation. Thus, the *moco.bareng* community demonstrates that providing inclusive facilities and strengthening Islamic

values can be an effective solution in building an intelligent, literate, and character-driven generation in today's era.

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