

Implementation of the International Community Service Program (KKNI) in Strengthening Literacy and Character Development of Indonesian Diaspora Children in Malaysia

Muhammad Fikri Almajid Munthe¹, Iin Natasya Divana Ginting¹, Yummy Jumianti Marsa¹, Rusi Ulfa Hasanah¹, Siti Aisyah¹

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Children's Literacy;
Indonesian Diaspora;
Education;
Service Learning

Article history:

Received 2026-02-115
Revised 2026-03-16
Accepted 2026-04-20

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the International Community Service Program (KKNI) of Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara in strengthening literacy and character development among Indonesian diaspora children at Sanggar Belajar Gumut, Selangor, Malaysia. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and field documentation methods. The findings indicate that the KKNI program was able to improve children's ability to read and write the Qur'an, recognize Latin letters and numbers, and foster discipline and responsibility through creative literacy activities, savings simulations, and moral guidance. In addition to cognitive impacts, the program also strengthened the moral values, empathy, and social cooperation of diaspora children. For the participating university students, the KKNI program became a transformative experience that developed empathy, leadership, and cross-cultural communication skills. These findings reinforce the concepts of Community-Based Education and Service Learning, showing that community-based and experiential learning can serve as effective means of shaping character and social spirituality. This study recommends establishing a sustainable partnership between Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara and Sanggar Belajar Gumut as a model of international community service grounded in Islamic and humanitarian values.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.



Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Fikri Almajid Munthe
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia; fikri.almajid2004@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right of every child regardless of citizenship status, civil documentation, or location. However, in reality, children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in destination countries such as Malaysia often face significant barriers in accessing formal education. Data show that as of

December 2022, there were 409 Community Learning Centers (CLC) in Malaysia, serving approximately 18,787 PMI children at the elementary and junior secondary levels (Conversation, 2023).

Many of these PMI children are unable to enroll in public or formal schools due to administrative factors, lack of legal documents, financial constraints, or discrimination (Dharossa, 2020). This condition creates an educational gap that affects basic literacy skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy, as well as the development of children's social character.

Literacy is not limited to the ability to read or write; it also includes an understanding of cultural, religious, moral, and financial values that are essential components of character building. Various community service studies in Malaysia have demonstrated success in improving financial and moral literacy through non-formal activities such as learning centers and alternative education facilities (Wulandari & Rohmad, 2025).

In addition to numeracy and academic literacy, character development is another important aspect that is often neglected in education for PMI children. Programs promoting national cultural literacy and character education have been implemented in Sanggar Bimbingan centers in Kuala Lumpur and Sabah, showing that PMI children possess both the willingness and potential to learn Islamic values, nationalism, and social empathy (Hasnida, Adrian, & Siagian, 2024).

The Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) mandates that higher education graduates should possess not only knowledge and technical competencies, but also good character and attitudes. Within the KKNI context, the implementation of community service programs forms part of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, which must encompass community empowerment, socio-cultural, religious, and character dimensions.

Several previous studies have discussed reading and writing literacy, financial literacy, or the character development of PMI children in Malaysia, such as *Financial Literacy for Early Childhood in Selangor, Malaysia* or literacy and numeracy programs at Sanggar Belajar Rawang, Selangor (Triputra, 2017). However, many of these studies focus only on one aspect (academic or financial literacy), without holistically integrating moral character, religion, and cultural dimensions.

Studies on "character strengthening" are often limited to specific activities such as anti-bullying campaigns, national literacy, or value-learning methods through songs or poetry, but few integrate student community service programs (such as International Community Service/KKN) as a systematic platform for combining academic literacy, character education, religious values, and community empowerment for diaspora children.

Studies examining the effectiveness of combined literacy + character + religious values programs in the context of PMI children in Malaysia remain limited, and few have employed an in-depth descriptive qualitative approach in learning centers as research sites. Existing studies often rely only on quantitative data or brief evaluation reports, without describing the implementation process or the perceptions of children, parents, and student volunteers.

The International Community Service Program (KKNI), conducted by Indonesian university students abroad, has the potential to fill this gap by serving as a means of non-formal educational empowerment, character formation, and integrated literacy improvement. However, there is still limited research documenting how KKNI is concretely implemented in diaspora contexts, particularly in learning centers in Malaysia, and its impact on the literacy and character development of PMI children.

Therefore, this study aims to describe the implementation of KKNI work programs in strengthening literacy and character among Indonesian diaspora children in Malaysia. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research will examine the implementation process, challenges, and perceived impacts experienced by PMI children, parents, learning center managers, and student volunteers. This study is expected to fill the research gap regarding the comprehensive integration of literacy, character education, and cross-border community service through KKN, while also providing policy and practical recommendations that can be replicated elsewhere.

2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a community service model based on participation (Community-Based Education Program). This approach was selected to provide an in-depth description of the implementation process of the International Community Service Program (Kuliah Kerja Nyata Internasional/KKNI) and its impact on strengthening literacy and character development among Indonesian diaspora children in Malaysia. The activities were conducted at Sanggar Belajar Gumut, Kalumpang, Hulu Selangor, Malaysia, from August 23 to September 17, 2025, involving 25 diaspora children, 5 parents, the learning center management, and three students from the State Islamic University of North Sumatra as program implementers. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with primary sources obtained from field activities and secondary sources derived from KKNI reports and learning center archives (Rahmani, 2022).

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, as well as verifying findings with informants (member checking). This study followed the principles of social research ethics, in which all child participation was conducted with permission from the management and parents, while maintaining the confidentiality of personal identities (Samsul, 2017).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

General Overview of the Service Location and Subjects

Sanggar Belajar Gumut is one of the non-formal education centers located at Lot 281, Jalan Besar Kampung Gumut, Kalumpang, Hulu Selangor, Malaysia. This location serves as a learning space for children of the Indonesian diaspora whose families are migrant workers. Geographically, the area is classified as a developing semi-urban region situated between industrial zones and plantation areas, where most residents are Indonesian workers who have lived in Malaysia for many years. Although the Indonesian community in the area is relatively cohesive socially, limited access to public services especially education remains a prominent issue.

The educational conditions of children in this community depend greatly on the presence of learning centers such as Sanggar Belajar Gumut. Most of the children do not possess official documents that would allow them to enroll in formal Malaysian schools. As a result, non-formal education becomes the only realistic alternative to ensure that their right to learn is fulfilled. The children at this center are between six and thirteen years old and come from various regions of Indonesia, such as North Sumatra, West Nusa Tenggara, and Central Java. They live with parents who work as daily laborers, domestic workers, and plantation workers. The families' limited socio-economic conditions make them highly dependent on community support to meet their children's educational needs.

Sanggar Belajar Gumut is managed by Mrs. Yanti Surati, a diaspora community leader who voluntarily dedicates herself to providing basic education and moral values to the children of migrant workers. Under her leadership, the center functions not only as a place to learn reading and writing, but also as a social and cultural space where children strengthen their Indonesian identity. Learning activities take place in a modest house converted into a classroom with minimal facilities, using second-hand books and stationery donated by Indonesians living around Selangor.

In this context, the International Community Service Program (KKNI) from the State Islamic University of North Sumatra was introduced to strengthen the role of the learning center through a series of educational activities and character-building programs. Three student volunteers were directly assigned to the center to carry out various educational programs, such as teaching basic literacy, moral guidance, and children's social activities. The students functioned not only as teachers but also as learning partners for the community, interacting closely with children and parents in a warm family atmosphere.

Based on observations, the children showed a strong enthusiasm for learning despite very limited study conditions. This demonstrates that community-based education can grow naturally when there is collective awareness to share roles among society, volunteers, and educational institutions. This concept aligns with the theory of Community-Based Education, which emphasizes the importance of community participation in the learning process, especially in situations where access to formal education is limited. Community-based education not only transfers knowledge but also builds social solidarity and strengthens humanitarian values within the community.

Thus, the existence of Sanggar Belajar Gumut reflects a real example of an alternative education system that emerged from the social needs of the Indonesian diaspora community in Malaysia. Initiatives like this show that education can be implemented not only by formal institutions but also through collaboration among individuals, communities, and universities. The KKNI program became a catalyst that strengthened this synergy, while also demonstrating that university students can play an active role in developing participatory cross-border educational models aligned with the spirit of the Three Pillars of Higher Education.

Implementation of the International Community Service Program (KKNI) at Sanggar Belajar Gumut

The implementation of the International Community Service Program (KKNI) at Sanggar Belajar (SB) Gumut represents a concrete form of involvement by students from the State Islamic University of North Sumatra in cross-border community service. This program was designed as a contextual learning model integrating academic, social, and spiritual dimensions to address the educational needs of Indonesian diaspora children in Malaysia. Students served not only as teachers but also as facilitators, character mentors, and social motivators within the community. This approach reflects the service-learning paradigm, which emphasizes a balance between academic learning and social contribution (Mawardi, 2015).

The KKNI activities at SB Gumut were conducted in a participatory and adaptive manner according to field conditions. Programs were developed based on needs assessments through discussions with the learning center management, direct observation, and interaction with the children. From this process, twelve main work programs were formulated in three fields: education, socio-religious development, and character strengthening. Major activities included learning to read and write hijaiyah letters and Iqra, simple financial literacy training, creative recycling activities, anti-bullying guidance, strengthening moral values through Islamic stories, and organizing the Festival Anak Sholeh as the closing event.

The activity model used a learning-by-doing approach, where children learned through direct practice and play experiences. For example, in financial literacy sessions, students used savings simulations and simple buying-selling games to instill responsibility and honesty. In the religious field, Iqra lessons and memorization of short surahs were conducted gradually, accompanied by group recitation and the cultivation of daily worship values. This approach is consistent with Suprpto's findings regarding Islamic education services for children of Indonesian migrant workers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, which found that non-formal religious activities can effectively maintain spirituality and Islamic identity among migrant children abroad (Kamila, 2023).

Beyond cognitive and religious aspects, KKNI activities at SB Gumut also emphasized character education through the exemplary social conduct of students in daily life. Discipline, punctuality, polite speech, and mutual cooperation became part of daily habits throughout the program. This concept is in line with the study by Rheda Merlyna et al., which emphasized that role-model-based learning in educational centers for migrant workers' children in Malaysia strengthens moral values and positive behavior among learners (Rahman, Zebua, & Kusuma, 2022).

Furthermore, Paulo Freire's concept of Participatory Education was evident in the implementation of these activities. Students did not position themselves as superior teachers, but rather as co-learners growing together with the community. Learning was a two-way process: children, parents, and center managers actively participated in planning and evaluating activities. This collaboration created an

egalitarian, warm, and liberating learning environment free from the structural pressures of formal education systems. Such participatory approaches were also found in the study by Sinta Wahyu Lutfiyah et al. concerning Community Learning Centers (CLC) in Johor, Malaysia, where active participation of parents and volunteers became a key factor in the success of migrant children's education (Mazid, Prasetyo, & Farikah, 2020).

The implementation of KKNI at SB Gumut demonstrates that community-based education can function effectively when managed through empathetic, participatory, and contextual approaches. Students did not merely transfer knowledge, but also carried out small-scale social transformation by nurturing humanitarian, religious, and national values within the diaspora community. Activities such as collective prayer before class, communal cleaning, and sharing simple meals symbolized togetherness and strengthened social solidarity among residents. This condition is consistent with Sahureka's study highlighting the importance of social relations among education managers, NGOs, and migrant communities in ensuring the sustainability of education for undocumented children in Malaysia (Azmi, 2022).

Based on field observations, community participation in SB Gumut is considered very high. Parents actively contributed by providing food and activity supplies, while the studio management played an active role in giving input regarding the teaching methods used by the students. This phenomenon reinforces the findings of Aini, Ishari, and Muttaqin that the success of non-formal education in migrant communities is highly dependent on social trust, cross-role collaboration, and community leadership in maintaining program sustainability (Kementrian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2016).

Overall, the implementation of KKNI in SB Gumut successfully developed a collaborative model involving students, studio management, and the Indonesian diaspora community in Malaysia. This program demonstrates that education rooted in community participation can create a learning process that not only enhances intellectual capacity but also humanizes individuals spiritually and socially. Islamic values and the spirit of nationalism became the main pillars guiding all activities, making KKNI not merely a community service program, but also a form of the nation's social and spiritual diplomacy abroad.

The Impact of Activities on Strengthening the Literacy of Diaspora Children

The implementation of the International Community Service Program (KKNI) at Sanggar Belajar Gumut has produced a tangible impact on strengthening the literacy skills of Indonesian diaspora children in Malaysia. Based on observations and interviews with the learning center administrators, there was a significant improvement in the children's ability to read and write both Hijaiyah and Latin letters. Before the program began, most children still had difficulty recognizing letters and reading *Iqra* fluently. However, after nearly one month of regular learning activities, the children gradually became able to pronounce Hijaiyah letters correctly, read short Quranic verses, and write basic Latin letters. Activities introducing numbers and letters were carried out creatively through educational games, which simultaneously increased their interest in learning and self-confidence.

In addition to improving cognitive abilities, the simple financial literacy program also contributed to the character development of the children. Through activities such as saving simulations and buying-selling games, children were introduced to the values of honesty, responsibility, and self-management. This approach reflects the principle of service learning, namely learning that integrates academic knowledge with social experience to develop moral awareness and empathy (Wahid, 2018). Activities such as the *Mini Bank for Pious Children* and the *Literacy Market* at SB Gumut demonstrate that experience-based learning can simultaneously foster financial literacy and character values. This finding is consistent with Alexander et al., who stated that community service-learning significantly improves learning outcomes, content understanding, and perceptions of the social value of educational activities (Baihaqy & Ramli, 2023).

The "Happy Reading Corner" program became one of the most influential activities in improving children's reading and writing literacy. Children were invited to read illustrated Islamic stories and

then retell them in their own words. This activity trained their narrative skills, enriched vocabulary, and built confidence in speaking before peers. This approach aligns with the concept of contextual multiliteracies, in which literacy is understood not merely as the ability to read text, but also as the skill to interpret and express meaning through various forms of social, visual, and cultural communication (Buchori, 2020). In the context of diaspora children, such an approach is highly relevant because they live in multilingual and multicultural environments that require flexible thinking and linguistic adaptation.

These findings are in line with the study by (Yusnita, 2025) at Kepong Guidance Studio, Malaysia, which showed that literacy among diaspora children plays a dual role: preserving cultural identity and strengthening community social cohesion. At SB Gumut, activities such as group reading, storytelling competitions, and simple writing in Indonesian became ways to instill pride in the mother tongue while strengthening social bonds among children. These activities also created an affirmative space for diaspora children to affirm their identity as part of the Indonesian nation abroad.

This multiliteracy approach is important because diaspora children live in diverse social and cultural contexts. They use various forms of verbal, visual, and digital communication in everyday life. Therefore, creative literacy activities such as drawing, making posters about Islamic values, and reading together not only train academic abilities but also build social awareness and self-identity as Indonesian children living overseas.

From the moral and spiritual dimension, activities such as memorizing daily prayers, listening to stories of the Prophet's exemplary life, and discussions on honesty reinforced the important role of value literacy in character building. This approach strengthens the idea of *Building Moral Communities* (Kementrian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2016), which argues that effective character education emerges from living moral communities where children learn through social interaction, role modeling, and habituation. This concept was reflected at SB Gumut, where children learned not only through formal teaching but also through affectionate and respectful social relationships with one another.

The program results also showed increased learning discipline. Before the program started, attendance was only around 60%, but it increased to more than 85% by the third week. The children showed high enthusiasm, and some even began helping their younger siblings learn to read and write. This phenomenon supports the view of Gregorová et al. that participation in service learning can increase students' intrinsic motivation and social competence because they feel they are active members of a meaningful learning community (Aryani & Fauziah, 2020).

Thus, KKNi activities at SB Gumut not only improved functional literacy (reading, writing, and numeracy), but also value literacy, including moral, spiritual, and social awareness. This concept is consistent with the framework of humanistic literacy, which places education as a process of humanizing individuals through social and cultural experiences. Therefore, the implementation of KKNi in Malaysia can be viewed as an effective community-based service model for strengthening the literacy, character, and identity of Indonesian diaspora children.

Social Impact and Character Formation of Diaspora Children

One of the most significant impacts of the International Community Service Program (KKNi) at Sanggar Belajar Gumut was the change in the social behavior and character of Indonesian diaspora children in Malaysia. Before the program, the learning center administrators revealed that some children were passive, lacked discipline, and had low learning motivation due to a less supportive social environment. However, after a series of educational activities, value-building programs, and social practices were implemented, positive changes became evident in terms of discipline, responsibility, and cooperation among peers.

Activities such as anti-bullying classes and cooperative games became effective media for cultivating empathy and mutual respect. Through group activities such as "My Best Friend" and "Pious Character Puzzle," children learned the meaning of respecting differences and helping others. This approach aligns with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that children learn

through observation, imitation, and social interaction. In this context, KKNI students acted as role models who demonstrated positive behaviors such as discipline, courtesy, and cooperation, which were then imitated and internalized by the children. This finding is similar to the research of Hasanah & Nuryana, which showed that character education based on role modeling and active participation effectively shapes children's social behavior in non-formal educational settings (Saputra, Putra, & Gusmaneli, 2025).

In addition to the social aspect, character building based on Islamic values became the main foundation at SB Gumut. Through daily activities such as collective prayer, congregational prayer, and reading stories of the Prophet's exemplary life, children were guided to understand the values of honesty, responsibility, and compassion for others. This approach reflects Lickona's Character Education Framework, which emphasizes three dimensions of moral character education: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

Field observations showed clear social behavior changes after the activities took place. Children became more disciplined, actively cooperated, and were brave enough to take small leadership roles such as leading prayers before studying or helping friends who struggled with reading. These changes were also acknowledged by parents, who stated that their children had become more polite, diligent in worship, and more responsible at home. These findings are consistent with (Kamila, 2023), who emphasized that character education based on religious activities in learning centers for migrant workers' children in Malaysia plays a major role in building positive social behavior and children's spirituality.

(Arif, 2021) in *Sustainability of Non-Formal Education for Indonesian Migrant Children* also supports these findings. The study emphasized that the success of non-formal education in migrant communities greatly depends on the sustainability of character values instilled through daily social interaction, not merely on the formal academic curriculum. This condition shows that character education is most effective when implemented participatively and contextually in the environment where children grow up.

Besides shaping children's character, KKNI activities also strengthened the social solidarity of the diaspora community. Parents, volunteers, and local residents actively participated in supporting activities such as the *Festival Anak Sholeh*, community clean-up programs, and joint religious gatherings. This collective participation revived the spirit of mutual cooperation and togetherness, which are hallmarks of Indonesian culture. This phenomenon is consistent with Freire's view of education as a practice of freedom, where liberating education is a social process that fosters critical awareness and community solidarity.

Thus, the implementation of KKNI at Sanggar Belajar Gumut generated real social and cultural transformation. Children not only gained academic skills but also underwent a character-building process aligned with Islamic values and Indonesian culture. Student volunteers served as catalysts for social change, bridging the academic world with the realities of the migrant community.

This value- and experience-based educational practice proves that cross-border community service can be an effective means of building a diaspora generation that is religious, morally grounded, and socially empowered.

Challenges and Reflections on International KKNI Activities

The implementation of the International Community Service Program (KKNI) in Malaysia presented complex challenges across administrative, socio-cultural, and psychological dimensions for participating students. The primary challenge emerged in the aspect of legality and permits, where cross-border educational activities required intensive coordination among universities, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuala Lumpur. The permit process often required a long period of time and involved cross-national bureaucracy, demanding strong academic diplomacy and mature cross-cultural management skills.

From a social and cultural perspective, students encountered the reality that diaspora communities possess linguistic, cultural, and habitual diversity. Some children were more fluent in Malay than in Indonesian, requiring literacy methods to be bilingual or adaptive. This challenge is consistent with the findings of Yassin et al., who reported that language barriers and cultural adaptation negatively affect the continuity of learning among international students in Malaysian institutions (Merliza & Retnawati, 2018).

Limited educational facilities also became a significant obstacle. At SB Gumut, resources such as digital whiteboards, new books, and multimedia facilities were minimal, forcing students to rely on simple tools such as used paper, colored markers, and creative teaching media. However, these limitations often stimulated innovation in more contextual and relevant teaching methods. Rachmawati et al. noted that limited facilities encourage teachers and volunteers to create creative methods suited to local conditions.

Students were also required to adjust psychologically and culturally within a cross-national context. Adapting to local communication styles, which tend to be more subtle, as well as differing norms of politeness, demanded intercultural sensitivity. Research by Anuar mentioned that intercultural communication competence is a real challenge for international students in understanding the expectations of local supervisors and local students (Raihan, Firdausi, & Kasri, 2022).

Reflections from the students showed that KKNi became a transformational experience. They realized that international service opened new perspectives on education, humanity, and social relationships. This opportunity shaped the understanding that education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but also the construction of social relationships and cultural empathy—a concept consistent with transformative learning practices.

Institutional aspects also received important attention. Students suggested that programs such as KKNi should become part of a more systematic institutional policy, with cross-cultural training, financial support, and integration into the university's vision and mission as an element of social diplomacy. In line with the article *Service-Learning as a Niche Innovation in Higher Education* (Alejandro Álvarez-Vanegas, 2024), higher education institutions often struggle to implement service learning due to insufficient training and incentives for educators, as well as the lack of integration of such programs into the core curriculum.

Overall, these challenges were not merely obstacles but also learning opportunities for both students and institutions. Despite facing administrative, linguistic, facility-related, and cultural adaptation barriers, the KKNi experience proved that international service can become a collaborative space among universities, diaspora communities, and local institutions in creating inclusive, transformative, and sustainable education. The study *Impact of International Service Learning* (Ayu, Meli, Ambara, & Suniasih, 2024) reinforces the argument that ISL (International Service Learning) can enhance students' global awareness, ethics, and intercultural competence while engaging with overseas local communities.

Student Reflections and Program Sustainability

The implementation of the International Community Service Program (KKNi) at Sanggar Belajar Gumut, Malaysia, not only provided benefits for diaspora children but also became a transformative experience for the participating students. Through direct interaction with migrant communities, students realized the meaning of service as an integral part of the tridharma of higher education, namely education that upholds humanity and social empowerment. The learning process in the field created awareness that knowledge only gains value when implemented in real life and when it generates constructive social impact.

Interviews and student reflections revealed that their involvement in this program fostered four key values: social empathy, moral leadership, intercultural communication, and humanitarian spirituality. Students learned to navigate the diverse social dynamics of diaspora communities, sharpen their sensitivity to community needs, and develop problem-solving skills in resource-limited

environments. This finding aligns with research on Community Engagement in Multicultural Education (Rejeki Lensa, Jufni, & Hadijaya), which found that active community involvement strengthens social cohesion and empathy among students in multicultural contexts (Suradi & Ag, 2022).

From an affective perspective, the overseas KJNI experience also shaped students' spiritual awareness. Interacting with diaspora children who were eager to learn despite limitations fostered gratitude, compassion, and motivation to continue doing good. This experience is consistent with the study *Instilling Religious Values in Elementary Schools During the Pandemic* (Wahid, 2024), which showed that even in difficult times, schools can still cultivate religious values through habituation, religious activities, and teacher role modeling.

Beyond personal impacts, KJNI activities also provided institutional lessons for the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU). This program demonstrated significant potential for the university to become an agent of social diplomacy and moderate Islamic education on the international stage. Cross-border service programs such as this can serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy and humanitarian values that introduce the face of Indonesian Islam as inclusive, tolerant, and oriented toward public welfare. This is reinforced by research (Rizki, Ahmad; Azizah, Nurul; Mubin, 2024), which stated that the presence of community service students increased the activation of religious teaching in villages and encouraged children to participate more actively in religious activities.

In terms of sustainability, this activity generated several strategic recommendations. First, it is important to establish a UINSU-SB Gumut Service Partnership as a sustainable collaboration supporting literacy development and character building for diaspora children on a regular basis. Second, cross-cultural training should be provided to students before deployment abroad so that they are prepared to face differences in language, customs, and social norms. Third, the university needs to develop an international service-learning curriculum model integrated with academic study programs, ensuring that service continuity is systemic rather than sporadic.

The final reflection shows that overseas KJNI is not only about social service but also a process of shaping students' academic and spiritual identity. They learned to become empowered learners who are empathetic and oriented toward social change. Thus, this program is not merely a routine service activity, but a meeting space of values, knowledge, and humanity capable of nurturing global character grounded in Islam and national identity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of the International Community Service Program (KJNI) at Sanggar Belajar Gumut, Selangor, Malaysia, plays an important role in strengthening the literacy and character development of Indonesian diaspora children through a community-based nonformal education approach. The program, carried out by students of Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, not only provides learning access for the children of Indonesian Migrant Workers but also creates an inclusive, participatory, and meaningful learning environment. Improvements in Qur'anic reading and writing skills, recognition of the Latin alphabet, and basic numeracy skills serve as clear evidence of the success of activities integrated with moral values, discipline, and social responsibility.

Field findings indicate that community-based education can develop effectively when the community, program managers, and university students collaborate in designing activities according to local needs. This approach is consistent with the theory of Community-Based Education, which emphasizes the active role of the community in the educational process. In addition, the application of learning by doing methods and creative literacy activities demonstrates the relevance of David Kolb's Experiential Learning concept in the context of migrant children's education, where direct experience becomes the primary means of developing skills and character values.

The KJNI program also generates significant social impacts. The children become more disciplined, communicative, and empathetic, while the surrounding community shows strong solidarity and participation. These results reinforce Thomas Lickona's Character Education theory,

which states that character formation is most effective through repeated social interaction and positive role modeling. For the university students, this experience becomes a reflective learning process that fosters empathy, leadership, and awareness of social responsibility, as explained in the modern concept of Service Learning by Andrew Furco (2023), namely learning that combines academic theory with social experience to shape students' character and spirituality.

Institutionally, overseas KKNi activities provide important lessons regarding the need for sustainable international community service strategies. Collaboration between the university, the learning center management, and the diaspora community demonstrates the potential for establishing the UINSU-SB Gumut Community Service Partnership as an annual program. With policy support and cross-cultural training, programs of this kind can become a model of global education based on Islamic and humanitarian values.

Overall, this study confirms that community-based nonformal education, when integrated with service learning principles, can become an effective means of strengthening literacy, character, and identity among Indonesian children abroad, while also shaping university students who are socially minded, empathetic, and ready to contribute at the global level.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara for its institutional support in the implementation of the International Community Service Program. Appreciation is also extended to the management of Sanggar Belajar Gumut, especially the coordinators, parents, and children from the Indonesian diaspora community who actively participated in and warmly welcomed the program activities. The authors are grateful to the representatives of the Consulate, local community leaders, and all volunteers who provided administrative assistance, technical facilitation, and moral support throughout the research and community service process. Their cooperation and contributions were essential to the successful completion of this study.

REFERENCES

- Arif, M. (2021). Prophetic Leadership in Forming the Religious Moderation Values in Islamic Education Institutions. *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan*, 19(2), 219–235. <https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v19i2.3109>
- Aryani, R., & Fauziah, P. Y. (2020). Analisis Pola Asuh Orangtua dalam Upaya Menangani Kesulitan Membaca pada Anak Disleksia. *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 5(2), 1128–1137. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v5i2.645>
- Ayu, G., Meli, P., Ambara, D. P., & Suniasih, N. W. (2024). Interactive Powerpoint Multimedia to Improve Letter Recognition Skills in Group B Children. *Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Undiksha*, 12(3), 419–427.
- Azmi, R. (2022). Disability Law Reform in Malaysia: Lessons for ASEAN. *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, 3(1), 43–56.
- Baihaqy, S. A., & Ramli, A. (2023). Pola Komunikasi Dalam Manajemen Sekolah Dan Madrasah. *Tolis Ilmiah: Jurnal Penelitian*, 5(2), 120. <https://doi.org/10.56630/jti.v5i2.456>
- Buchori, M. (2020). *Peranan Pendidikan Dalam Pembentukan Budaya Politik Di Indonesia, dalam Quo Vadis Pendidikan Di Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius.
- Dharossa, T. T. R. (2020). Upaya Perlindungan WNI oleh Pemerintah Indonesia melalui Pendekatan Diplomasi Digital (2014-2019). *Padjadjaran Journal of International Relations (PADJIR)*, 2(1), 105–118. <https://doi.org/10.24198/padjir.v2i1.26055>
- Hasnida, S. S., Adrian, R., & Siagian, N. A. (2024). Transformasi Pendidikan di Era Digital. In *Jurnal Bintang Pendidikan Indonesia* (Vol. 1). Retrieved from <https://kumparan.com/aan-herdian89/transformasi-pendidikan-di-era-digital-1zG74Ilpzc4/4>
- Kamila, A. (2023). Pentingnya Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Pendidikan Moral Dalam Membina Muhammad Fikri Almajid Munthe, Iin Natasya Divana Ginting, Yummy Jumianti Marsa, Rusi Ulfa Hasanah, Siti Aisyah / Implementation of the International Community Service Program (KKNi) in Strengthening Literacy and Character Development of Indonesian Diaspora Children in Malaysia

- Karakter Anak Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya*, 4(1), 88–100.
- Kementrian Pendidikan Malaysia. (2016). *Panduan Pelaksanaan Sains, Teknologi, Kejuruteraan, dan Matematik(STEM) Dalam Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran*. Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum: Putrajaya.
- Mawardi, I. (2015). Dimensi-Dimensi Masyarakat Madani: Membangun Kultur Etika Sosial. *Cakrawala*, X(2), 156–174.
- Mazid, S., Prasetyo, D., & Farikah, F. (2020). Nilai Nilai Kearifan Lokal Sebagai Pembentuk Karakter Masyarakat. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 10(2), 249–262. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpk.v10i2.34099>
- Merliza, P., & Retnawati, H. (2018). Continuing professional development (CPD) for junior high school mathematics teachers : An evaluation study. *REiD (Research and Evaluation in Education)*, 4(1), 79–93.
- Rahman, A., Zebua, W. D. A., & Kusuma, A. A. (2022). Sosialisasi Kebijakan Transformasi dan Revitalisasi Balai Pengembangan dan Penjaminan Mutu Pendidikan Vokasi. *To Maega : Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 5(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.35914/tomaega.v5i1.918>
- Rahmani, N. A. B. (2022). Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif dan Kuantitatif. In *Rahmani*.
- Raihan, M., Firdausi, A., & Kasri, R. A. (2022). Islamic Financial Literacy Amongst Muslim Students in Indonesia : A Multidimensional Approach. *AL-MUZARA'AH*, 2(1), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.29244/jam.specialissue2022.77-94>
- Rizki, Ahmad; Azizah, Nurul; Mubin, N. (2024). Pluralisme Prespektif Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus dur) dan Relevansinya dengan Pendidikan Multikultural. *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin*, 2(2), 245–251.
- Samsul. (2017). *Metode Penelitian : Teori dan Aplikasi Penelitian Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, Mixed Method, dan Development*. Jambi: Pusaka.
- Saputra, T. E., Putra, A. A., & Gusmaneli, G. (2025). Pendidikan Islam sebagai Pilar Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia. *Harmoni Pendidikan : Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 2(2), 208–218.
- Suradi, A., & Ag, M. (2022). *Pendidikan Islam & Multikultural*. SURABAYA: Pustaka Aksara.
- Triputra, Y. A. (2017). Implementasi Nilai-Nilai HAM Global Ke dalam Sistem Hukum Indonesia yang Berlandaskan Pancasila. *Jurnal Hukum IUS QUIA IUSTUM*, 24(2), 279–300. <https://doi.org/10.20885/iustum.vol24.iss2.art6>
- Wahid, A. (2018). Pentingnya Media Pembelajaran dalam Meningkatkan Prestasi Belajar. *Istiqra*, 5(2), 1–11.
- Wahid, A. (2024). Moderasi Beragama dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Agama Islam : Implementasi dalam Pendidikan Multikultural di Indonesia. *SCHOLARS: Jurnal Sosial Humaniora Dan Pendidikan*, 2(1), 29–36. <https://doi.org/10.31959/js.v2i1.2367>
- Wulandari, M., & Rohmad, M. A. (2025). Integrasi Nilai Islami Dan Literasi Digital: Transformasi Pai Menuju Generasi Emas Society 5.0. *Naas: Jurnal Dakwah Islam*, 9(1), 51–59. Retrieved from <https://www.ejournal.unia.ac.id/index.php/bayan-linnaas/article/view/2226%0Ahttps://www.ejournal.unia.ac.id/index.php/bayan-linnaas/article/viewFile/2226/1298>
- Yusnita, E. (2025). INTEGRASI NILAI-NILAI AL-QUR'AN DAN HADIST DALAM PENGEMBANGAN PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER DI ERA DIGITAL. *Pendas : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, 10(3), 247–260. Retrieved from <http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0>

[Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484_SISTEM_PEMBETUNGAN_TERPUSAT_STRATEGI_MELESTARI](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484_SISTEM_PEMBETUNGAN_TERPUSAT_STRATEGI_MELESTARI)