

 Research Article

Toward a Sustainable Future: Islamic Education Strategies to Cultivate Moral and Ethical Muslim Youth at ICC Muar Johor, Malaysia

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Abstract

Moral education plays a vital role in shaping students' character and personality, guiding them to become individuals with noble character, a strong sense of responsibility, and high social awareness. The Indonesian Community Center (ICC) Muar, located in Johor, Malaysia, serves as an educational institution for children of Indonesian migrant workers at the elementary level. It holds a significant responsibility in embedding moral values through effective and sustainable learning strategies tailored to the unique needs of its students. This study aims to explore the strategies employed in Islamic education at ICC Muar in fostering a morally grounded Muslim generation. A descriptive qualitative research design was adopted, utilizing observation, interviews, and documentation as the primary data collection techniques. The findings reveal that ICC Muar integrates several key strategies in its moral education efforts: modeling by teachers who serve as moral exemplars, active and participatory learning methods, the use of interactive learning media, and the incorporation of religious and social activities that emphasize direct practice and application. These strategies contribute not only to students' increased religious understanding but also to the internalization of moral behaviors in daily life, such as discipline, empathy, and social responsibility. The learning approach at ICC Muar is deeply rooted in Islamic values, creating a holistic and supportive educational environment. As a result, the institution successfully nurtures a generation of students who are not only intellectually capable but also possess strong moral integrity and spiritual depth, aligning with the broader goals of Islamic moral education.

Keywords: Islamic Education, ICC Muar, Learning Strategies, Moral Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian Education System mentions that education is a conscious and planned effort to create an atmosphere of learning and learning so that students actively develop their potential to have religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble morals and the skills needed by themselves and society (Ujud et al., 2023). Therefore, education must be accessible to everyone from all walks of life so that they can implement and help make the fifth SDG's goal a success, namely Quality Education. This then also includes the children of Indonesian Migrant Workers or commonly abbreviated as PMI, this is because equal and equal rights must be had by all levels of society, including in accessing education. (Sulistya Handoyo & Triarda, 2020). By obtaining quality education in a multicultural environment, Indonesian children can develop a broader understanding of the world, enrich their learning experiences, and bring the nation's noble values to the international stage. Apart from that, good education is also the key to creating a generation that is competitive, innovative and able to contribute to Indonesia's progress in the future. Therefore, support for the education of Indonesian children abroad is very important in order to create superior and highly competitive human resources.

Indonesia and Malaysia are geographically close to each other, it cannot be denied that Indonesian residents who enter Malaysia are not only legal immigrants, but also illegal immigrants. Therefore, the problem of limited education for PMI children is also becoming increasingly complex (Udhwalalita & Hakim, 2023). Indonesia and Malaysia are geographically close to each other, it cannot be denied that Indonesian residents who enter Malaysia are not only legal immigrants, but also illegal immigrants. Therefore, the problem of limited education for PMI children is also becoming increasingly complex (Darmono et al., 2023). In Malaysia, educational affairs are overseen by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and are under the responsibility of the federal government. However, each state has a department of education to coordinate educational affairs in its territory. The 1996 Education Law is known as the main law governing education. Education can be obtained from the multilingual state school system, which provides free education to all Malaysians, or private schools, or through home-schooling (Yaacob et al., 2015).

Indonesian children in Malaysia, whether following their parents to work or in various other migration conditions, have a very important role as the nation's next generation and will determine their future. Parents play a big role in supervising their children so that they are involved in positive activities which ultimately minimizes their children's involvement in delinquency (Ghani et al., 2016). However, on the other hand, parents with their various activities as migrant workers in Indonesia have limited time to interact and educate their children directly. So the need for access to education that is appropriate, quality, and in accordance with cultural values and Indonesian identity is something that cannot be ignored, because with good education, they will not only obtain the knowledge and skills needed to face global competition, but will also be able to maintain and preserve the identity of the Indonesian nation in overseas countries, build awareness of the importance of unity and solidarity, and become ambassadors who carry Indonesia's good name in various aspects of life in Malaysia, so that efforts to provide sustainable access to education, and based on the needs and challenges they face must be the main concern, both for the government, educational community, and parents, so that they are not left behind in obtaining the right to a decent education like other Indonesian children.

Islamic education for elementary school students has an important role in introducing them to religious teachings and beliefs held by Islamic society. Apart from that, Islamic education helps children understand the ethical and moral values contained in the teachings of this religion. In the context of this school, Islamic values are instilled through various activities and learning methods which aim to strengthen students' character. This includes aspects such as honesty, empathy, cooperation, and fairness. This approach is not only limited to classroom learning, but is also applied in extracurricular activities and daily interactions at school (Jamil et al., 2023). Moral enhancement is a subcategory of human enhancement where the proposed enhancement is directed at increasing human ability to carry out moral actions (Huttunen & Sivula, 2023). Today's Muslim society is faced with social problems due to rapid social changes, both directly and indirectly affecting the way of life (Laeheem, 2018). In this context, moral education must be given to children, especially in formal educational institutions.

Islamic education has a very important role in shaping the character and morals of students, especially for Indonesian children in Malaysia. Islamic education learning continues to innovate in order to provide deep and applicable understanding for students. One of the institutions that seeks to develop Islamic education learning methods is the Indonesia Community Center (ICC) MUAR Johor Malaysia. This institution engaged in education in Malaysia, aims to form a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, moral, and have a strong understanding of Islam. In facing the challenges of the digital era and the increasingly complex needs of society, ICC MUAR Johor implements various innovative and adaptive learning strategies. Some of the challenges faced in learning Islamic Education at this institution include differences in student backgrounds, rapid technological developments, and how to convey religious material in an interesting and relevant way for the younger generation. Therefore, the learning strategies implemented at ICC MUAR Johor need to be studied in depth so that they can become a model for Indonesian educational institutions in other countries.

1.1. Literature Review

Several previous studies have discussed Islamic education learning strategies in various contexts and approaches in Indonesian schools in Malaysia, among others:

- 1.1.1. Research conducted by Lasmi (2023) with the title *"The Role of the Indonesian Community Center (ICC) in Fighting for the Education and Moral Development of Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia"* in 2023 shows that this educational institution has played an important role in shaping students morals. This is shown by the Indonesian children studying at ICC Muar who are improving with the various activities carried out by the teachers.
- 1.1.2. Research entitled *"Fulfillment of Education for PMI Children in Malaysia by the Indonesian Citizen Education Center"* conducted by Avilla (Udhwalalita & Hakim, 2023) in 2023 stated that the Indonesian Citizen Education Center (PPWNI) has a very important role in fulfilling the educational rights of Indonesian children in Klang, Malaysia, especially for students who do not have official documents such as birth certificates but are still connected to Indonesia through their parents. PPWNI has also succeeded in meeting the metrics that schools can achieve in realizing the right to education. PPWNI is also a form of implementation of the Education for All (EFA) concept, a UNESCO initiative and recognized globally.
- 1.1.3. Research from Rahimah (Embong, 2020) in 2020 with the title *"Development of Islamic Education in the Archipelago: Malaysia and Indonesia"* explains that the modern Islamic education system must use physical facilities such as the aspect of integrating non-religious subjects in the formal education curriculum, using innovative teaching methodologies, using modern technological tools and materials as teaching aids, practicing freedom of thought and flexibility in thinking. Several factors are important to overcome the issue of intellectual deadness in the modern era as an effort to reform the Islamic education system.
- 1.1.4. Research entitled *"Problems of Education at the Border: Case Study of Basic Education for Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in the State of Sarawak, Malaysia"* by Handoyo (Sulistya Handoyo & Triarda, 2020) in 2020 found that the state's inability to provide educational access/services could be covered by cooperation schemes that exist through partnerships with the private sector. In terms of education for PMI children in the Sarawak region, through the Transnational Public Private Partnership, we can then provide access to education for PMI children in Sarawak, Malaysia. Through collaboration between actors who then provided assistance to fulfill basic education for PMI children in Sarawak, Malaysia, this then provided many benefits and also new problems that emerged from this collaboration. This collaboration can then be seen as quite successful, but then there is an important point that must be understood, that this form of cooperation is not permanent, this must then be rethought by all actors regarding the way out of this problem. So that in the future new ideas and policies must emerge to regulate education for PMI children in Malaysia, especially in the state of Sarawak.
- 1.1.5. Research conducted by Julfian (2023) in 2023 with the title *The Role of Citizenship Education in Forming a Sense of Homelandishness in ICC Muar Johor Malaysia* Students shows that education has a significant impact in forming a sense of homeland love in Indonesian children. Through the effective implementation of integrated teaching in the educational curriculum, Indonesian children in Malaysia can be well introduced to important aspects such as history, culture, diversity and national values which are an integral part of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

Based on several previous studies above, this research has significant novelty in several aspects, namely that most of the previous research discussed general learning strategies in Islamic schools or institutions in Malaysia, while this research specifically examines the approach used at the Indonesian Community Center (ICC) Muar Johor Malaysia, which has its own social and cultural context in the Islamic Education system. Apart from that, this research aims to produce a moral and character-based learning strategy model, which can be a reference for other Islamic education institutions in developing methods that are not only oriented towards the transfer of knowledge, but also towards the formation of Islamic morals and values in the lives of students.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the concept of Islamic education to shape student morals at ICC Muar Johor, Malaysia. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the concept of Islamic education in the Indonesian school

environment in Malaysia. The research was conducted at the Indonesia Community Center (ICC) Muar Johor Malaysia, which is an elementary school that provides educational services for the children of Indonesian migrant workers living in Muar Johor Malaysia.

2.2. Participants

The subjects in this research included headmaster, teachers and students at ICC Muar. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews and documentation. Observations are carried out to assess student behavior, especially learning activities and daily interactions at school. Interviews were conducted with school principals to explore data related to general policies related to curriculum development in learning and collaboration activities at ICC Muar.

2.3. Research Instruments

The teacher is to collect in-depth information regarding learning activities which include strategies and learning models for Islamic religious education. In addition, documentation is used to collect relevant material, such as reports on school activities and policies that support Islamic education. Triangulation of data sources was carried out to help provide a comprehensive view of how Islamic education is implemented at ICC Muar Johor Malaysia.

Table 1. Data Collection Instrument

Instrument	Description	Purpose
Observation	Monitoring Student Activity during In the school	To observe the implementation and impact of islamic education learning activity
Interviews	Structured interviews with educators and the principal	To gain insights into the application of Islamic education learning
Documentation	Collection of school reports, policies, and activity logs	To support data with real evidence of educational practices

2.4. Procedures

This research followed the following steps: (1) Preliminary study, Identification of the research location, and obtaining permission from school authorities. (2) Data collection. Conduct observations, interviews and document analysis. Observations were made on daily routine activities and special activities related to character education. Interviews were conducted individually with teachers and principals, while relevant school documents were analyzed for supporting evidence. (3) Organizing data, transcribing interviews, compiling observation notes, and categorizing documents for analysis.

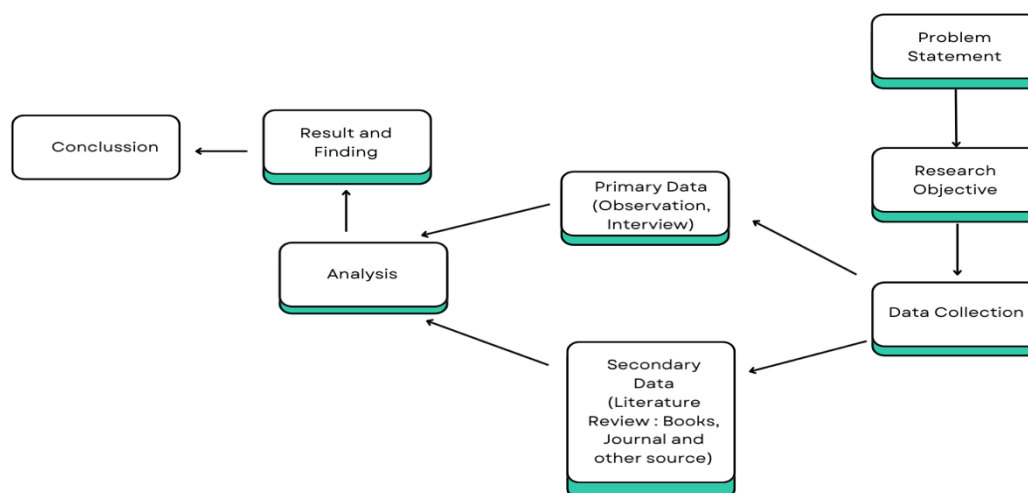


Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram

2.5. Data Analysis

The data that has been collected is then analyzed using interactive analysis techniques which consist of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and data verification. In the first stage, the data is simplified by selecting the relevant and important parts. Then, the selected data is organized and presented systematically in narrative format to make it easier to understand. In the final stage, verification is carried out to ensure the consistency and validity of the data. This analysis provides clear conclusions, providing insight into the implementation of Islamic education at ICC Muar. Triangulation is used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness by cross-verifying data from observations, interviews and document analysis. This research is limited to ICC Muar, so the findings may not be generalizable to all Indonesian schools in Malaysia. Additionally, qualitative research relies on subjective interpretation, which can introduce researcher bias. However, triangulation and data checking were carried out to minimize bias and increase data validity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesian Community Center (ICC) Muar is an educational institution that was established in 2016 in response to the educational needs of children of Indonesian migrant workers in the Muar area, Johor, Malaysia. The establishment of ICC Muar involved the active role of Mrs. Lasmi from Blitar, Indonesia. In the early stages of its establishment, ICC Muar utilized the house owned by Mrs. Lasmi, an Indonesian citizen who had become a permanent resident in Muar, as a place for teaching and learning activities. However, because local government regulations prohibit residences from being used as locations for educational activities with a large number of students, the school was moved to a shopping complex. This shows the spirit of mutual cooperation and concern of the Indonesian community in providing access to education for the younger generation in the diaspora. Over time, ICC Muar continues to grow. In 2025, this education center has served 31 students with the support of a manager. Despite facing limited resources, the dedication of the manager and community support ensure that the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Muar receive a decent and sustainable education.

3.1. ICC Muar Islamic Education Learning Strategy

Islamic Religious Education Learning at ICC Muar is designed to meet the educational needs of the children of Indonesian migrant workers living in the area. The learning strategy implemented is oriented towards instilling Islamic values, strengthening morals, and developing Islamic character through interactive and contextual methods. One of the main strategies implemented is experiential and exemplary-based learning, where teachers not only present material theoretically, but also provide real examples in everyday life. Teachers should have good provisions in providing religious experiences to their students at school. In religious education in an increasingly pluralistic society, it is very important to develop intercultural relations (Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2020) so that Indonesian children in Malaysia must be able to adapt to the culture and rules of that country.

Table 2. Teacher Role Modeling

Role Modeling Activity	Purpose	Impact
Exemplary in Morals	Forming good character and morals	Students find it easier to understand and apply Islamic teachings
Discipline in Worship	Increase student motivation in learning and worship	Increasing discipline in worship
Social Concern	Instilling discipline and responsibility	Formation of a strong Islamic character

The closeness of teachers to students and parents is also an important strategy in shaping children's Islamic character. Teachers not only teach in the classroom, but are also active in religious activities, recitations, and Islamic mentoring programs. As role models, teachers at ICC Muar apply the concept of *"learning by example"*, where Islamic values are not only taught theoretically, but are also realized in daily interactions. Teachers demonstrate noble morals, such as patience, honesty, discipline, and compassion in educating students.

ICC Muar also applies active learning methods designed to increase student participation, encourage critical thinking, and facilitate understanding of religious concepts through direct involvement in the learning process. This approach aims to make students active learning subjects, not just passive listeners, so that it is easier for them to understand and internalize Islamic values in everyday life. Active learning methods in elementary schools are important to pay attention to so that to optimize their benefits, a deeper understanding of how to implement them is needed. This includes an understanding of how to adapt the method to suit the physical, cognitive, and emotional developmental characteristics of students at the elementary school level (Ritonga & Napitupulu, 2024). By utilizing methods such as group discussions, case studies, role plays, and collaborative projects, teachers can create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. This helps increase student involvement in learning, strengthening students understanding of Islamic religious concepts.

Table 3. Active Learning Methods for Islamic Education

Learning Methods	Form of Activity
Role-Playing and Simulation	Simulation of the implementation of thaharah, prayer, zakat, and social interaction in accordance with Islamic teachings
Story Based Learning	Stories of the Prophets and inspiring Islamic figures in an interesting way, such as through drama, video, or visual illustrations
Project-Based Learning (PBL)	Create Islamic educational videos, develop posters about noble morals
Gamification and the Use of Technology	Interactive quizzes, Islamic educational games, and digital applications to increase student engagement in learning.

Apart from these learning methods, the use of media in Islamic Religious Education is very important to increase the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, especially in helping students understand abstract concepts in Islam in a more concrete and interesting way. With the presence of adequate learning media, teaching and learning activities can take place effectively and efficiently. Moreover, students and teachers will be more active, communicative, creative and innovative in the classroom (Meliyani et al., 2022). The type of learning media, namely conventional, includes traditional tools such as blackboards, textbooks and printed materials, which have long been the basis of formal education. Meanwhile, digital learning media utilizes modern technology, such as computers, the internet and mobile applications, to present learning material that is more interactive and can be accessed from anywhere. (Achmad Faqihuddin, 2024). This digital learning media is better known as “*educational technology*” which is considered very important because it is not only the theme that appears most frequently during this period, but also dominates discussions in 2020 in particular. (Boateng et al., 2024). However, teachers can combine technology with conventional media in the learning process by paying attention to needs and circumstances.



Figure 2. Educational Posters

As a learning medium, posters are works of art or graphic designs composed of images, letters and information printed on paper or other materials, large and small. The application is attached to a wall or other flat surface with strong characteristics (Lestari et al., 2023). Poster learning media can create an

effective and interesting learning atmosphere, learning can be done inside or outside the classroom, adapted to needs, whether additional, complementary or substitute for current in-class learning activities. (Munirah et al., 2022). Posters are used by ICC Muar teachers as an effective strategy for conveying material in a visual, interesting and easy to understand way for students. Posters function as tools that can provide an understanding of worship in Islam, such as the pillars of faith, the pillars of Islam, prayer procedures, as well as explanations of noble moral values and an understanding of Indonesia's cultural diversity. Because literacy development is important for maintaining cultural heritage through intergenerational transmission, especially in migrant communities (Hamid & Jahan, 2023).

In its implementation, the Islamic education curriculum at ICC Muar used refers to Indonesian education standards supported by the Indonesian School Johor Bahru Malaysia (SIJB), which is contextualized with local conditions and culture, so that it is more relevant to the lives of students in Malaysia.



Figure 3. Learning Process and Evaluation Book

To strengthen the implementation of this strategy, ICC Muar also involves the community and parents in the learning process. Considering parent and teacher involvement, such as holding parent and teacher meetings at school, accountability and transparency can improve learning through the provision of better school services and a better learning environment (Kumar et al., 2024) through various programs such as family taklim assemblies, as well as studies with parents and students, it becomes an integral part in forming a learning environment that supports students' moral and spiritual growth.

In addition, Through this comprehensive learning strategy based on Islamic values, it is hoped that students at ICC Muar will not only gain academic understanding in Islamic Religious Education, but will also be able to apply Islamic teachings in everyday life, become individuals with noble character, and maintain their Islamic and Indonesian identity in overseas lands.

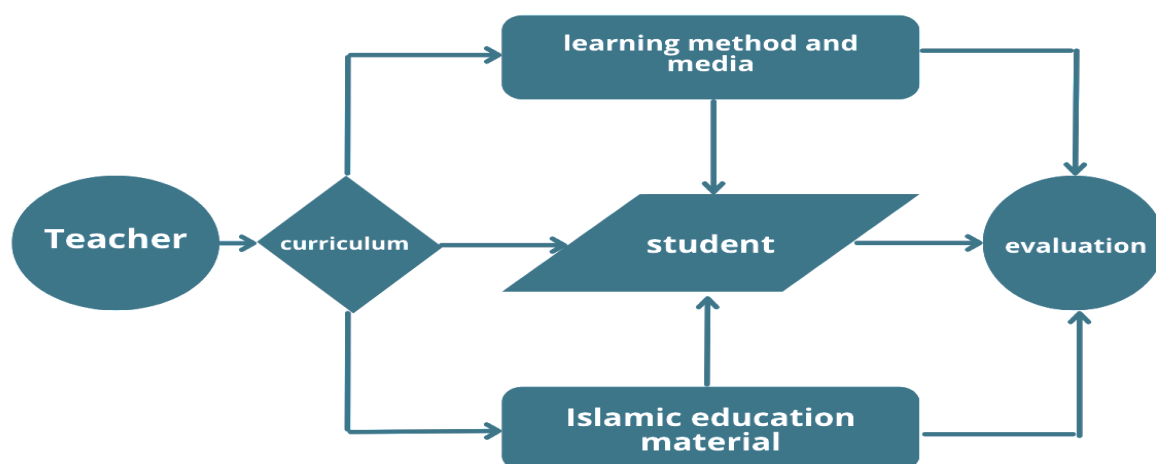


Figure 4. Flowchart of Islamic Education Learning Strategies at ICC Muar

This flow diagram shows the Islamic education learning strategy at ICC Muar which is sustainable and interconnected. Each element supports each other to create a school environment where Islamic education is taught and practiced.

3.2. The Concept of Moral Education for ICC Muar students

Moral education plays a very important role in forming a generation of Muslims who have noble character, are responsible, and have high religious awareness in everyday life. As an educational institution that instills Islamic values in the learning process, ICC Muar not only focuses on theoretical mastery of religious knowledge, but also prioritizes the formation of students' character and morals so that they are able to become honest, disciplined, tolerant individuals and have a sense of empathy towards others. The headmaster and teachers explained the concept of moral education that had been implemented :

School Principal *"Apart from religious learning such as reciting the Koran and prayer, we really emphasize the aspect of developing students' morals. because this will be a provision for them to live side by side with society"*.

Teacher *"Every time all students enter the school, they make it a habit to say salam to each other, respect and obey teachers, parents, school rules, always be disciplined, take responsibility for learning tasks and respect each other"*

Moral education can be applied through various approaches, both directly and indirectly, by emphasizing the importance of the teacher's example as a role model, a conducive learning environment, and the integration of Islamic values in every aspect of learning. Teachers not only teach moral theories based on the Koran and Hadith, but also provide real examples in everyday life, such as speaking politely, respecting differences, instilling sincerity in worship, and teaching students to have an attitude of responsibility and social concern. Morals refer to good and bad deeds that can be seen from human actions which are used as a benchmark for someone goodness (Purnaningtias et al., 2020). Moral education give attention to human life which is pursued through the development of active experiential construction so that it can restore students lives as an alternative learning-oriented educational reality by examining students moral character profiles. (Chang, 2022).

Instilling moral values from an early age is the main foundation in shaping children's character, personality and social attitudes which will influence their behavior in the future. Since childhood, children are in the golden age phase, where they have a high absorption capacity for the environment around them, so values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy and respect for other people must be introduced and accustomed to from an early age so that they become part of their life habits. Because in these early years humans develop the beginnings of what will become a moral identity, which is called in childhood the *"moral self."* (Wilke & Baker, 2025).

The need for moral education is very important to avoid moral degradation for students. According to Dewi (Dewi et al., 2022) Children's moral decline occurs due to a lack of attention from parents, a lack of affection, a lack of understanding about religion, the presence of bad influences in the surrounding environment, and interactions with peers that do not conform to social norms. Elementary school students with negative behavior problems are at risk of experiencing low school performance and facing negative consequences that can continue into adulthood (Hendrickx et al., 2022). One form of negative behavior can appear in the form of aggression, impulsive behavior, or antisocial actions, which are usually influenced by a less conducive environment, lack of moral guidance, or certain psychological factors. For example, children who are not used to being taught how to manage their emotions well may find it easier to express excessive anger, defy rules, or act less caring towards other people. This can trigger bullying at school. They must be able to discern whether an incident constitutes bullying, which requires them to remember whether there is intent to harm, an imbalance of power, and whether the incident is repeated. (Sjögren et al., 2024). In the Al-Quran Surah Ali Imran: 159 :

“So by mercy from Allāh, [Muḥammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allāh. Indeed, Allāh loves those who rely [upon Him]”

Social literacy and out-of-class education play an important role in building students awareness, empathy and social skills in interacting with the surrounding environment by referring to the individual's ability to understand social norms, communicate well and build healthy and harmonious relationships with other people. By equipping students with an understanding of tolerance, diversity, and the importance of respecting differences, they will be better able to adapt to social life without feeling the need to intimidate or act aggressively towards their peers.



Figure 5. Outing Class ICC Muar Johor

Social literacy is an important skill for every child enrolled in a school education program. These social skills include students' ability to read or write and include mastery of literacy skills acquired through social interactions with other children and adults both inside and outside the formal or informal curriculum. (Alsubaie, 2022). Meanwhile, out-of-class education is an effective approach in strengthening students' social and moral values by providing more contextual and applicable learning experiences. Through activities such as working together in groups, educational games, outbound, and social projects, students can develop skills in resolving conflicts in a healthy manner, build self-confidence, and understand the importance of solidarity and mutual respect. The characteristics of elementary school students who prefer outdoor learning activities are certainly effective if the outdoor learning environment is conditioned (Saptono et al., 2021).

The moral education implemented at ICC Muar is a fundamental step in forming students' character and personality based on Islamic values and good social norms. As an Indonesian educational institution that focuses on religious learning and moral formation, ICC Muar has a big responsibility in ensuring that every student not only acquires knowledge, but also has a high moral awareness in everyday life.

5. CONCLUSION

Islamic education learning strategies at ICC Muar have a significant role in shaping student morals. By implementing learning methods based on Islamic values, ICC Muar is able to create an educational environment that is conducive to building a generation of Muslims with noble character, discipline and high social awareness. Some of the main strategies implemented include the example of teachers as role models, an active learning approach, the use of interactive learning media, and the integration of religious and social activities in the educational process. This strategy not only helps students understand Islamic teachings conceptually, but also encourages them to internalize and practice moral values in everyday life. It requires

a strong commitment from various parties, including teachers, parents and the school environment, to continue to strengthen learning strategies that are oriented towards moral and Islamic values.

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Research Ethics. This research has been conducted in accordance with academic research ethics standards to ensure that the entire research process is transparent, responsible, and respects the rights of all participants involved.

Data Availability Statement. The data supporting the findings of this study come from the results of interviews, observations, and documentation conducted at the Indonesian Community Center (ICC) Muar. The data have been collected and analyzed following applicable research ethics standards.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this research. All research processes, including data collection, analysis, and preparation of the article, have been carried out independently, objectively, and transparently, without any influence from external parties that could affect the results or interpretation of the research.

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