

LITERACY INITIATIVE IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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Abstract

Literacy is one of the key skills for students. Unfortunately, it was found that the students of Islahiyah Islamic boarding school had limited access to books and low reading motivation, which might inhibit the development of their literacy skills. The problem was addressed through a literacy initiative aimed at increasing the literacy skills of students at Al-Islahiyah Islamic boarding school. The programs were done through four stages, which were 1) needs analysis, 2) program planning, 3) program implementation, and 4) program evaluation. During the program implementation stage, a book donation was made to complete the boarding school's book collection. Then, there was a reading workshop, in which the students were introduced to various genres of text and discussed the summaries of the books by using the Jigsaw method. Then, the program continued with the formation of a reading club. The reading club was held twice a week in the library during study time. This literacy initiative was successful in fostering reading motivation and developing a reading habit at the boarding school. In the future, it is expected that the program will continue to strive to enhance the literacy skills of the students.

Keywords: jigsaw, literacy, reading, reading club

INTRODUCTION

The definition of literacy has expanded beyond reading and writing skills to answer the ongoing development of science and knowledge throughout history (Rintaningrum, 2009), as it now also addresses other fields such as financial and digital literacy. Nonetheless, the core of literacy remains rooted in reading ability (UNESCO, 2025) as one of the basic life skills. In literacy, a reading skill requires more than the ability to decode a written text but emphasizes the ability to comprehend the content of the text. In other words, the level of literacy can be reflected and improved through a textual understanding that is developed through an appropriate process and assessment (Mustopa et al., 2024). To enhance reading comprehension and develop sufficient literacy skills, adequate exposure to texts is

necessary (Rahmah & Mistar, 2023). Therefore, providing easy access to various books becomes vital. Moreover, literacy is also closely related to intrinsic motivation. The level of reading motivation positively correlated with the ability to engage with the text and the advancement of reading skills (Frankel et al., 2016). The motivation can be promoted through the reading habit in their environment, such as at home and in school. Familiarity with books and reading activities can be shaped through bedtime story sessions (Novela et al., 2022) or dedicated reading time at school (Arıcı, 2020).

An Islamic boarding school functions as more than a place of study. It serves as a second home for students during their studies. In the context of literacy, the Islamic boarding school must function as a supportive environment to enhance students' literacy skills, because reading is a core teaching in Islam. Islam begins with the command to read, or "Iqra" in the Arabic language, as stated in the Qur'an in Surah Al-Alaq. In the interpretation of Surah Al-Alaq, reading refers to the process of thinking, and it opens the way to learning ('Afiifah & Yahya, 2020). 'Afiifah and Yahya (2020) further stated that the verses in Al-Alaq are not only limited to reading and learning the religion, but also science and knowledge that are beneficial for human life.

The students in an Islamic boarding school intensively study the Qur'an and Hadith as the primary sources of Islamic teachings, which are supplemented by the Yellow Book (known as Kitab Kuning). Understanding these primary scriptures indicates the vital role of students' literacy (Maskur, 2019). Nowadays, students in Islamic boarding schools also study general subjects, which require them to read a wide variety of books. Therefore, an Islamic boarding school ideally also supports its students' literacy skills in general knowledge by providing a diverse range of books in the library. The institution's library must provide a collection of non-fiction and fiction books that align with topics accepted in Islamic teaching. It can be a place where the students read in their free time or when they work on their assignments. The library can serve as a medium to enhance the habit and motivation to read, which will, in turn, further improve literacy skills.

Al-Ishlahiyah Islamic boarding school is located in Malang regency, East Java, Indonesia. This boarding school was selected as the location for the community service program of Universitas Islam Raden Rahmat Malang, known as Kuliah Kerja Nyata Tematik (KKN-T), in 2025. Kuliah Kerja Nyata is a university program that enables students to engage in community service, contributing their academic knowledge to local development. The students invite the lecturers as experts to support their program. In this program, lecturers and students collaborated on a literacy initiative for the students of Al-Ishlahiyah Islamic boarding school. The literacy initiative consisted of book donations, a reading workshop, and a reading club. The program aimed to enhance literacy skills by

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

The literacy initiative was developed based on the problems identified in the location of the community service program at Al-Islahiyah Islamic boarding school. The head of Al-Islahiyah Islamic boarding school expressed concern about students' literacy skills, particularly their interest in reading. Alongside the obligation to learn various Islamic scriptures, the students seemed to have less enthusiasm for reading. The head of Al-Islahiyah Islamic boarding school expected that the students would be able to balance their religious and general knowledge. The UNIRA Malang team developed a program to help students enhance their reading interest, thereby improving their literacy skills.

Additionally, it was discovered that the library was not in ideal condition. The library had no books displayed because they were stored in the storage room and had not been arranged adequately after the renovation. The books were outdated and featured only a limited range of genres. The students stated that although they were allowed to bring some books from home, they still lacked access to a sufficient number of books. They expect that the boarding school can facilitate their reading, one of which is by having a well-stocked library.

These problems required a series of solutions. First, the team focused on book access by opening the book donation process to add book collections to the library. After the students had an ample collection of books, they were provided with several activities. The activity began with a reading workshop, followed by a reading club. The one-day workshop aimed to improve their understanding of reading, various types of books, and the objectives of reading. Then, the knowledge from the workshop was practiced and strengthened through the reading club. It is designed to have a regular schedule twice a week. Lecturers and students of UNIRA Malang conducted these programs during the community service program period. After the community service program ends, the reading club program is managed under the board of PP Al-Islahiyah.

METHOD

In addressing the problem, the team followed several steps, namely: 1) needs analysis, 2) program planning, 3) program implementation, and 4) program evaluation (Rahmawati, 2018) the procedure aimed to ensure that the proper solution was implemented to overcome the existing problems. The data for the needs analysis were collected through interviews with the head, teachers, caretakers, and students of Al-Islahiyah Islamic boarding school. The summaries of the interviews were analyzed and compiled into a list of programs to be implemented. In Program planning for the literacy initiative involved several

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activities, including book donations, workshops, and the formation of a reading club. These programs were implemented during a one-month community service by the UNIRA Malang team. The team evaluated the programs through observations and interviews. The observations were carefully documented to portray the progress and drawbacks during the program. At the final stage, the evaluation of the program was reported to the head of Al-Ishlahiyah Islamic boarding school, who then handed it over to the school's management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the problem analysis, three programs were designed to improve their literacy skills. The programs included a book donation, a reading workshop, and a reading club.

Book Donation

The objective of a book donation was to provide a sufficient book collection for the students in the boarding school. The team observed that the library was not correctly set up; the books were not displayed properly, and the room was not arranged comfortably. The book donation drive was held during the community service program, accepting new or secondhand books. The genres of the book are varied, from religion, science, fiction, and non-fiction. The book must pass the selection of the boarding school management to avoid inappropriate content.

A total of 29 books were obtained from the donation, encompassing various genres, including Islamic novels, science, geography, Islamic studies, and finance. All the donated books were given labels and then combined with the library's previous book collection. The team of UNIRA Malang students organized the books in the library, enabling library visitors to easily locate the books they wanted. Besides, the library can be a comfortable place for students to study or read during their free time.

Reading Workshop

The workshop aimed to develop a foundation of reading interest in students of Al-Ishlahiyah Islamic boarding school. The workshop was conducted on January 28, 2025, from 7.30 a.m. to 12 p.m. in the hall of the boarding school. It was attended by around 80 students from the Junior High School and Senior High School levels. The activity in the workshop was divided into several sessions, namely: 1) the speakers' presentation, 2) students' reading activity in the expert group, 3) students' discussion in the jigsaw/ home group, and 4) presentation of the concept map.

To begin with, the students were given some questions to check on their current reading activities. From the survey, it was evident that most respondents showed an interest in reading novels or short stories; however, they lacked access

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to these books in the boarding school. This problem had been recognized and solved by opening a book donation. Then, the speaker emphasized the importance of reading for the students. They were given some tips to increase their reading habit that can be easily applied in their boarding school routines.

After a brief discussion, the students were divided into groups to participate in Jigsaw reading activities. Jigsaw reading activities are used to enhance students' reading skills through cooperative learning. In Jigsaw activities, students act as active participants to collaborate in some work groups (Dewi et al., 2024). Jigsaw is not only efficient in terms of time needed, but also offers some benefits, such as giving equal responsibility for every group member and more opportunities for a passive student to participate in the group activity (Al-Owaidi, 2024)



Figure 1. Reading Workshop

All participants were divided into 10 jigsaw groups, also known as home groups. In one group, each member was given a different text to read to the other members. In this activity, the speaker provides eight texts written in the Indonesian language, which include types of recount, narrative, and biography texts. Then, the students gathered with other students from other groups who had the same texts; this group was called the expert group. In the expert group, the students read and discussed the text together, focusing on the content and moral of the story. After the discussion, the students returned to their home groups or jigsaw groups. In the jigsaw groups, the students retold the content of the story they had read in the expert group. This way, the students were informed about various texts in a short amount of time. After the the sharing session in jigsaw groups was finished, and they were asked to create a concept map. The concept map contained the summary of all the stories they provided in the workshop. At the end of the session, the students presented the concept map to the audience. After the sharing session in jigsaw groups was finished, they were asked to create a concept map. The concept map contained the summary of all the stories they provided in the workshop. At the end of the session, the students presented the concept map in front of the audience.

Reading many texts in a short amount of time may not be engaging for students with low reading interest. In the workshop, the students were given

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different texts to share, exposing them to various types of texts within the given time. Reviewing the book's content can enhance students' reading interest (Septiani et al., 2016). This is also to demonstrate that reading texts or books encompasses various genres, allowing readers to start building their reading habit by choosing the genres they enjoy.

The students showed positive responses to the workshop. They were actively engaged in the group work, especially when they were given books to read and took turns telling stories to their groupmates. Additionally, enthusiasm was evident when they created a concept map. They asked permission to bring some coloring pencils and markers from their room to make the concept map more interesting.

Reading Club

The reading club was formed to facilitate the students' exploration of various books. It was also intended to build a reading habit in the students. The goal of the reading club activity was to finish at least one book in each period. This first period, as well as the beginning of the reading club activity, was held from January 29 to February 23. The reading club activity was done regularly on Wednesday and Friday from 7.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. The reading club is held simultaneously with an independent learning session provided by the boarding school, which takes place outside the time allocated for religious activities.

The participants in the reading club, however, were unable to cover all the students from the previous workshop. In each session, only 20 to 30 students could join the activity because they had different schedules. The reading club activity took place in the study room and the library. In the reading club, the UNIRA Malang students assisted in selecting books and served as discussion partners. In the final reading club session, a competition was held for the students. The students made a concept map of a book they had read. They presented the concept map in the final meeting to their friends and UNIRA Malang students. From the presentation, it can be inferred that the students were enthusiastic about the reading club activity. It opened students' eyes to a variety of book genres.



Figure 2. Reading Club Activities at the Library

From observations of the activities and interviews with the students, the availability of various book genres appears to foster positive attitudes among the students. They could understand the book they had read and were able to retell its content. They also showed interest in books available in the library, including those on geography, history, modern Islamic studies, and Islamic novels. By being exposed to and aware of various genres, the students' curiosity and interest in reading were enhanced, allowing them to explore more books.

The Result of Literacy Initiative

At the end of the literacy initiative, the UNIRA Malang team evaluated the program. This literacy initiative laid the foundation for reading habits in the students. The results of the literacy initiative, which include book donations, reading workshops, and reading clubs, align with the program's goal of motivating students and increasing their reading habits to strengthen their literacy skills. The motivation was instilled through a good reading atmosphere, which was created by strengthening their background knowledge of reading through a workshop and facilitated by books from the book donation and the reading club.

Based on interviews with several students, they expressed happiness and gratitude for access to books and guidance in the workshop and reading clubs. They are more motivated to spend time reading. Although there is no specific assessment to measure students' reading skills, observations during the reading club showed that some students demonstrated better reading comprehension. This finding aligns with the research of Andreani et al. (2021), which demonstrates a positive correlation between exposure to various genres of text and reading habits and reading comprehension. Furthermore, high reading comprehension reflects high literacy skills of the students (Lustyantie & Aprilia, 2020).

The program received a good response from the management of Al-Islahiyah Islamic boarding school. The program was considered successful in enhancing students' reading interest and habits. For the continuation of the literacy initiative, some caregivers were involved to see directly how the programs are managed. It is expected that the programs will be implemented after the community service ends.

CONCLUSIONS

The literacy initiative in Al-Ishlahiyah Islamic boarding school successfully gives a foundation of literacy skills. It also provided the students with the facility and experience to read a wide range of book collections. However, there are some limitations to this program, such as the limited time allocated for community service, the lack of teacher involvement due to busy schedules, and further improvements needed for the reading club. After this program, it is expected that the boarding school can continue and develop the program by providing more books

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for the students, making the reading club an extracurricular program with an appointed teacher as supervisor, and conducting more events such as seminars, workshops, or library visits as efforts to strengthen the students' literacy skills.

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