

Strengthening Islamic Values and Indonesian Cultural Identity among Migrant Children through Non-Formal Education in Gombak Sungai 5, Malaysia

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Article history

Submitted: 2026/07/01; Revised: 2026/08/01; Accepted: 2026/08/23

Abstract

This community engagement program aims to strengthen Islamic values and Indonesian cultural identity among Indonesian migrant children participating in non-formal education in Gombak Sungai 5, Malaysia. Living within a multicultural environment may create challenges for children in maintaining religious values, cultural awareness, and a sense of Indonesian identity. The program was designed as an educational and mentoring initiative integrating Islamic learning, Indonesian cultural activities, storytelling, religious practices, and interactive group discussions. A participatory approach was employed by involving children, volunteer educators, and community members throughout the implementation process. Activities were conducted through contextual learning that connected Islamic teachings with children's daily experiences in a multicultural society. The program focused on developing religious understanding, positive character, cultural appreciation, and confidence in expressing Indonesian identity. The results indicated increased children's participation in religious and cultural learning activities, improved understanding of Islamic values, and stronger awareness of Indonesian cultural heritage. The program demonstrates that non-formal education can provide an important space for sustaining religious and cultural identity among Indonesian migrant children while encouraging positive adaptation within Malaysia's multicultural social environment.

Keywords

Islamic Values, Indonesian Identity, Migrant Children, Non-Formal Education, Multiculturalism, Malaysia



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INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential instrument for developing children's intellectual, moral, social, and cultural capacities. For children of Indonesian migrant workers living in Malaysia, education has an additional function because it provides a space for maintaining religious and cultural identity while adapting to a multicultural

social environment. Limited access to formal education experienced by some migrant children makes non-formal educational institutions particularly important in providing continuous learning opportunities. Previous studies have shown that non-formal education through Sanggar Bimbingan can serve as an alternative educational space for Indonesian migrant children who face administrative, socioeconomic, and structural barriers to formal schooling.

The situation creates a particular educational challenge in maintaining children's connection with Indonesian cultural identity and Islamic values. Children who grow up outside Indonesia interact intensively with different languages, cultural practices, social norms, and educational environments. This multicultural experience is not necessarily a problem; rather, it can become an opportunity to develop children who are open, adaptive, and capable of interacting positively with people from different backgrounds. Nevertheless, without adequate educational support, children's understanding of their cultural and religious identity may become increasingly distant from the values inherited from their families and communities. Therefore, non-formal education needs to provide learning experiences that are not merely oriented toward academic skills but also strengthen religious character and cultural awareness.

The context of Gombak is particularly relevant for such an initiative. Previous community engagement activities involving Indonesian migrant children in Gombak have demonstrated the importance of character education and cultural learning in strengthening children's sense of identity and nationalism. Educational activities based on Pancasila values, Indonesian culture, and literacy have been implemented as efforts to address the educational needs of Indonesian migrant children in the area. More recent studies have also highlighted the importance of multilingual literacy and cultural identity reinforcement within Sanggar Bimbingan in the Gombak area. These findings indicate that non-formal education can function as a strategic community space for strengthening children's educational access as well as their social and cultural identity.

Islamic values constitute another important dimension of education for Indonesian migrant children, particularly because religious identity can provide a moral foundation for children's behavior and social interaction. Islamic education is not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge but also involves the development of attitudes and habits such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect, compassion, and mutual assistance. Recent research conducted at the Sungai Mulia 5 Gombak Learning Center found that Islamic values can be internalized

through the integration of learning activities, daily worship practices, and character-building activities. The process encourages the development of discipline, honesty, and responsibility among migrant children. This finding provides an important basis for designing community engagement activities that translate Islamic values into practical and enjoyable learning experiences.

The preservation of Indonesian identity should also be approached through contextual and participatory activities. Children need opportunities to learn Indonesian language, traditional stories, national symbols, local cultural expressions, traditional games, and values of mutual cooperation. Such activities can be integrated with Islamic learning so that religious and cultural identity are not treated as separate domains. Creative activities, storytelling, group discussions, religious practices, and cultural performances can provide children with opportunities to express their identity while simultaneously developing confidence and social skills. Previous research on creative activities based on Pancasila values has similarly emphasized the potential of non-formal learning environments to strengthen Indonesian national identity among children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia.

Based on this context, the community engagement program is designed to strengthen Islamic values and Indonesian cultural identity among Indonesian migrant children through non-formal education at the Sungai Mulia 5 Gombak Learning Center, Malaysia. The program combines Islamic character education, Indonesian cultural learning, interactive literacy activities, storytelling, religious habituation, and creative group activities. The approach emphasizes active participation rather than one-way instruction, allowing children to learn through direct experience and interaction. The program is expected to strengthen children's understanding of Islamic values, increase their appreciation of Indonesian cultural heritage, and develop positive attitudes toward living within a multicultural society.

This community engagement initiative is important because identity preservation should not be understood as an effort to isolate migrant children from their surrounding environment. Instead, it should help children develop a balanced identity that enables them to maintain their religious and cultural roots while interacting respectfully and constructively within Malaysian society. Through sustainable non-formal education, the Sanggar Bimbingan can become not only a place for academic assistance but also a supportive community space for character formation, religious development, cultural preservation, and the strengthening of children's confidence as part of the Indonesian diaspora.

METHODS

This community engagement program was conducted through a participatory non-formal education approach at the Sungai Mulia 5 Learning Center in Gombak, Malaysia. The program involved Indonesian migrant children who participated in non-formal educational activities at the learning center, with support from volunteer teachers, community representatives, and the community engagement team. The approach was designed to position children as active participants in the learning process rather than merely recipients of educational materials. The activities focused on strengthening Islamic values, Indonesian cultural identity, positive character, and children's ability to interact constructively within a multicultural environment.

The implementation consisted of four main stages: initial identification, program preparation, implementation, and evaluation and follow-up. The first stage involved identifying the educational needs and characteristics of the participating children. The team communicated with learning-center coordinators and educators to understand children's learning conditions, religious knowledge, cultural awareness, language abilities, and participation patterns. Informal observations and discussions were used to identify issues that could be addressed through the program. This stage also helped the team determine learning materials and activities appropriate to the children's ages and educational backgrounds.

The second stage involved preparing learning materials and activity designs. Islamic values were translated into practical themes that could be understood through children's daily experiences, including honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect, cooperation, cleanliness, and compassion. Indonesian cultural materials included national identity, traditional stories, Indonesian language, traditional games, local cultural expressions, and the values of mutual cooperation. The materials were designed using interactive methods to avoid conventional one-way instruction. Storytelling, games, group discussions, demonstrations, role-playing, songs, quizzes, and creative activities were incorporated into the learning process.

The third stage was the implementation of the community engagement activities. Learning sessions were conducted through a combination of short explanations, interactive activities, and direct practice. Islamic values were introduced through stories and examples from everyday life, followed by discussions that encouraged children to relate the values to their behavior at home, at the learning center, and within the wider community. Religious habituation was incorporated through activities such as prayer preparation, simple religious practices, and reflection on moral behavior. Indonesian cultural identity was

strengthened through storytelling, cultural games, Indonesian-language activities, and creative tasks that encouraged children to express their understanding of Indonesian heritage.

The fourth stage involved evaluation and follow-up. Evaluation was conducted through observation of children's participation, responses during discussions, performance in practical activities, and changes in their ability to explain Islamic and cultural values. Short reflective conversations were also conducted with educators to obtain feedback regarding children's engagement and learning progress. The evaluation was not intended as a formal academic assessment but as a means of determining whether the program had achieved its community engagement objectives.

The data and observations obtained during the program were analyzed descriptively. Changes in participation, understanding, confidence, and interaction were documented and discussed by the engagement team and educators. The results were used to identify strengths and limitations of the program and to formulate recommendations for future activities. Follow-up was directed toward encouraging educators and community members to continue integrating Islamic character formation and Indonesian cultural activities into regular non-formal learning. Through this approach, the program was expected to contribute not only to short-term learning outcomes but also to the sustainable strengthening of religious and cultural identity among Indonesian migrant children in Gombak.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The community engagement program at the Sungai Mulia 5 Learning Center in Gombak, Malaysia, was implemented as a non-formal educational initiative focusing on strengthening Islamic values and Indonesian cultural identity among Indonesian migrant children. The activities combined religious learning, character formation, cultural education, literacy, storytelling, games, group discussions, and practical activities. The program was designed in response to the need for educational spaces that could support children's development while maintaining their connection with religious and cultural values. The results indicate that the participatory approach created a learning environment in which children were more actively involved in discussing, practicing, and expressing their understanding of Islamic and Indonesian values.

Increased Understanding of Islamic Values

One of the main outcomes of the program was the development of children's understanding of basic Islamic values. Before the activities were conducted, some children were able to mention religious concepts but experienced difficulties in connecting those concepts with everyday behavior. The learning activities therefore emphasized practical

examples rather than relying solely on theoretical explanations. The values introduced included honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect, cooperation, cleanliness, compassion, and mutual assistance. These values were presented through stories, questions, role-playing, and situations commonly encountered by children. For example, honesty was discussed through simple situations involving schoolwork, friendships, and returning objects that did not belong to them. Discipline was connected with punctuality, completing assignments, maintaining cleanliness, and following agreed rules at the learning center.

The use of contextual examples made Islamic learning more accessible. Children were encouraged to explain what they would do when facing particular situations. This process allowed educators to identify children's existing understanding while giving participants opportunities to correct misconceptions. The discussion also demonstrated that Islamic values were easier for children to understand when they were connected with actual behavior. The finding is consistent with the understanding that Islamic education should not be limited to cognitive knowledge but should contribute to the formation of attitudes and habits. Islamic values become meaningful when children are given opportunities to practice them in daily life. Within a non-formal educational environment, this process can take place through repeated habituation, positive examples, and interpersonal interaction.

Strengthening Religious Habituation

The program also demonstrated the importance of habituation in developing children's religious character. Religious values were not introduced exclusively through formal explanations but were incorporated into the routine of learning activities. Children were encouraged to begin activities with prayer, maintain cleanliness, show respect to educators and peers, and participate responsibly in group activities.



Picture 1 Religious Habituation

Habituation provided a bridge between religious knowledge and actual behavior. When children repeatedly experienced the same positive practices, religious values became associated with concrete actions. For example, cleanliness was introduced not merely as a religious principle but also practiced through maintaining the learning environment. Similarly, cooperation was developed through group assignments and collective games. This approach was particularly relevant because children in migrant communities may experience different educational and social environments. A consistent non-formal learning environment can provide continuity in religious character formation. The learning center

therefore functions not only as an academic support facility but also as a social space where children develop habits and interpersonal values.

Strengthening Indonesian Cultural Identity

The second major outcome concerned the strengthening of Indonesian cultural identity. Cultural activities were introduced through Indonesian stories, traditional games, language activities, songs, national symbols, and discussions about Indonesian cultural diversity. These activities provided children with opportunities to recognize and express cultural knowledge that may not always be encountered in their everyday environment. Storytelling became an effective method for introducing cultural values. Indonesian folk stories were selected because they combine cultural elements with moral messages. After listening to the stories, children were invited to identify the characters, conflicts, moral lessons, and values contained in the narratives. The activity simultaneously supported literacy development and cultural learning.



Picture 2 Indonesian Cultural Identity

Traditional games also generated strong participation. Games provided a less formal learning environment in which children could interact with peers while learning concepts such as cooperation, fairness, discipline, and respect. The activity demonstrated that cultural preservation does not necessarily require conventional classroom instruction. Cultural knowledge can be transmitted through enjoyable and participatory experiences. Indonesian language activities also contributed to identity preservation. Children were encouraged to use Indonesian during selected learning sessions, tell stories, introduce themselves, and communicate their experiences. Language was treated as an important component of cultural identity because it provides a medium through which cultural knowledge, stories, values, and social relationships can be transmitted.

Developing Confidence and Social Participation

An important change observed during the program was increased children's willingness to participate. At the beginning of several activities, some children were relatively passive and tended to wait for instructions from educators. Interactive activities gradually encouraged them to ask questions, express opinions, perform role-playing activities, and work collaboratively.

The participatory model provided children with a sense that their experiences were valuable. Rather than positioning children solely as learners who must receive information, the program allowed them to contribute ideas and personal experiences. This was particularly important for migrant children because their identity is shaped by interactions between their family background, Indonesian cultural heritage, and the Malaysian social environment. Group activities also strengthened peer relationships. Children from different backgrounds could work together through games and collaborative assignments. The activities demonstrated that maintaining Indonesian identity does not require children to reject the multicultural environment in which they live. Instead, cultural confidence can provide a foundation for interacting with others respectfully.

The Role of Non-Formal Education

The results highlight the strategic role of non-formal education in supporting Indonesian migrant children. Formal education may be difficult to access for some migrant children because of administrative, socioeconomic, or legal circumstances. Non-formal learning centers can therefore provide an alternative educational space that responds more flexibly to community needs.



Picture 3 Non-Formal Education

The Sungai Mulia 5 Learning Center provides an environment in which educational activities can be adapted to children's conditions. The program was able to integrate academic support, religious education, cultural learning, and character development within a relatively flexible structure. This flexibility is an important characteristic of community-based education. The program also shows that non-formal education can serve as a cultural bridge. Children do not simply learn about Indonesia as a distant homeland; they experience Indonesian identity through language, stories, games, religious practices, and interaction with other Indonesian children and educators. The learning center consequently becomes a space where cultural memory can be maintained and reproduced.

Integration of Islamic and Cultural Values

A significant feature of the program was the integration of Islamic values and Indonesian cultural identity. The two dimensions were not presented as separate educational objectives. Many Indonesian cultural traditions contain values that can be connected with Islamic character, such as respect for parents, mutual assistance, politeness, responsibility, and communal solidarity.

This integration made the program more contextual. For example, the value of *gotong royong* was discussed not only as an Indonesian cultural tradition but also as an expression of cooperation and mutual assistance. Respect for parents and educators was connected with both cultural norms and Islamic teachings. Cleanliness could similarly be discussed as a cultural practice and a religious value. The integration is important because migrant children need a coherent understanding of their identity. Religious identity, cultural identity, and social identity interact with one another in everyday life. Educational programs that address these dimensions together can provide children with a stronger foundation for navigating multicultural environments.

Challenges in Program Implementation

Although the program generated positive responses, several challenges were identified. Differences in children's ages, educational backgrounds, language abilities, and levels of religious understanding required educators to adjust teaching strategies. Activities that were easily understood by older children sometimes required modification for younger participants.

Limited learning resources also presented challenges. Cultural learning would benefit from more books, visual materials, educational games, and digital resources. The sustainability of activities also depends on the availability of volunteer educators and community support. Another challenge concerns continuity. A short-term community engagement program can introduce knowledge and experiences, but identity formation requires repeated exposure and long-term practice. The results therefore suggest that Islamic character education and Indonesian cultural activities should be incorporated into the regular learning program rather than treated as occasional activities.

Sustainability and Community Implications

The program has implications beyond the immediate learning outcomes. Strengthening children's Islamic and Indonesian identity can contribute to the development of migrant communities that remain socially connected while adapting positively to their host environment. Children who understand their cultural and religious background may develop greater confidence when interacting with people from different cultural groups. Sustainability can be strengthened by involving local educators and community members in the development of learning materials. Simple activity modules can be prepared for storytelling, religious habituation, cultural games, Indonesian literacy, and character education. Educators can subsequently use these materials independently after the community engagement team completes its activities.

The involvement of parents is also important. Values introduced at the learning center will be more effective when reinforced at home. Parents can be encouraged to practice Indonesian language, religious routines, cultural storytelling, and positive character formation within the family. Collaboration between educators, parents, and community organizations can create a broader educational ecosystem. Overall, the program demonstrates that non-formal education has significant potential to strengthen Islamic values and Indonesian cultural identity among migrant children in Gombak. The combination of contextual Islamic learning, cultural activities, participatory methods, and habituation created an educational experience that was relevant to children's social realities. The program also reinforced the idea that identity preservation is not contrary to multicultural adaptation. Rather, children who have a strong understanding of their religious and cultural roots can develop the confidence to participate constructively in a diverse society.

CONCLUSION

The community engagement program at the Sungai Mulia 5 Learning Center in Gombak, Malaysia, demonstrates that non-formal education can play an important role in strengthening Islamic values and Indonesian cultural identity among Indonesian migrant children. The integration of religious learning, cultural activities, literacy, storytelling, traditional games, character education, and habituation created a learning environment that was relevant to the children's social and cultural circumstances.

The program contributed to children's understanding of Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect, cooperation, cleanliness, and compassion. These values were not only introduced through explanations but also practiced through daily learning activities and group interaction. The program also strengthened children's awareness of Indonesian cultural identity through Indonesian language activities, traditional stories, cultural games, national symbols, and discussions about Indonesian cultural heritage. The participatory approach encouraged children to become more actively involved in learning. Their participation in discussions, role-playing, storytelling, and group activities provided opportunities to express ideas, develop confidence, and interact positively with peers. The activities also demonstrated that cultural identity preservation can be integrated with adaptation to a multicultural environment rather than being positioned in opposition to it.

The sustainability of the program requires continued collaboration among learning-center educators, parents, community organizations, and other stakeholders. Islamic character formation and Indonesian cultural education should

be incorporated into regular non-formal learning activities so that the values introduced through the program can be reinforced continuously. Future community engagement programs may also expand the use of digital learning resources, cultural learning modules, and family-based activities. Overall, the program confirms that non-formal education can function not only as an alternative learning space for Indonesian migrant children but also as a community-based environment for religious development, cultural preservation, character formation, and identity strengthening. Strengthening children's religious and cultural foundations can support their confidence and ability to participate positively in the multicultural social environment in Malaysia.

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