



Transforming the Values of Moral Habituation in *Akhlakul Banin*: A Community Engagement Program in Aek Hitetoras Village

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Abstract

Religious education does not always translate into the development of ethical conduct in children's everyday lives. The gap between knowledge of moral values and their behavioral application has emerged as a concern among children in Aek Hitetoras Village, Sei Merbau District, North Labuhanbatu Regency. This community engagement program aimed to implement the values of *Akhlakul Banin* through learning, practical activities, and habituation to strengthen children's character. The program employed the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. The results indicate that the values presented in *Akhlakul Banin* could be integrated into children's daily behaviors, including greeting others, asking permission before leaving home, speaking respectfully to parents and teachers, apologizing, expressing gratitude, and maintaining appropriate conduct in social interactions. The involvement of parents and religious teachers further reinforced the habituation process beyond the community engagement activities. As a partner village for ongoing community development, program sustainability is supported through the continued use of instructional modules by religious teachers, independent mentoring, periodic behavioral monitoring, and strengthened family involvement to ensure the sustained internalization of moral values.

Keywords: *Akhlakul Banin; Moral Habituation; Children; Community Engagement.*

Abstrak: Pendidikan keagamaan anak tidak selalu berbanding lurus dengan terbentuknya perilaku adab dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Kesenjangan antara pengetahuan tentang nilai moral dan praktik perilaku menjadi persoalan yang ditemukan pada anak di Desa Aek Hitetoras, Kecamatan Sei Merbau, Kabupaten Labuhan Batu Utara. Kegiatan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat (Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat) ini bertujuan mengimplementasikan nilai-nilai *Kitab Akhlakul Banin* melalui pembelajaran, praktik, dan pembiasaan sebagai upaya memperkuat karakter anak. Kegiatan dilaksanakan dengan metode *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD). Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa materi *Akhlakul Banin* dibiasakan dengan perilaku sehari-hari, seperti mengucapkan salam, berpamitan, berbicara santun kepada orang tua dan guru, meminta maaf, mengucapkan terima kasih, serta menjaga etika dalam pergaulan. Keterlibatan orang tua dan guru pengaji juga memperkuat proses pembiasaan di luar kegiatan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat. Sebagai desa mitra binaan keberlanjutan program diarahkan melalui penggunaan modul oleh guru pengaji, pendampingan mandiri, pemantauan perilaku secara berkala, dan penguatan keterlibatan keluarga agar internalisasi nilai dapat berlangsung secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Akhlakul Banin; Pendidikan Karakter; Anak; Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat.*

INTRODUCTION

Children's character development cannot be understood merely as a process of transmitting knowledge about moral values, since religious knowledge does not necessarily translate into children's ability to enact such values in their everyday behavior (Berkowitz & Grych, 2000). Character formation has become increasingly complex amid changing patterns of children's social interaction shaped by modernization and digitalization (Mahmuddah & Junaidi, 2025). Exposure to technology, changing patterns of family communication, and shifts in social authority may influence how children understand respect, responsibility, empathy, and civility (Arahman & Pratikno, 2022).

Rasyid et al. (2024) demonstrate that character education plays an important role in developing children's moral qualities, while social environments that provide limited support for value habituation may weaken the process of internalization (Mardianto et al., 2024). The challenge lies in the tendency of character education to remain focused on the transmission of normative principles, even though behavioral development requires a longer process involving modeling, experience, repetition, and habituation (Pujianti, 2024). Thus, the central problem in children's character development is not simply the absence of moral instruction, but the gap between values that children know, values that they understand and accept, and values that they enact in everyday situations (Purba et al., 2026). This problem calls for a shift in moral education from knowledge transmission toward pedagogical processes that enable children to connect religious teachings with concrete experiences in their daily lives.

Within this context, *Akhlakul Banin*, a classical Islamic text by Shaykh Umar bin Ahmad Baradja, was employed as a pedagogical resource for the internalization of moral values within the community. The text presents moral guidance through forms of conduct closely related to children's everyday relationships, including reverence toward God and the Prophet, respect for parents, proper conduct toward teachers, relationships with peers, and appropriate behavior within the broader social environment (Baraja, 1953). Its relatively simple language and accessible presentation make its moral teachings amenable to translation into behavioral examples that children can readily recognize and understand (Nurfasihah et al., 2025). However, the pedagogical potential of *Akhlakul Banin* does not lie solely in its textual content. Its values can contribute to character formation when incorporated into a learning process that allows children to understand the meaning behind forms of conduct, observe positive models, practice them, and repeat them in real-life situations (Rabbani et al., 2024; Izzah & Hidayat, 2024). This gap provides an important entry point for community engagement, particularly in strengthening character education within

children's religious learning activities in Aek Hitetoras Village, Sei Merbau District, North Labuhanbatu Regency.

At the community level, religious activities for children are already supported through TPA/TPQ programs and Qur'anic learning groups. However, moral education within these settings still requires greater emphasis on habituation and practical application. Children receive religious instruction, yet the internalization of these values is not always reflected in their communication patterns, respect toward parents and teachers, or interactions with peers. This condition illustrates a gap between the availability of religious instruction and the actualization of moral conduct. This gap constitutes a substantive concern for the community engagement program, because the success of moral education should not be measured solely by children's ability to recall or explain moral values, but also by their ability to incorporate those values into habitual patterns of behavior. Accordingly, the community's need extends beyond additional religious instruction toward a mentoring model that connects textual teachings, understanding, practical application, and habituation.

In response to this problem, the community engagement program was designed to implement the values of *Akhlakul Banin* through an educational and participatory approach combining instructional sessions, inspirational storytelling, dialogue, simulation, positive modeling, and practical exercises in everyday moral conduct. This strategy was adopted because character formation requires learning experiences that enable children to establish meaningful connections between moral norms and actual behavior. Children were therefore not merely encouraged to understand that respecting parents, teachers, and peers constitutes an essential component of Islamic morality, but were also guided to identify appropriate forms of conduct, practice them, and apply them within their homes, schools, and broader communities. Accordingly, *Akhlakul Banin* was positioned not merely as a religious text, but as a source of moral values that could be pedagogically translated into concrete practices for children's character development.

METHOD

This community engagement program was conducted in Aek Hitetoras Village, Sei Merbau District, North Labuhanbatu Regency, with 35 elementary school-aged children (7–12 years old) as the primary beneficiaries. The program was implemented over a two-month period using a participatory approach based on the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, which emphasizes the identification and mobilization of existing community assets rather than focusing solely on community needs or limitations (Harrison et al., 2019). In this program, local religious resources, including TPA/TPQ facilities, Qur'anic teachers, parents, and community

religious leaders, were positioned as key assets supporting the implementation and continuity of character education.

The implementation consisted of four interconnected stages: (1) community condition assessment, (2) delivery of *Akhlakul Banin* learning materials, (3) mentoring and habituation, and (4) evaluation and sustainability strengthening. The initial assessment was conducted through field observation and interviews with Qur'anic teachers, parents, and community leaders to identify children's initial understanding of daily etiquette and the behavioral issues requiring attention. Based on these findings, relevant values from *Akhlakul Banin* were selected and adapted into learning materials appropriate to the children's age and social context.

The second stage involved interactive learning sessions focusing on manners toward God and the Prophet, parents, teachers, and peers. Learning activities combined storytelling, visual media, group discussions, dialogue, and demonstrations to connect the values contained in *Akhlakul Banin* with situations encountered in children's daily lives. The third stage focused on practical mentoring and habituation. Children were guided to practice specific behaviors, including greeting others, asking permission, speaking respectfully, apologizing, expressing gratitude, and maintaining appropriate conduct in social interactions. The habituation process followed a cycle of modeling, practice, observation, feedback, and repetition to strengthen the transition from moral knowledge to habitual behavior.

The final stage involved evaluating behavioral changes and establishing mechanisms for program continuity. Evaluation was conducted through observations and in-depth communication with parents, Qur'anic teachers, and community leaders to identify changes in children's daily conduct. Parents and Qur'anic teachers were subsequently involved as local facilitators who could reinforce habituation beyond the formal program sessions. Learning modules based on *Akhlakul Banin* were also provided to local Qur'anic teachers to support continued mentoring after the completion of the community engagement program. Through this approach, the program sought not only to strengthen children's understanding of Islamic moral values but also to develop a locally supported process of internalization through practice, habituation, and sustained community involvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community Condition Assessment

The community condition assessment was conducted to obtain an empirical overview of the initial state of children's character education and to identify the needs of the community as the basis for designing the intervention. The community engagement team conducted field surveys, observed children's behavior, and interviewed community leaders, Qur'anic teachers, and parents. The assessment focused on children's understanding

of everyday etiquette, patterns of habituation within the family and religious learning environment, and behavioral patterns indicating a gap between religious knowledge and the practice of moral conduct. This stage was important because community engagement interventions need to be grounded in the actual needs of the community rather than solely on the team's assumptions regarding the problems faced by the partner community (Afandi et al., 2022). Based on the findings of this assessment, the team developed concise learning modules and interactive instructional materials that adapted the values of *Akhlakul Banin* to the characteristics and needs of the children.

The observations indicated that the religious education environment for children in Aek Hitetoras Village already had considerable social capital through the presence of TPA/TPQ programs, children's religious study groups, and the involvement of Qur'anic teachers and parents. This condition indicates that the primary challenge was not a lack of access to religious education, but rather how previously introduced values could be transformed from knowledge into habitual behavior. This finding is significant because character education does not end with children's ability to distinguish between right and wrong; it requires repetition, modeling, experience, and habituation for values to become integrated into everyday conduct. Learning processes that rely predominantly on verbal and one-way instruction have limitations when children are not provided with sufficient opportunities to practice values in concrete situations (Subchi et al., 2022). Accordingly, the community condition assessment identified a need to strengthen the practical dimension of children's moral education.

This issue was evident in the daily lives of children in Aek Hitetoras Village, Sei Merbau District, North Labuhanbatu Regency. Religious activities were already in place, yet structured character mentoring had not been fully integrated into the learning process. Children's leisure time was largely spent in outdoor activities and interactions within their surroundings, which were not always accompanied by consistent reinforcement of moral habits. In religious learning sessions, instruction also tended to emphasize the transmission of knowledge, leaving limited opportunities for children to simulate and practice behaviors such as respecting parents, honoring teachers, using appropriate language, and maintaining positive relationships with peers. This condition indicated a specific area for intervention, namely connecting moral instruction with behavioral experiences that are closely related to children's everyday lives.

Based on these conditions, the community engagement team designed an intervention that focused not only on the delivery of instructional content but also on the internalization of values through education, practice, and habituation. *Akhlakul Banin* was selected as the primary source because its content directly addresses children's moral conduct in various interpersonal

relationships, allowing its values to be translated into concrete situations (Baraja, 1953). The implementation combined motivational talks, inspirational stories, interactive discussions, simulations, and practical exercises involving moral conduct in everyday situations (Maghfiroh, 2026). This approach enabled children not only to learn moral principles but also to understand the reasoning behind particular forms of conduct, recognize how these values could be applied, and subsequently practice them in contexts familiar to their daily lives.

Delivery of *Akhlakul Banin* Learning Materials

The *Akhlakul Banin* learning materials were delivered through interactive educational sessions held three times a week. The materials were selected based on the core content of the text that is directly relevant to children's everyday lives, particularly proper conduct toward God and His Messenger, respect for parents, appropriate manners toward teachers, ethical interaction with peers, and the development of positive behavioral habits in daily life. These teachings position morality not merely as a set of rules distinguishing right from wrong, but as a framework for guiding children's relationships with God, family members, educators, and the broader social environment (Putri & Siregar, 2021). The relevance of these materials to children's everyday experiences provided the basis for selecting *Akhlakul Banin* as a source of character education, as the values introduced could be directly connected to concrete actions performed at home, in learning environments, and within the wider community (Izzah & Hidayat, 2024; Rabbani et al., 2024).



Figure 1. Implementation of the Socialization and Mentoring Activities

The material on proper conduct toward God and His Messenger was intended to foster children's awareness that moral behavior has a spiritual foundation and extends beyond social etiquette. The material concerning parents and teachers emphasized respect, appropriate obedience, courteous communication, and appreciation for those responsible for children's care and education. Meanwhile, the material on peer relationships focused on developing mutual respect, mindful communication, avoidance of harmful behavior, and concern for others. These values were subsequently translated

into situations familiar to the children so that the concept of *adab* would not remain merely a matter of normative knowledge. This process was essential for value internalization because children need to understand the connection between the teachings they learn and the behaviors they repeatedly practice in their everyday lives.

To support this process, the materials were delivered through storytelling based on inspiring Islamic narratives, visual media, question-and-answer sessions, and small-group discussions (Janah, 2026; Maghfiroh, 2026). Storytelling was used to present moral values through narratives and characters that children could readily understand (Hidhayah & Tanfidiyah, 2024), while visual media helped make situations involving appropriate conduct more concrete. Small-group discussions provided opportunities for children to share their experiences, identify moral issues encountered in their daily lives, and discuss appropriate responses based on the values being learned. Through this approach, learning was directed beyond the passive reception of information toward a process of understanding, connecting, and reflecting on moral values through children's own experiences.

The subsequent stage focused on practice and habituation as essential components of the internalization process. Children were not only asked to understand proper conduct toward parents, teachers, and peers but were also guided through concrete behavioral simulations, such as respectfully greeting and shaking hands with parents, using expressions such as "please," "I'm sorry," and "thank you," greeting teachers politely, using respectful language when interacting with peers, and arranging their footwear neatly after participating in activities at the TPA. These practices were repeated to provide children with direct and sustained experience in applying the values they had learned. This approach was based on the premise that character formation requires a process connecting moral knowledge with experience and action, allowing values to move beyond memorization and develop into habitual patterns of behavior (Mahfud & Zahriyah, 2025).

Mentoring Stage

The mentoring stage was conducted as a follow-up to the delivery of the learning materials, based on the recognition that understanding moral values does not automatically result in behavioral change. Children require repetition, positive modeling, corrective guidance, and reinforcement in real-life situations for learned values to develop into habitual behaviors. Mentoring was also necessary to bridge the gap between the learning environment at the religious study sessions and children's everyday lives. Without sustained mentoring, the practice of *adab* could remain limited to the period of the community engagement program and fail to extend into children's family environments and peer interactions. Accordingly, mentoring was designed as a reinforcement process that consistently

connected the values presented in *Akhlakul Banin* with children's actual behavior.

The mentoring process consisted of three main elements: behavioral simulation, repeated practice, and environmental reinforcement. During the simulation stage, children were shown examples of appropriate behaviors corresponding to the *adab* they had learned and were subsequently given opportunities to practice them directly. The behaviors included greeting others and asking permission, shaking hands respectfully, praying before and after activities, using courteous language, knocking before entering a room, refraining from interrupting others, and displaying respectful body language when interacting with older people (Izzah & Hidayat, 2024). These behaviors were selected because moral values are more readily internalized when translated into concrete, simple, and repeatedly practiced actions within children's everyday lives.

The community engagement team first demonstrated the appropriate behaviors, after which the children practiced them individually and in groups. During the practice sessions, the team observed the children's responses and provided immediate corrective guidance when their behavior did not correspond to the expected standards. Corrections were delivered through guidance and positive reinforcement so that children could understand why a particular behavior was appropriate rather than feel that they were being punished for making mistakes. Behaviors that had been practiced were revisited in subsequent sessions to assess consistency in their application. This mechanism positioned mentoring not merely as a form of supervision but as an iterative learning process that helped children establish connections between knowledge, action, and habituated behavior.

Mentoring was not conducted solely by the community engagement team. Parents and Qur'anic teachers were involved as agents of habituation because children spend much of their time outside the formal community engagement sessions. Qur'anic teachers monitored the application of *adab* during activities at the Qur'an Education Center (TPA/TPQ) while parents observed and reinforced its application at home. Both groups received guidance regarding the specific behaviors targeted for habituation, thereby ensuring continuity between the values introduced by the community engagement team, their practice in the religious learning environment, and their reinforcement within the family (Mardianto et al., 2024). Through this approach, the child's social environment functioned not as a set of separate contexts but as interconnected spaces that mutually reinforced the character-building process.

To sustain the process, mentoring included reinforcement of positive behaviors demonstrated by the children in their daily lives. Reinforcement took the form of verbal appreciation, opportunities for children to serve as positive role models for their peers, and reminders when previous behavioral

patterns reappeared. Islamic exemplary stories drawn from *Akhlakul Banin* were also revisited as a reflective medium when particular behaviors required improvement. This approach enabled children to receive corrective guidance through language and narratives that were familiar to their experiences without creating a sense of judgment. Accordingly, storytelling served not only as a method for delivering learning materials but also as a reflective instrument throughout the mentoring process.

Sustainability Stage

Program sustainability was designed to ensure that behavioral changes initiated during the mentoring process would continue beyond the completion of the community engagement program. This consideration is important because character development is a gradual process that requires consistency across the environments in which children live and interact. Evaluation therefore focused not only on the children's ability to recall the *Akhlakul Banin* materials but also on observable behavioral changes in their everyday lives. Accordingly, evaluation was conducted through communication and in-depth interviews with parents, Qur'anic teachers, and community leaders to obtain information regarding the children's application of *adab* at home, in religious learning settings, and in social interactions (Amini et al., 2023). The information was used to assess the extent to which values practiced during the program had begun to develop into habitual patterns of behavior.

The evaluation focused on several behavioral indicators addressed during the mentoring process, including the habits of greeting others and asking permission before leaving, speaking respectfully to parents and teachers, apologizing and expressing gratitude, and demonstrating appropriate conduct when interacting with peers. Parents and Qur'anic teachers provided information regarding behavioral changes they observed following the program. Several parents reported that children had begun to develop the habit of asking permission before leaving home and had become more mindful of their language when interacting with family members. In peer interactions, there were also reports of a reduction in rough or inappropriate behavior during play. These findings were treated as initial indications of behavioral change based on community observations and were therefore not interpreted as quantitative measures of program effectiveness.

Program sustainability was further strengthened by transferring part of the mentoring function to the social environments closest to the children. The community engagement team provided *Akhlakul Banin* learning modules to Qur'anic teachers for use in continued mentoring and established an independent mentoring group managed by local Qur'anic teachers. Parents were involved in maintaining consistent habituation practices at home, while Qur'anic teachers continued reinforcing *adab* during activities at the Qur'an

Education Center (TPA/TPQ). Community leaders contributed by providing social support for the program and helping ensure that moral education remained integrated into community activities. This distribution of roles allowed the character-building process to continue without depending entirely on the presence of the community engagement team.

This sustainability model drew upon the social capital already present in Aek Hitetoras Village, particularly the relationships among families, Qur'anic teachers, and the broader community. The involvement of these different actors was important because children's behavior develops through interactions across multiple social environments. Consequently, habituation practices introduced in religious learning settings need to be reinforced at home and within the broader social environment. In this context, *Akhlakul Banin* functioned as a shared source of moral values and reference, while the family and religious learning environments provided spaces for their practical enactment. This approach enabled the materials introduced during the community engagement program to remain available as a reference for continued habituation after the program had ended.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Akhlakul Banin*-based community engagement program in Aek Hitetoras Village demonstrates that children's character education requires an approach that connects the understanding of religious values with practical application and habituation in everyday life. The implementation of the learning materials through interactive instruction, storytelling, simulation, repeated practice, and mentoring provided opportunities for children to translate *adab* toward God and His Messenger, parents, teachers, and peers into more concrete forms of behavior, while the involvement of parents and Qur'anic teachers reinforced its application beyond the community engagement activities. The contribution of this program lies in developing a character mentoring model that draws upon local religious literacy while activating the family and Qur'an Education Center (TPA/TPQ) as sustainable spaces for moral education. Going forward, this approach should be sustained through independent mentoring by Qur'anic teachers, periodic monitoring of children's behavior, strengthened parental involvement, and the development of more contextually adapted *Akhlakul Banin* learning modules, ensuring that value internalization extends beyond the community engagement program and develops into a sustainable character education practice that can be adapted to communities with similar characteristics..

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