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INSTITUTIONALIZING ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SPACES IN URBAN COMMUNITIES: A STUDY OF THE URBAN ISLAMIC AFTER-SCHOOL LAB IN SURABAYA

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses two major challenges in urban communities, namely the predominantly administrative nature of university internship programs, which often have limited social impact, and the lack of structured alternative learning spaces to support elementary school students experiencing academic difficulties at home. In urban settings characterized by limited parental availability, economic pressures, and inadequate academic support at home, the need for community-based learning institutions has become increasingly important. This study examines the institutionalization of the Urban Islamic After-School Lab as an alternative learning space that integrates educational support, literacy development, and Islamic values in Surabaya. The study employed an action research approach involving fourth- and fifth-grade students in Babad Jerawat Urban Village, Surabaya. The research consisted of five stages, namely initial assessment, problem identification, focus group discussions, corrective action, and final assessment. The intervention focused on strengthening reading and religious literacy as essential components of students' academic and moral development. The findings indicate improvements in students' reading and religious literacy. Furthermore, the program transformed the university internship into a structured form of social engagement, strengthened university–community relationships, and revitalized the social role of higher education in urban communities.

Keywords: Urban Education, Action Research, Alternative Learning Spaces, Reading Literacy, University–Community Engagement

INTRODUCTION

University internship programs are an important component of higher education because they provide students with opportunities to gain practical experience beyond the classroom. These programs are commonly implemented through collaborations with educational, social, economic, and government institutions (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Through such arrangements, students are expected to develop professional competencies and apply their academic knowledge in real-world settings. However, the implementation of internship programs does not always achieve these objectives. Several evaluations have revealed that internship activities are sometimes dominated by administrative tasks and institutional routines that have little relevance to students' learning outcomes. Takdir et al. (2021) reported that some internship activities did not correspond to their original educational objectives and, in certain cases, involved tasks that provided limited academic value. These conditions raise concerns about the

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effectiveness of conventional internship models, particularly regarding their contribution to addressing broader social problems. Therefore, internship programs need to be reconsidered as more than opportunities for individual professional development. They should also provide meaningful opportunities for students to participate in addressing real challenges within the communities where they undertake their activities.

An alternative approach to university internships can be developed by integrating academic activities with action research aimed at addressing social and environmental problems. This approach allows universities to design and manage programs that directly respond to community needs rather than depending entirely on the institutional agendas of external internship partners. A relevant example is the Smarter World Living Lab program developed by the Bandung Institute of Technology, which focuses on generating innovations to address problems in urban and rural communities (Bandung Institute of Technology, 2022). A similar approach can be applied to the field of education, particularly in addressing the limited availability of structured academic support for elementary school students outside formal school hours. Although schools assign additional learning activities to strengthen students' educational experiences at home, these activities often require parental guidance and support. Shilviana and Hamami (2020) explain that cocurricular activities cannot function effectively without adequate assistance from adults. This situation creates difficulties for children whose parents have limited time because of work responsibilities or lack the pedagogical skills needed to support learning at home. Although families with sufficient financial resources may address this problem by enrolling their children in private tutoring programs, economically disadvantaged families often have limited access to such services.

After-school programs offer an alternative approach to addressing educational inequalities among children, particularly those from economically disadvantaged families in urban communities. These programs have been implemented in developed countries to provide academic assistance and educational support after formal school hours (Durlak et al., 2010; Blazer, 2018). Their activities may include tutoring, mentoring, and academic enrichment through reading, science, mathematics, and other educational activities outside the classroom (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015). Such programs are particularly relevant in urban environments where parental work schedules, unfavorable social conditions, and limited academic assistance at home may affect children's educational development. Kahne et al. (2001) emphasize that these conditions can influence not only academic achievement but also children's social skills and personal development. Similar challenges can be identified in Surabaya, where educational inequalities are reflected in problems such as low educational achievement, grade retention, school dropout, and limited opportunities to continue formal education (Mardliyah & Suharko, 2008). Although the Surabaya municipal government has initiated various programs to support children's learning at home, these efforts have tended to be sporadic and have not always been supported by systematic, structured, and sustainable

learning designs. This situation highlights the need for an alternative educational institution that can provide continuous learning assistance within urban communities.

In response to these challenges, this study examines the institutionalization of the Urban Islamic After-School Lab as an alternative learning space in Surabaya. Rather than functioning merely as an additional tutoring program, this initiative is designed to establish a structured learning environment that integrates educational support, literacy development, and Islamic values. Its learning activities adopt several organizational elements of formal education, including planning, implementation, and evaluation, while incorporating Islamic education as a foundation for students' character development and religious literacy. Accordingly, this study addresses two main research questions. First, how can a university internship program be transformed into a structured alternative learning space that responds to the educational needs of children in urban communities? Second, how can the institutionalization of the Urban Islamic After-School Lab strengthen children's reading literacy and religious literacy while enhancing the social engagement of higher education institutions? By addressing these questions, the study aims to analyze the process of establishing an alternative learning institution through a community-based educational intervention. Its significance lies in demonstrating how university internship programs can move beyond administrative and individual learning objectives to become organized forms of social engagement that support children's academic development, religious character formation, and the broader social role of higher education in urban communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

University Internships and Action Research

University internship programs are designed to connect academic learning with practical experience in professional and social environments. However, their educational value depends on the extent to which internship activities are aligned with academic objectives and actual community needs. Takdir et al. (2021) identify several problems in the implementation of university internship programs, including activities that do not correspond to their original objectives and tasks that provide limited contributions to students' learning outcomes. These limitations suggest that conventional internship programs need to be redesigned to provide more meaningful educational and social experiences. One possible approach is to integrate internship activities with action research, allowing students and academic supervisors to identify community problems, develop appropriate interventions, implement solutions, and evaluate their outcomes. Yaumi and Damopolii (2014) explain action research as an approach that connects systematic inquiry with practical efforts to improve existing conditions. Similar applications can be found in community-based research conducted by Zulkifli et al. (2021) and Rachmadi et al. (2022). Within this framework, university internships can become instruments of social transformation rather than merely opportunities for individual professional development. This perspective provides a conceptual foundation

for understanding the Urban Islamic After-School Lab as an educational intervention designed and managed through active university involvement.

After-School Education in Urban Communities

After-school education provides additional learning opportunities for children beyond regular school hours, particularly those who have limited access to academic assistance at home. Durlak et al. (2010) demonstrate the importance of after-school programs in supporting children's and adolescents' personal and social development. Similarly, Blazer (2018) discusses academic enrichment programs as opportunities to strengthen students' educational experiences outside formal schooling. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015), after-school activities may include tutoring, mentoring, and academic enrichment in subjects such as science, reading, mathematics, and other areas of learning. These programs are particularly relevant in urban communities where parents' work responsibilities and socioeconomic conditions may limit their ability to accompany children during their study time. Kahne et al. (2001) also emphasize the importance of after-school programs in supporting young people's development beyond academic achievement. Therefore, after-school education should not be understood simply as an extension of classroom instruction. It can also function as a community-based educational environment that provides consistent academic guidance, supports children's personal development, and addresses inequalities in access to educational resources. This perspective is relevant to the development of an alternative learning space that responds to the educational needs of children in urban Surabaya.

Reading Literacy and Academic Achievement

Reading literacy is an essential foundation for students' academic development because it enables them to understand, process, and use written information in different learning contexts. Pecorari et al. (2012) identify a significant relationship between reading literacy and students' academic achievement. Related findings reported by Gao et al., as cited in Wuryanto and Abduh (2022), also emphasize the contribution of reading skills to improved academic performance. In this context, reading literacy extends beyond the technical ability to recognize written words. It involves understanding textual content, identifying important information, summarizing ideas, answering questions, and reconstructing information through coherent explanations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development defines reading literacy as the ability to understand, use, and reflect on written texts to develop knowledge and personal potential and participate actively in society (OECD, 2010). This definition highlights the cognitive, reflective, and participatory dimensions of literacy. Furthermore, learning achievement can be understood through students' development in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, as reflected in the educational framework discussed by Bloom. Sukmadinata also views learning outcomes as representations of students' abilities and competencies acquired through educational processes. Accordingly, reading literacy

serves not only as a fundamental academic skill but also as an important form of cultural capital that supports children's educational development and broader social participation.

Religious Literacy and Islamic Education

Religious literacy in this study is understood as the integration of religious knowledge, practical religious skills, and the internalization of values in everyday life. Gallagher (2009) emphasizes that religious literacy involves more than acquiring basic religious knowledge because it also includes the ability to practice and apply religious teachings in daily activities. Similarly, Prothero (2009) associates' religious literacy with understanding fundamental religious concepts, recognizing religious symbols, practicing Islamic obligations, and understanding religious narratives and values. These perspectives provide a foundation for developing religious literacy as an educational process that combines cognitive understanding with practical application. In the context of Islamic education, children's religious development can be supported through structured learning activities that introduce Islamic teachings while encouraging their consistent practice. Such activities may include understanding basic Islamic concepts, performing ablution and prayer, writing Arabic letters, memorizing short chapters of the Quran, and learning everyday prayers. These components allow religious education to become part of children's regular learning experiences rather than an occasional instructional activity. Therefore, the development of religious literacy requires a learning environment that provides systematic instruction, practical guidance, repetition, and continuous evaluation. This approach is particularly important in urban communities where opportunities for consistent religious guidance at home may vary according to family circumstances and parental involvement.

Institutionalization of Alternative Learning Spaces

The institutionalization of alternative learning spaces in this study refers to the process of transforming occasional educational assistance into an organized, structured, and sustainable learning practice within the community. This process involves identifying actual educational needs, developing an appropriate learning curriculum, implementing regular educational activities, conducting systematic assessments, and establishing continuous institutional involvement. The concept is closely connected to the discussion of after-school education and action research because both emphasize organized interventions that respond to practical educational problems. Durlak et al. (2010) and Blazer (2018) provide a basis for understanding the educational contribution of structured after-school activities, while Yaumi and Damopolii (2014) support the use of action research to improve existing practices through systematic intervention and reflection. Within this framework, the university plays an important role in providing academic legitimacy, organizing learning activities, and facilitating the development of community-based educational practices. Students participating in internship programs are positioned not merely as temporary assistants but as active participants in educational improvement. The integration of reading literacy and Islamic religious literacy further

establishes the educational identity of the Urban Islamic After-School Lab. Thus, institutionalization is understood as the transformation of community learning assistance into a structured educational practice that can strengthen children's cultural resources, academic competencies, and religious development in urban settings.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an action research approach to examine the institutionalization of the Urban Islamic After-School Lab as an alternative learning space in an urban community. Action research was selected because it allows researchers and participants to identify problems, develop appropriate interventions, implement activities, and evaluate the results through a collaborative process. Rather than positioning the researcher as an external observer, this approach involved the researcher, university interns, and participants in the development and implementation of the program. The research process followed a cyclical pattern of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Through this process, the program was designed to respond to the educational needs of children while providing university students with meaningful opportunities to engage with the community. The approach also enabled the research team to evaluate the relevance of the internship program beyond its conventional academic and administrative requirements. The use of action research was informed by the methodological perspectives discussed by Yaumi and Damopolii (2014), Zulkifli et al. (2021), and Rachmadi et al. (2022).

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in Babat Jerawat Urban Village, Pakal District, Surabaya, East Java. The area was selected because some elementary school children experienced limited academic support outside school, particularly in families facing economic difficulties and limited parental availability. The initial assessment identified 50 school-age children in the community. From this group, 19 children were selected to participate in the program based on the results of the initial assessment. The participants were fourth- and fifth-grade elementary school students who demonstrated difficulties in reading literacy and limited understanding of basic religious knowledge. These conditions indicated a need for additional learning support beyond regular school activities. The selection of participants was therefore based on their identified educational needs rather than on a general assumption that all children in the community experienced the same difficulties. The program focused on providing structured learning activities that addressed both academic and religious literacy. Through this setting and participant group, the study examined how a university-supported learning initiative could respond to educational challenges experienced by children in an urban community.

Data Collection and Research Procedures

The research was conducted through five main stages, consisting of an initial assessment, problem identification, focus group discussions, corrective action, and final

assessment. The initial assessment was used to identify the participants' learning needs and examine their reading and religious literacy. Reading literacy was assessed through four indicators, namely understanding written texts, summarizing information, answering questions about texts, and retelling the content of texts. Religious literacy was examined through five aspects, including understanding Islamic learning materials, performing ablution and prayer, writing Arabic letters, memorizing short chapters of the Quran, and reciting daily prayers. After the initial assessment, the research team identified the main learning problems and discussed the appropriate program activities through focus group discussions. Corrective actions were then implemented through structured learning activities that combined reading exercises and Islamic education. The final assessment was conducted to examine the participants' learning conditions after the program activities. In addition to observations, the study also used students' school report cards to examine the relationship between reading literacy and academic achievement. These procedures provided information about the participants' learning needs and the implementation of the alternative learning program.

Data Analysis

The research data were examined descriptively by considering the indicators used in the initial and final assessments. Reading literacy observations focused on the participants' ability to understand texts, summarize information, answer questions, and retell what they had read. The assessment results were organized into four categories, namely poor, fair, good, and very good. The number and percentage of participants in each category were used to describe their reading literacy levels. Religious literacy was examined through the five learning aspects addressed in the program, including the understanding of Islamic materials and the ability to perform basic religious practices. The study also considered students' school report cards to describe the relationship between reading literacy and academic achievement. These data were used to support the discussion of how literacy development was connected to students' educational experiences. The analysis focused on describing the learning conditions identified through the research activities and explaining the role of the program in addressing the participants' needs. The findings were interpreted in relation to the institutionalization of an alternative learning space and the university's engagement with the surrounding community.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The Urban Islamic After-School Lab Internship Model

The Urban Islamic After-School Lab internship model emerged from a critical evaluation of the Field Experience Program, known as Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan or PPL, which has been a characteristic component of the Elementary Islamic Education program. Traditionally, PPL has provided university students with valuable pedagogical experience, particularly through teaching practice in formal educational institutions. However, the institutional evaluation described in this study indicated that the program

had not produced measurable social impacts in addressing educational challenges within urban communities. One major concern was the limited academic assistance available to children at home. Internship activities were also influenced by the institutional agendas of partner organizations, which were not always aligned with the academic objectives of the university. Consequently, students often performed technical tasks rather than developing educational initiatives that responded to community needs. The Urban Islamic After-School Lab was designed as an alternative institutional model in which the university took an active role in planning, managing, and integrating learning activities. This model shifted the internship from an individual learning experience toward a structured community-based educational initiative with a broader social purpose.

Initial Conditions of Reading Literacy

The initial assessment revealed that participants experienced difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly in processing and communicating information from written texts. Reading comprehension was assessed through four indicators, namely understanding the content of a text, summarizing its information, answering questions based on the text, and retelling its content coherently. Among the 19 participants, two children (10.5%) were categorized as poor, nine (47.4%) as fair, and eight (42.1%) as good in understanding text content. In summarizing texts, three children (15.8%) were categorized as poor, while eight (42.1%) were fair and eight (42.1%) were good. For answering text-based questions, five children (26.3%) were categorized as poor, six (31.6%) as fair, and eight (42.1%) as good. The results for retelling texts showed two children (10.5%) in the poor category, nine (47.4%) in the fair category, and eight (42.1%) in the good category. None of the participants reached the very good category in any of the four indicators. These findings indicate that reading comprehension remained an important learning need among the participants.

Reading Literacy and Academic Learning Conditions

The observation results also indicated that participants' reading abilities were influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included intellectual ability, interests, and talents, while external factors included parental involvement, learning motivation, tutoring, and access to learning media. Parental involvement was identified as an important factor in supporting children's reading development. Parents who had sufficient knowledge of school subjects and were able to provide learning guidance could help children understand academic materials and develop effective learning habits. However, the findings also showed that some participants whose parents had higher levels of formal education still studied independently at home. Based on information obtained from the participants, some children spent more time playing because they did not know what to study and received limited guidance from their parents. This condition suggests that formal parental education does not automatically ensure adequate academic assistance at home. The study also discussed the relationship between reading literacy and academic achievement, drawing on students' school report cards. The

findings were used to emphasize the importance of structured reading support as part of children's broader academic development.

Institutionalization of Religious Literacy

The religious literacy program addressed five learning dimensions, including understanding Islamic materials, performing ablution and prayer, writing Arabic letters, memorizing short chapters of the Quran, and learning daily prayers. Memorization activities were conducted gradually during each meeting through collective repetition. Participants practiced each chapter until they could recite it completely before moving to the next one. The memorization sequence began with Surah Al-Ikhlas and continued through Surah Ash-Shams. Daily prayers included prayers before and after meals, before and after sleeping, when entering and leaving the bathroom, and when traveling. At the end of learning sessions, participants repeated the materials to reinforce their understanding and religious practices. Practical instruction in ablution and prayer was guided directly by the researcher. Prayer movements were explained and checked, followed by collective prayers for parents and the doa sapu jagat. The findings also showed that formal parental education and occupation were not significantly associated with children's religious literacy. Among the three participants whose parents held bachelor's degrees, only one demonstrated high religious literacy. In contrast, children whose parents had religious educational backgrounds, such as Islamic boarding schools or Quranic learning institutions, generally demonstrated better religious literacy.

DISCUSSION

The development of the Urban Islamic After-School Lab represents an effort to transform university internship programs from activities primarily focused on students' individual professional experience into structured educational practices that respond to community needs. Traditionally, the Field Experience Program (PPL) has provided opportunities for students to develop pedagogical competencies through teaching practice in formal educational institutions. However, its contribution to addressing broader educational problems in urban communities has remained limited. Internship activities are often determined by the institutional agendas of partner organizations, which may not always correspond to the academic objectives of universities or the actual needs of local communities. Consequently, students may become involved mainly in administrative or technical activities rather than participating in meaningful educational innovation. This condition indicates a gap between the objectives of higher education and the practical implementation of internship programs. The Urban Islamic After-School Lab was developed to address this gap by positioning the university as an active institution responsible for identifying educational problems, designing learning activities, and facilitating their implementation. This approach expands the function of internships beyond individual competency development and connects academic learning with social responsibility.

The program also illustrates how university engagement can contribute to the development of community-based educational institutions. Rather than relying entirely on the activities of internship students, the program was designed around an identified educational need, particularly the limited availability of learning assistance for elementary school children outside formal school hours. Its activities were organized through assessment, problem identification, learning interventions, and evaluation. This structure enabled the university to connect its academic resources with the educational conditions experienced by children and their families. Students participating in the internship were therefore positioned not merely as recipients of professional experience but as contributors to educational improvement. Their involvement provided opportunities to apply pedagogical knowledge while responding to concrete community challenges. From this perspective, the program demonstrates the potential of action-oriented internships to strengthen relationships between universities and society. Its significance lies not only in providing additional learning support but also in establishing a more relevant relationship between higher education and the social environment in which it operates.

Reading Literacy as an Educational and Structural Challenge

The findings indicate that reading literacy should not be understood solely as an individual learning difficulty. It is also connected to the availability of educational support within families and communities. The initial assessment identified differences in students' abilities to understand texts, summarize reading materials, answer questions, and retell information. None of the 19 participants achieved the highest category in any of these four indicators. Although some students demonstrated good reading comprehension, a considerable proportion remained in the fair or poor categories. These findings suggest that the ability to read words does not necessarily indicate the ability to process information, identify important ideas, or communicate the meaning of a text. Reading literacy involves a broader set of cognitive activities that support students in understanding and using information. This interpretation is consistent with the relationship between reading comprehension and academic achievement discussed in the literature. Students who experience difficulties in understanding written materials may also encounter obstacles when learning subjects that require them to interpret instructions, identify concepts, and connect information. Therefore, reading literacy needs to be treated as an essential foundation for learning across different academic subjects.

The students' learning conditions further demonstrate the importance of examining literacy within its social context. The research identified several factors associated with reading literacy, including parental involvement, learning motivation, tutoring opportunities, learning media, intelligence, and individual interests. Parental involvement emerged as an important factor because children require guidance to develop regular learning habits and understand what they are expected to study. However, the findings also show that parents' formal educational attainment does not automatically guarantee adequate learning assistance. Some children whose parents had higher educational

qualifications still studied independently because their parents had limited time to accompany them. These children sometimes spent their time playing because they lacked guidance about learning activities at home. This situation illustrates that educational support depends not only on family educational resources but also on the availability and consistency of assistance. The Urban Islamic After-School Lab responds to this condition by providing an organized learning environment outside school and home. Its role is particularly relevant for children who cannot regularly access private tutoring or receive sufficient academic guidance from their families.

Religious Literacy and the Formation of Everyday Practices

The integration of Islamic religious literacy into the Urban Islamic After-School Lab extends the function of the program beyond academic assistance. Religious literacy in this study was developed through several practical dimensions, including understanding Islamic learning materials, performing ablution and prayer, writing Arabic letters, memorizing short chapters of the Quran, and learning daily prayers. These activities were intended to connect religious knowledge with practical behavior in children's everyday lives. The learning process included collective memorization, direct demonstrations, guided practice, and repetition. For example, students practiced memorizing short Quranic chapters from Al-Ikhlas to Ash-Shams through repeated recitation. They also learned daily prayers associated with ordinary activities, such as eating, sleeping, and entering or leaving the bathroom. Such activities show that religious learning was not limited to the transmission of information. Instead, it emphasized the relationship between understanding religious teachings and practicing them consistently. This approach is relevant to the program's objective of integrating literacy development with Islamic values and character formation.

The findings concerning parental backgrounds also provide an important perspective on the transmission of religious knowledge. The formal educational qualifications and occupations of parents did not appear to have a straightforward relationship with the religious literacy levels of participating children. Among the three participants whose parents held bachelor's degrees, only one demonstrated a high level of religious literacy. In contrast, children whose parents had experience with religious education, such as Islamic boarding schools or Quranic learning institutions, generally demonstrated stronger religious literacy. These observations suggest that religious knowledge may be influenced more directly by the continuity of religious instruction and daily practice than by formal educational qualifications alone. The program therefore provides an organized environment in which religious knowledge can be introduced, practiced, and reinforced through collective activities. Regular instruction and guided practice may help address limitations in the transmission of religious values within the domestic environment. In this respect, the Urban Islamic After-School Lab functions as a complementary learning space that supports children's religious development while connecting Islamic knowledge with everyday habits.

Institutionalizing an Alternative Learning Space in Urban Communities

The institutionalization of the Urban Islamic After-School Lab can be understood as a process through which educational activities that might otherwise remain temporary or informal are organized into a more systematic learning structure. The program was developed in response to identified learning difficulties rather than being implemented solely as an additional activity for children after school. Initial assessments provided information about students' educational needs, particularly their reading comprehension and religious literacy. These findings became the basis for organizing learning activities and determining the program's educational focus. The institutionalization process was supported by the adoption of several elements commonly found in formal education, including learning plans, structured implementation, and evaluation. The integration of Islamic values further distinguished the program by connecting academic support with religious learning and character development. Through this arrangement, alternative learning activities gained a clearer educational direction and an organizational framework. The program consequently represents more than a temporary tutoring initiative. It demonstrates how community-based educational activities can be developed through systematic planning and institutional involvement in response to specific social needs.

From a sociological perspective, the program also illustrates the potential of higher education institutions to contribute to the formation of new educational structures within urban communities. The university provides academic legitimacy and organizational support, while internship students contribute through their participation in learning activities and educational assistance. Children, meanwhile, gain access to a learning environment that complements the support available at school and at home. These relationships create opportunities for educational practices to become more consistent and socially embedded. The institutionalization of the program therefore depends not only on the existence of learning activities but also on the integration of community needs, university involvement, curriculum development, and systematic evaluation. This model repositions the internship program as an arena for social transformation in which students can act as agents of educational change and contribute to strengthening children's cultural capital. The Urban Islamic After-School Lab demonstrates that the integration of empirical community needs, higher education resources, and structured learning design can support literacy development, social participation, and character formation. Its broader significance lies in strengthening the social function of universities through educational practices that are relevant to urban communities.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that low reading literacy among children in urban communities is not merely an individual problem but a structural issue related to the weak system of learning support within families and communities. National data, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), indicate that Indonesia continues to face

low reading literacy achievement. The findings of this study confirm this condition at the community level. Most children involved in this study have only reached the basic or mechanical stage of literacy and have not yet developed reading comprehension skills that enable them to process, reflect on, and apply information from texts in more complex ways. This limitation directly affects their academic performance and learning outcomes. In this context, the Urban Islamic After-School Lab internship program serves as an institutional response to structural literacy problems. Unlike conventional teaching practice programs, which mainly focus on student teaching experience, this model is designed as a structured alternative learning space based on community needs assessments and integrated with Islamic values. Therefore, the program functions not only as a learning support initiative but also as a means of developing alternative educational practices within urban communities.

The institutionalization process takes place through the development of a curriculum based on literacy problems, systematic learning activities, measurable evaluations, and the active involvement of higher education institutions as social actors. As a result, alternative learning spaces are no longer temporary or occasional activities but become new social structures with academic legitimacy and sustainable practices. This model also repositions internship programs as spaces for social transformation, where university students act as agents of change who directly contribute to strengthening children's cultural capital. From a sociological perspective, this study emphasizes that institutionalizing alternative learning spaces based on literacy and religious values is an important strategy for strengthening the role of education in urban communities. The Urban Islamic After-School Lab demonstrates that integrating real community needs, the role of higher education institutions, and systematic learning designs can create an effective educational intervention model. Such a model not only improves children's literacy skills but also establishes a foundation for social participation and character development. Through continuous educational support and community involvement, this approach has the potential to strengthen children's academic abilities, social awareness, and personal development in a sustainable manner.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author was responsible for structuring the manuscript, designing the research framework, and conducting the study. The second author performed the proofreading of the manuscript and provided financial support for the publication. Both authors read and approved the final version.

AI USAGE STATEMENT

During the preparation of this work, the authors utilized GEMINI to assist in language editing, grammatical corrections, and improving the writing style. The authors reviewed and edited the content after using this tool and take full responsibility for the integrity of the published article.

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