

## **Integrating a Service-Learning Approach into Arabic Language Instruction with Fun-Learning and a Participatory Appreciation System to Enhance Student Motivation at RQ Raudhatul Hufadz**

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### **Article history**

Received : 2026-04-05

Revised : 2026-06-23

Accepted : 2026-06-25

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### **Abstract**

Rumah Qur'an (RQ) Raudhatul Hufadz, a non-formal Qur'anic learning center in Sei Mencirim Village, Deli Serdang Regency, faced two intertwined problems: children showed strong enthusiasm for learning yet had no access to structured Arabic instruction, and the existing tahfidz (Qur'an memorization) program suffered from flagging motivation caused by repetitive, one-directional teaching. This community service initiative combined Service Learning (SL) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) to introduce basic Arabic instruction alongside a redesigned tahfidz process over a two-week period (21 February–5 March 2026). Twenty-four children took part in the Arabic class and twenty-one in the tahfidz program. Data were gathered through observation, a focus group discussion, and daily evaluation sheets, and were analyzed across two intervention cycles following a plan-act-observe-reflect sequence. In the Arabic class, drill practice, the mubasyarah (direct) method, and communicative techniques paired with visual media such as matching boards and flashcards produced measurable gains in vocabulary recognition and simple conversational exchange. In the tahfidz program, replacing rote repetition with a fun-learning approach and a participatory appreciation system – daily evaluation sheets tied to small rewards – raised both attendance and the completion rate of memorization targets. A parallel online Ta'lim session engaged parents (Ummahat) in supporting home-based learning. The findings suggest that pairing Service Learning's structured reflection with Participatory Action Research's cyclical, community-driven problem-solving can resolve demotivation in traditional Qur'anic education while leaving behind a durable foundation for Arabic-language instruction.

*Keywords:* Arabic Learning; Community Service; Fun-Learning; Rumah Qur'an; Tahfidz

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: 10.51590/jpm\_assunnah.v6i2.1300

## Introduction

The Thematic Community Service Program (Kuliah Kerja Nyata Tematik, KKNT) occupies a central place in the Tri Dharma mandate of Indonesian higher education, pairing students' academic competence with direct engagement in community problem-solving. Rather than treating fieldwork as an extracurricular add-on, the pedagogy behind it is Service Learning (SL): a structured practice that reciprocally links community service with course-related learning activities and, crucially, with guided reflection that lets students trace the relationship between classroom theory and field practice.<sup>1</sup>

In non-formal religious education, this form of engagement matters especially in bridging access gaps in Arabic literacy and Qur'anic instruction at the village level, gaps that often persist despite genuine local enthusiasm for learning. KKNT programs, however, tend to gravitate toward visible, physical outputs – renovating a building, repainting a prayer hall – while leaving the host institution's underlying pedagogical shortfalls untouched. Physical contributions are tangible and easy to document, but they rarely explain why an existing educational practice underperforms. Where the root problem is methodological rather than infrastructural, SL's value lies precisely in refusing to stop at volunteerism: it commits students to sustained curriculum design, delivery, and revision, evaluated through the same reflective cycle used in classroom teaching practice.

Where SL supplies a pedagogical bridge for a program built from nothing, Participatory Action Research (PAR) supplies the method for revitalizing a program that already exists but has stalled. PAR proceeds through an iterative cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection, with the people affected by a problem – in this case RQ instructors, students, and parents – taking an active role in diagnosing it and testing solutions, rather than receiving a solution designed elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Because each cycle folds field observation back into the next round of planning, PAR suits a tahfidz program whose central complaint, flagging motivation, cannot be diagnosed from outside the classroom.

Both approaches recur separately across the community-service literature, and both rest on a shared logic: a structured, cyclical process of action and reflection tends to outperform a single-pass intervention, a pattern that also holds in applied fields outside education where action research has been used as a meta-methodology for organizational and pedagogical change.<sup>3</sup> What remains comparatively rare is their deliberate combination within one service initiative solving two distinct problems at once: building an Arabic curriculum where none existed, a task suited to SL because RQ had no prior model to revise, and reviving a demotivated but pre-existing tahfidz routine, a task suited to PAR because that routine only needed diagnosis and adjustment rather than invention. The novelty of this article lies in that pairing – SL is used to build a new language-learning structure, while PAR is used in parallel to revitalize and evaluate the memorization program that RQ already ran.

The problem at the service location was an imbalance between a large population of school-age children and the near-total absence of structured Arabic instruction, compounded by internal constraints within RQ itself: teaching for tahfidz had remained monotonous, and students had little say in how their own progress was evaluated. Left unaddressed, these conditions were likely to entrench both the language-access gap and the motivational decline. Building on this diagnosis, the

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Furco and Katrina Norvell, "What Is Service Learning? Making Sense of the Pedagogy and Practice," in *Embedding Service Learning in European Higher Education: Developing a Culture of Civic Engagement*, ed. Pilar Aramburuzabala, Lorraine McIlrath, and Héctor Opazo (London: Routledge, 2019), 13–35.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, and Rhonda Nixon, *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research* (Singapore: Springer, 2014).

<sup>3</sup>Amaya Erro-Garcés and J. A. Alfaro-Tanco, "Action Research as a Meta-Methodology in the Management Field," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19 (2020): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920917489>.

study aimed to (1) describe how SL and PAR were implemented to improve Arabic instruction and the tahfidz program, (2) analyze how participatory involvement affected student motivation and learning outcomes, and (3) distill a transferable service model for comparable KKNT programs elsewhere.

**Ethical Considerations.** This activity and the data collection associated with it were approved by the Sei Mencirim Village Government, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra, and by the administration of RQ Raudhatul Hufadz. All adult participants gave written informed consent to take part voluntarily; for participating children, consent was obtained from a parent or guardian. Data reported in the text of this article, including evaluation results and any quoted remarks, have been de-identified and are treated as confidential.

**Methods.** This activity combined Participatory Action Research with Service Learning: PAR placed RQ instructors, students, and parents in the role of co-planners and co-evaluators, cycling through reflection and action together with the KKNT team, while SL let the team apply classroom knowledge of Arabic pedagogy directly to service delivery, treating the fieldwork itself as a parallel learning process for the researchers.

The service took place at Rumah Qur'an (RQ) Raudhatul Hufadz, Jalan Jati, Dusun II, Gang Anugrah, Sei Mencirim Village, Medan Sunggal Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency, over roughly two weeks, from 21 February 2026 to the program handover on 5 March 2026.

Participants comprised twenty-four children in the Arabic class and twenty-one in the tahfidz program; RQ teachers and administrators, who took part directly in problem identification, planning, and evaluation; and parents (Ummahat), who were reached through an open Ta'lim session aimed at building household support for the children's learning.

Data were collected through three methods. Non-participatory observation captured the existing learning process and each session's level of student activity, interaction, and focus. Interviews and a focus group discussion with RQ teachers and administrators, held early in the activity, identified the two core problems – absent Arabic instruction and low tahfidz motivation. Daily evaluation sheets and an interactive final assessment, using a matching board and a randomized-letter arrangement task, measured vocabulary mastery.

**Implementation Procedure (Research Cycle).** The team began with field observation and permit-seeking, from which the absence of Arabic teaching and the students' flagging tahfidz motivation emerged as the priority issues; this diagnosis shaped the subsequent choice of fun-learning techniques, drill practice, and a participatory appreciation system. During the action stage, the tahfidz program combined question-and-answer exchanges, a reward-and-consequence structure, drill repetition, and daily evaluation sheets, together with pre-session focus games as a cognitive-humanistic fun-learning technique and individual mentoring on a one-by-one basis. The Arabic program, launched as a new initiative rather than a revision of an existing routine, applied a behaviorist orientation, the mubasyarah (direct) method, communicative techniques, and drill practice to build pronunciation habits and vocabulary retention. A mid-point evaluation on 27 February found that participation had not yet improved meaningfully, which prompted a corrective second action on 1 March: a daily assessment sheet tied to a reward system. That adjustment produced a measurable, and qualitatively visible, increase in active participation and in the completion of memorization targets.

## Results and Discussion

This community service initiative produced measurable change in two programs at Raudhatul Hufadz: the redesign of the tahfidz method and the launch of Arabic language instruction where none had existed. Before the intervention, RQ ran no Arabic curriculum at all, since its activities were oriented entirely around Qur'an memorization. In the Arabic class, all twenty-four children showed high enthusiasm from the first session; an interactive final evaluation, using matching-board media and a randomized-letter arrangement task, confirmed that they could recognize vocabulary meaning, reproduce everyday greeting dialogues, and manage simple conversation with reasonable confidence and pronunciation.

In the memorization program, the presenting problems were low motivation, boredom, and distractibility. The team addressed these by shifting the teaching pattern toward fun-learning, supported by a participatory appreciation system; twenty-one children returned with renewed enthusiasm to the tahfidz halaqah. Daily evaluation papers paired with small rewards measurably increased students' drive to reach their memorization targets, and children who had previously been passive became more active both in memorizing new material and in murojaah, the review of what they had already learned.

**Increasing Motivation and Quality of Qur'an Memorization.** Table 1 summarizes the PAR cycle applied to the tahfidz program.

| Day/Date         | Activities  | Location                  | Output  | Description |
|------------------|---|---------------------------|---|-------------|
| Sat,<br>21/02/26 | Field observation   | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Non-participatory<br>observation of the learning<br>process     |             |
| Sun,<br>22/02/26 | Focus group discussion<br>with RQ instructors;<br>problem identification                            | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Problem identification  |             |
| Mon,<br>23/02/26 | Lesson planning (fun-<br>learning and<br>participatory) and<br>interviews with RQ<br>administrators | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Application plan for<br>improving memorization<br>quality       |             |
| Tue,<br>24/02/26 | Action 1: focus exercise<br>before the lesson begins  | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Memorization still not<br>optimal due to low<br>participation   |             |
| Wed,<br>25/02/26 | Process observation   | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Participation still limited                                     |             |
| Thu,<br>26/02/26 | Field observation   | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Lack of interactivity and<br>effectiveness in learning          |             |
| Fri,<br>27/02/26 | Evaluation and<br>reflection  | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Group evaluation and<br>reflection                              |             |
| Sat,<br>28/02/26 | Improvement planning<br>based on reflection   | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Reward design for students<br>showing improved<br>participation |             |

| Day/Date         | Activities   | Location            | Output   | Description |
|------------------|--|---------------------|--|-------------|
| Sun,<br>01/03/26 | Action 2: implementation of a reward system (evaluation forms)     | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz | Participation increased  |             |
| Mon,<br>02/03/26 | Implementation of the reward system                                | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz | Increased engagement in memorization-based learning                        |             |
| Tue,<br>03/03/26 | Qur'an memorization halaqah using the reward and evaluation system | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz | Significant increase in student participation                              |             |
| Wed,<br>04/03/26 | Final evaluation   | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz | Increased participation; completion of new and review memorization targets |             |
| Thu,<br>05/03/26 | Program handover   | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz | Official handover of the Arabic learning program to RQ Raudhatul Hufadz    |             |

**Table 1. PAR daily activity schedule.**

Read against this schedule, the increase in tahfidz participation follows a clear arc.

**Pre-Reflection and Problem Identification.** The activity began on Saturday, 21 February 2026, with field observation at RQ Raudhatul Hufadz. Non-participatory observation flagged low student engagement from the outset. To trace the problem to its root, the team held a focus group discussion with the teachers and interviewed the administrators on 22–23 February; both pointed to the same cause, a lack of interactivity and methodological variety, which in turn had been eroding the quality of students' memorization.



**Figure 1. Planning and Initial Action Activities.**

**Cycle I: Planning and Initial Action.** In response, the team designed a plan around fun-learning and participatory methods. On Tuesday, 24 February, Action 1 introduced an icebreaker before each halaqah began. Observation over the following three days (24–26 February) showed that this alone had not produced significant change: students remained largely passive, the sessions stayed

non-interactive, and recitation quality suffered from limited active engagement with the teacher's instructions.

**Reflection and Improvement Planning.** On Friday, 27 February, the team and the teaching staff carried out an in-depth evaluation. They concluded that focus games alone were not strong enough to trigger intrinsic motivation, and on 28 February designed an improvement strategy built around a reward system tied to assessment sheets – intended to give concrete recognition for every gain in participation and submission quality.



**Figure 2. Reflection and Improvement Planning; daily assessment sheets accompanied by small rewards.**

**Cycle II: Action for Change and Results.** Action 2, which began on 1 March, marked the turning point in the program's pedagogical approach. Introducing a structured reward system built around assessment sheets produced a near-immediate shift in behavior: rather than treating memorization as a repetitive chore, students began to read their own progress as a tangible achievement. Observation on 2–3 March recorded a measurable rise in engagement across every tahfidz group, and the classroom atmosphere took on a competitive, but healthy, character, in which students were both more enthusiastic and more invested in tracking their own and each other's progress.

By the final evaluation on 4 March, the cumulative effect of the intervention was unambiguous. Participation gains went beyond simple attendance: the quality of recitation itself improved, with students completing new memorization and murojaah with a level of fluency clearly ahead of where they had started. This pattern is broadly consistent with the mechanism by which structured reward systems operate on classroom behavior more generally – not as a substitute for learning, but as a feedback loop that makes incremental progress visible and lets children experience competence directly, which is precisely the pathway through which classroom reward structures have been shown to shape both motivational and emotional responses among elementary-age learners.<sup>4</sup>

**Handover.** As the final stage of the PAR cycle, the program was formally handed over to RQ Raudhatul Hufadz on Thursday, 5 March 2026. The reward system and the Arabic materials developed during the activity, both of which had already demonstrated their effectiveness, were transferred to the partner institution to be carried forward independently, so that the gains in educational quality would not depend on the KKNT team's continued presence.

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<sup>4</sup>J. M. Kowalski and M. J. Froiland, "Parent Perceptions of Elementary Classroom Management Systems and Their Children's Motivational and Emotional Responses," *Social Psychology of Education* 23, no. 2 (2020): 433–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-020-09543-5>.



Figure 3. Program handover to RQ Raudhatul Hufadz.

### Arabic Language Program: A Service-Learning Cycle

Table 2 sets out the corresponding schedule for the Arabic language program, which the KKNT team ran as an entirely new initiative rather than a revision of an existing routine.

| Day/Date         | Activities   | Location              | Output   | Description |
|------------------|--|-----------------------|--|-------------|
| Sat,<br>21/02/26 | Observation  | Jl. Jati, Gg. Anugrah | The village head/deputy granted permission to conduct the KKNT activity              |             |
| Sun,<br>22/02/26 | Observation  | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz   | The RQ chair granted permission to base fieldwork at RQ and reviewed site conditions |             |
| Mon,<br>23/02/26 | Arabic instructional planning  | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz   | Design of the approach and method to be used in teaching Arabic                      |             |
| Tue,<br>24/02/26 | Teaching Arabic using a behaviorist approach and the mubasyarah method | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz   | Students understood and repeated everyday dialogues (e.g., greetings)                |             |
| Wed,<br>25/02/26 | Teaching Arabic using the drill method                                 | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz   | Improved pronunciation accuracy and vocabulary retention through repetition and Q&A  |             |
| Thu,<br>26/02/26 | Teaching Arabic using the communicative method                         | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz   | Students used vocabulary and expressions in simple conversation with more confidence |             |
| Fri,<br>27/02/26 | Teaching Arabic using the drill method                                 | RQ Raudhatul Hufadz   | Students reviewed vocabulary and phrases covered so far                              |             |

| Day/Date         | Activities   | Location                  | Output  | Description  |
|------------------|--|---------------------------|---|--|
| Sat,<br>28/02/26 | Community education on the importance of Arabic for children | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Zoom session helped parents understand how to support their children's Arabic learning        | Network and focus issues; less effective than face-to-face |
| Mon,<br>02/03/26 | Teaching Arabic using the drill method                       | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Improved pronunciation accuracy and vocabulary retention through repetition and Q&A           |  |
| Tue,<br>03/03/26 | Teaching Arabic using the drill method                       | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Students mastered vocabulary and phrases reviewed the previous day                            |  |
| Wed,<br>04/03/26 | Assessment of Arabic language learning                       | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Students mastered the taught vocabulary; assessed via flashcards and letter-arrangement tasks |  |
| Thu,<br>05/03/26 | Program handover   | RQ<br>Raudhatul<br>Hufadz | Official handover of the Arabic program; shared commitment to continued learning              |  |

**Table 2. Daily schedule for the Service-Learning (SL) method.**

**Pre-Reflection and Authorization Phase.** The activity opened on 21–22 February with site observation and permit coordination. The team met with the Village Head on Jalan Jati, Gang Anugrah, and with the RQ chair, to establish the site as the KKNT program's base and to understand the demographic profile and learning needs of the local children – a step that mattered because, unlike the tahfidz program, the Arabic class had no existing precedent to build from.

**Planning.** On 23 February, the team drew up a full instructional plan. Given the students' backgrounds, they combined a behaviorist orientation with the mubasyarah (direct) method, drill practice, and the communicative method, with the explicit goal that students should not merely memorize vocabulary but be able to use it in everyday conversation.

**Action and Observation.** Implementation ran in several intensive phases from 24 February to 3 March.

**Direct Method (mubasyarah):** The mubasyarah method – the Arabic-language counterpart of what is known in English as the direct method – emerged historically as a reaction against the *al-qawa'id wa al-tarjamah* (grammar-translation) approach, which had been criticized for treating language as an inert object stripped of any living communicative element; alongside that critique came a broader push to make foreign-language teaching more efficient and effective.<sup>5</sup> In this program, students were introduced to simple dialogues such as asking after someone's wellbeing, and were able to reproduce the dialogue structure with reasonable accuracy.

**Reinforcement through Drill:** Repetitive practice, delivered through the drill method, is one of the more common techniques teachers use with beginning Arabic learners because it instills specific habits and helps sustain them once formed; it is also useful for building the agility, accuracy, and proficiency that language knowledge depends on. The team applied it consistently on 25 and 27 February and again on 2–3 March. Through intensive repetition and question-and-answer

<sup>5</sup>Azhar Arsyad, *Bahasa Arab dan Metode Pengajarannya* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010).

exchange, students showed a clear improvement in pronunciation accuracy (makhrāj) and vocabulary retention (mufradat).



**Figure 4. Arabic language instruction using the drill and direct method.**

Communicative Approach: The communicative approach in Arabic instruction, *al-madkhal al-ittisali*, centers on learners' active communication skills rather than on grammatical form for its own sake, placing greater weight on using Arabic in meaningful spoken and written contexts so that students develop genuine communicative competence. Two elements of the approach proved most relevant here: establishing competence, rather than rule recall, as the explicit learning target, which in turn made classroom feedback more directly useful to students; and treating listening, speaking, reading, and writing as an integrated set of skills rather than as separate drills, which let students who were still shaky on vocabulary nonetheless practice functional exchanges. On 26 February the team focused a session specifically on encouraging students to speak up, and observation recorded a visible increase in their confidence in using Arabic expressions during simple conversation – a pattern consistent with evidence that pairing communicative activity with concrete visual support, such as picture cards and matching media, measurably improves beginning learners' spoken performance in Arabic as a foreign language.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 5. Arabic grammar instruction (pronouns) using projected visual media.**

<sup>6</sup>Mohammad H. Al-Khreshah, Ahmad Khaerurrozikin, and Abdul Hafidz Zaid, "The Efficiency of Using Pictures in Teaching Speaking Skills of Non-Native Arabic Beginner Students," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 8, no. 3 (2020): 872–78, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080318>.

**Community Education (Ta'lim via Zoom).** Between class sessions, on 28 February, the team ran an online community-education session for parents on the importance of Arabic for their children. Despite technical friction – unstable network connections, data limits, and reduced participant focus relative to a face-to-face setting – the session succeeded in building a shared commitment to continuing the children's learning at home. This mirrors a broader pattern in the literature on family involvement in young learners' foreign-language education: when parents actively engage with what a child is learning, whether through direct participation or simply through informed encouragement at home, children's motivational profile for that language tends to be measurably stronger, and the effect operates independently of the parents' own language proficiency.<sup>7</sup>

**Reflection and Evaluation.** The final evaluation, on Wednesday, 4 March, used a matching board and a randomized-letter arrangement game rather than a written test. Results were strong: students mastered the material that had been presented across the two weeks, and the visual-aid format proved effective at validating vocabulary understanding built up through the earlier drill sessions.

**Closing Ceremony (Program Handover).** The SL cycle closed on Thursday, 5 March, with the formal handover of the Arabic program to the community on Jalan Jati, Gang Anugrah. The handover functioned as more than a formality: it was the occasion on which the team and its community partners agreed to continue Arabic-language activities on an ongoing basis, so that the momentum built over two weeks would not simply lapse once the KKNT team left.

### **Program Impact and Synthesis**

Taken together, the two cycles point to a consistent underlying diagnosis: the students at Raudhatul Hufadz were not short on cognitive ability, but on exposure to methods that made their own progress visible and gave them a reason to sustain effort. Field findings support this reading directly. Students demonstrated high productivity and enthusiasm for non-formal activity generally, as reflected in consistent attendance, yet that energy had not been channeled effectively because no systematic Arabic-language program existed to receive it; the resulting stagnation was a supply problem, not a motivation problem, in the Arabic case. In the tahfidz case, by contrast, motivation itself was the primary constraint: the routine of memorization had come to be experienced as a repetitive burden rather than a personal achievement, not because the material was inherently difficult, but because one-directional teaching gave students no way to see their own progress or have a say in how it was evaluated.

The daily evaluation sheets functioned as more than a bookkeeping device. By giving students a direct visualization of their own progress, they fostered a form of positive competition and let children register the satisfaction of reaching an “ideal” quantity of memorization for the day, converting an otherwise invisible cognitive process into something concrete enough to feel proud of. This is consistent with research on reward-based classroom management more broadly, which finds that structured reward systems shape children's motivational and emotional responses at least in part through the transparency they introduce, letting a child, and the adults around them, see incremental gains that would otherwise go unnoticed.<sup>8</sup> It is also broadly consistent with recent evidence on gamified learning strategies, where the benefit of point systems, visible milestones, and small rewards lies less in the reward itself than in the feedback loop it creates between effort and recognized progress – though that same literature cautions that such gains are not automatically durable, and can fade or even reverse if the novelty of the reward system wears off without a

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<sup>7</sup>N. Choi, S. Jung, and B. No, "Learning a Foreign Language under the Influence of Parents: Parental Involvement and Children's English Learning Motivational Profiles," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 33 (2023): 237–52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-023-02701-1>.

<sup>8</sup>Kowalski and Froiland, "Parent Perceptions of Elementary Classroom Management Systems."

parallel shift toward intrinsic motivation.<sup>9</sup> The two-week span of this intervention was too short to test that risk directly, and it is flagged below as a limitation rather than a settled finding.

On the Arabic-instruction side, drill and the mubasyarah method proved suited to habituating pronunciation and building a first layer of vocabulary, while the communicative approach and visual media, matching boards, flashcards, and a projected pronoun chart, gave students a reason to use that vocabulary rather than simply recognize it. Findings on gamification in online language learning point to a related mechanism, in which learners' motivation mediates the relationship between an engaging instructional format and eventual language achievement, rather than format alone driving the outcome; students have to want to use what they are shown, not merely be shown it.<sup>10</sup> This helps explain why the February 26 session that deliberately foregrounded speaking practice registered a jump in observed confidence: the shift was not primarily about adding new material, but about creating space for children to try out material they already partly knew.

**Analysis of Challenges and Strategic Solutions.** The team's central challenge was low internal motivation compounded by students' tendency toward distraction and boredom. Addressing it required looking past the classroom itself: the KKNT team organized a dedicated open Ta'lim session for mothers, aimed at building parental awareness so that families could reinforce the program's momentum through moral support at home rather than leaving that work entirely to two weeks of classroom contact. This choice reflects a pattern documented elsewhere in the literature on service-learning delivered to families in under-resourced settings, where a service-learning intervention's durability depends heavily on whether it is embedded in the household's existing routines rather than delivered as a self-contained, classroom-bound episode; home-based reinforcement of a short-term intervention has repeatedly proven decisive for whether behavioral or educational gains persist once the visiting team departs.<sup>11</sup> The technical difficulties encountered during the Zoom-based Ta'lim session – network instability, data limits, reduced participant focus relative to a face-to-face setting – illustrate the practical cost of that choice, and future iterations of this kind of program in similarly under-connected rural settings would likely benefit from a hybrid design that keeps a face-to-face fallback available rather than depending on video conferencing alone.

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<sup>9</sup>Elias Ratinho and Cátia Martins, "The Role of Gamified Learning Strategies in Student's Motivation in High School and Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *Heliyon* 9, no. 8 (2023): e19033, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e19033>.

<sup>10</sup>Zijun Shen, Minjie Lai, and Fei Wang, "Investigating the Influence of Gamification on Motivation and Learning Outcomes in Online Language Learning," *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (2024): 1295709, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1295709>.

<sup>11</sup>Stephen Wai Hang Kwok et al., "Faculty Service-Learning Students as Home-Visitors: Outcomes of a Lifestyle Modification Program for Vulnerable Families with Residents in Rural Indonesian Communities," *Frontiers in Public Health* 9 (2021): 597851, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.597851>.



Figure 6. KKNT students conducting an interactive Arabic assessment session using flashcards and a matching board.

**Discussion: Integrating Service Learning and Participatory Action Research.** Set against the wider literature, the case for combining SL and PAR in a single service initiative rests on more than convenience. Service Learning's emphasis on structured reflection is what let a group of KKNT students, most of them not yet trained Arabic-language specialists, design and revise a working curriculum inside two weeks, because the framework forced them to treat each session's outcome as data for the next one rather than as a fixed lesson plan to be repeated.<sup>12</sup> Participatory Action Research's cyclical structure did the complementary work on the tahfidz side: because RQ teachers and administrators were co-diagnosticians rather than recipients of an outside prescription, the pivot from Action 1 (an icebreaker alone) to Action 2 (a reward system tied to assessment sheets) reflected the community's own read of what had failed, not an assumption imported by the visiting team.<sup>13</sup> That distinction matters for transferability: a solution the community helped diagnose is more likely to survive the KKNT team's departure than one merely installed on their behalf, which is consistent with broader findings that action research functions less as a fixed technique than as a meta-methodology adaptable across very different institutional settings, education among them.<sup>14</sup> The comparison across the two programs also clarifies what each framework is, and is not, suited to solve. SL proved well matched to the Arabic class precisely because there was no existing routine to revise – the team could design from a blank slate and use reflection to correct course quickly. PAR proved well matched to tahfidz precisely because a routine already existed and the problem was diagnostic rather than constructive: something in the existing method was suppressing motivation, and only the people running that method day to day could identify what. Neither framework, used alone, would have addressed both problems efficiently within a two-week window; SL alone offers limited guidance for revitalizing an underperforming existing program, since it is oriented toward building new learning experiences rather than diagnosing why an

<sup>12</sup>Furco and Norvell, "What Is Service Learning?"

<sup>13</sup>Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon, *Action Research Planner*.

<sup>14</sup>Erro-Garcés and Alfaro-Tanco, "Action Research as a Meta-Methodology."

established one has stalled, while PAR alone offers limited guidance for building a program from nothing, since its cyclical logic presupposes an existing practice to reflect on. Read this way, the pairing is not merely additive but addresses a genuine gap between what each approach does well. Some caution is warranted before generalizing these findings. The sample was small (twenty-four and twenty-one children respectively), the intervention ran for only two weeks, and no post-handover follow-up data were collected to confirm whether the gains in participation and vocabulary mastery persisted once the KKNT team left. The reward system's effectiveness, in particular, should be read as evidence that it worked over this short horizon rather than as proof that it will sustain motivation over a full academic year without further adjustment, an important caveat given that gamified and reward-based strategies elsewhere have shown a tendency to lose their motivational pull once the initial novelty fades.<sup>15</sup> Future service-learning cohorts at this site, or comparable sites, would strengthen the evidence base considerably by returning for a follow-up evaluation several months after handover.

*Reflection and Sustainability.* The clearest lesson from this service project is that effective teaching has to be adaptive: children learn at different paces, so a uniform approach cannot serve them equally well. The KKNT team's dual positioning – as SL implementers in the tahfidz program and as PAR-guided initiators in the Arabic program – shows that students can act as a genuine bridge for translating academic knowledge into applied practice. Whether the evaluation system and the basic Arabic curriculum introduced here become a lasting foundation now depends on RQ's own administrators carrying that work forward, building the kind of religiously grounded, methodologically sound human-resource development this initiative was designed to seed.

## **Conclusion**

The Thematic Community Service Program (KKNT) conducted at Rumah Qur'an Raudhatul Hufadz achieved its stated objectives by integrating Service Learning and Participatory Action Research, addressing two distinct problems through two matched frameworks. In the tahfidz program, boredom and low motivation were addressed by replacing repetitive, one-directional teaching with a fun-learning approach and a participatory appreciation system; daily evaluation sheets paired with small rewards measurably increased the enthusiasm and active participation of the twenty-one students involved. In the Arabic language program, the team acted as the initiator of a curriculum that had not previously existed at RQ, and twenty-four children reached a working command of basic vocabulary and simple everyday conversation.

Beyond these two immediate results, the activity leaves a foundation for continuity: the open Ta'lim session extended the intervention's reach into participating families, encouraging moral support for children's learning from home even after the KKNT team's departure. Overall, the initiative confirms that differentiated teaching, grounded in the recognition that individual children learn differently, is necessary to obtain durable results in non-formal Islamic education, and that pairing SL's reflective structure with PAR's participatory diagnosis offers a transferable model for KKNT programs facing a similar combination of an absent curriculum and a demotivated existing one.

## *Acknowledgment*

The authors thank the administration and teaching staff of Rumah Qur'an (RQ) Raudhatul Hufadz for granting permission to conduct this activity and for their close cooperation throughout the two-week program. The authors also thank the Sei Mencirim Village Government, Medan Sunggal Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency, for institutional approval, and the parents and Ummahat of Sei Mencirim Village for their participation in the Ta'lim session and their support of their children's learning at home. Finally, the authors thank the Research and Community Service Center (P3M) of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam As-Sunnah, Deli Serdang, for facilitating and supervising this Thematic Community Service Program..

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<sup>15</sup>Ratinho and Martins, "Role of Gamified Learning Strategies."

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