



Madrasah as a Strategic Choice for Developing Excellent Individuals: A Community Engagement Experience at MA Darut Taqwa Semarang

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Keywords: *madrasah, Islamic education, motivation, future orientation, value-based learning, community engagement*

Abstract: *This community engagement initiative aimed to enhance students' awareness of the strategic role of madrasahs in developing spiritually grounded, intellectually capable, and socially responsible individuals. Conducted at MA Darut Taqwa Semarang on July 17, 2024, the program employed a motivational and participatory approach, integrating lectures, reflective discussions, and storytelling centered on Islamic values and success narratives of madrasah alumni. Participants included 86 Grade X students. Post-session evaluations revealed significant positive shifts in student perceptions. Among Grade X students, 82% expressed increased pride in their madrasah identity, and 76% developed greater optimism about their future success through madrasah education. Motivational gains were also observed as students redefined academic effort as part of spiritual devotion. These results suggest that when learning is contextualized within a value-based framework, it fosters intrinsic motivation and future-oriented thinking. Theoretically, the program supports expectancy-value and purpose-based education models by demonstrating how spiritual framing can shape motivation and aspiration. Practically, it offers a replicable model for enhancing student engagement in faith-based schools. On a broader level, the program contributes to the reframing of madrasahs as centers of leadership development and ethical formation in a morally uncertain world. This activity affirms that madrasahs, when supported by strategic communication and reflective pedagogy, can serve as transformative educational spaces for youth, particularly those from underserved backgrounds.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Madrasahs, as Islamic-based educational institutions, have long been recognized as pivotal in nurturing individuals with balanced intellectual and moral capacities. In an era marked by moral degradation and identity crises among youth, madrasahs offer an integrative learning model that harmonizes academic excellence with spiritual depth (Huang et al., 2019; Qoyyumillah et al., 2025). While public perception often associates madrasahs with limited career opportunities, growing empirical evidence indicates that students in madrasahs develop higher resilience,

religious commitment, and ethical behavior compared to their peers in secular schools (Yasin et al., 2023).

This community engagement initiative was designed to address the misperceptions about madrasahs and rekindle student motivation. Thematically, the activity focused on: (1) why madrasahs are a strategic choice for shaping excellent individuals, (2) how to foster learning motivation based on conviction, and (3) the importance of cultivating optimism about the future within the madrasah framework.

2. METHOD

2.1. Setting and Participants

The program was held at MA Darut Taqwa, Semarang, on Wednesday, July 17, 2024. Participants included first and second-year students (Grades X), totaling 40 students.

2.2. Design and Approach

The program employed a participatory and motivational training approach, combining lecture, group reflection, storytelling, and interactive discussion.

2.3. Material Development

Training materials were designed using a value-based educational framework, incorporating elements from Islamic pedagogy (Al-Attas, 1980) and motivational psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2013).

2.4. Data Collection

Data were collected through pre- and post-session reflections, observation of participant behavior, and an open-ended questionnaire.)

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Theme 1: Madrasah as a Strategic Platform for Excellence

The majority of Grade X students initially perceived madrasahs as a “second-choice” educational path, often considered inferior to public or secular schools. However, post-session reflections revealed a significant shift in perception: 82% of students expressed pride in their identity as madrasah students and began to articulate the notion of “excellence” in spiritual and moral terms—not merely academic achievement.

This change in perspective was reinforced by narratives of successful madrasah alumni who had gained admission to prestigious universities, secured scholarships, and become change agents in society. These examples inspired students to view madrasah not as a fallback option, but as a relevant and promising platform for personal and social development.

3.2. Theme 2: Strengthening Motivation through Conviction

Grade X students exhibited heightened learning enthusiasm after recognizing that seeking knowledge in a madrasah is part of religious worship. Several students even linked their learning motivation to the concept of *jihad fi sabilillah* in the intellectual domain, as reflected in their statements:

"I want to study seriously because in the madrasah I feel closer to religious values."
(Participant reflection, Grade X student)

This finding suggests that learning motivation can be significantly strengthened when aligned with spiritual and religious dimensions. The perception of studying as a sacred endeavor provided intrinsic meaning that deepened their academic engagement.



Figure 1. Student Motivation Session

3.3. Theme 3: Future Optimism with Madrasah Education

This theme represents the most prominent impact of the community engagement activity: the emergence of future-oriented optimism among Grade X students concerning their educational journey through the madrasah. Prior to the session, only 39% of students believed that a madrasah background would help them achieve their aspirations.

Following the session, 76% of participants stated they were confident in becoming future leaders, professionals, or academics through madrasah education.

Two main factors contributed to this increase:

1. Exposure to inspirational success stories of madrasah alumni.
2. A deeper understanding that integrity, moral character, and religious knowledge are strategic assets in a time of widespread ethical disruption.

As emphasized by (Ashfaq, 2022), value-based education contributes significantly to the development of *purpose in life* and future aspirations among adolescents. This session clearly validated such findings within the context of madrasah-based education.



Figure 2. Cultivating Optimism in Students

The results of this engagement support existing literature on the importance of developing future orientation as a core educational outcome. Grade X students—who are in a formative phase of adolescent development—require a strong sense of confidence that their educational path will lead to meaningful and successful futures.

Student optimism regarding madrasah education evolved beyond mere emotional reactions into reflective conviction. This aligns with future expectancy theory (Scherrer & Preckel, 2019), which posits that individuals' beliefs about their future influence their motivation, effort, and goal-directed behavior. Madrasah education in this case provided a space for meaning-making and long-term vision development.

These findings further affirm (Henry et al., 2017) argument that spiritual and value-based education environments foster psychological resilience and goal clarity—especially among students from vulnerable or underserved communities.

From a managerial perspective, these insights call for institutional action. Madrasah leaders and

policymakers must embed structured motivational interventions, alumni mentorship, and spiritual-academic integration into their curricular and counseling strategies. Doing so would not only sustain student optimism but also strengthen the institutional identity of madrasahs as transformative spaces for youth empowerment.

4. CONCLUSION

The community engagement conducted at MA Darut Taqwa Semarang provides compelling evidence that motivational interventions grounded in Islamic values can significantly reshape students' perceptions of madrasah education. When students are invited to reflect on the strategic potential of their educational environment—particularly through spiritual framing and value-driven success narratives—they begin to view madrasah as a legitimate, even advantageous, platform for achieving holistic excellence.

This program resulted in demonstrable shifts in Grade X students' mindset: from initial doubt to confidence, from passive participation to active engagement, and from viewing madrasah as a secondary choice to embracing it as a place of personal growth and future opportunity. The integration of moral, academic, and spiritual elements created a learning environment that not only enhanced motivation but also cultivated a strong sense of purpose.

Theoretical contributions of this program include support for expectancy-value theory and the importance of meaning-making in adolescent education. It affirms that future orientation and intrinsic motivation are enhanced when learning is linked to personal and spiritual significance. The results reinforce existing research on the power of value-based education to foster resilience, identity formation, and long-term aspiration among youth. From a practical perspective, this initiative offers a replicable model for other madrasahs seeking to strengthen student engagement and institutional identity. By combining storytelling, reflective learning, and peer inspiration, educators can instill both pride and purpose in students navigating a competitive and morally complex world. On a societal level, the activity contributes to reframing public perceptions of madrasahs from traditional or marginal institutions to dynamic spaces of innovation, leadership development, and character building. The findings encourage policymakers and religious educators to invest in integrated pedagogical approaches that prepare students for both worldly success and ethical citizenship.

Future initiatives may consider expanding this model through digital platforms, alumni mentoring programs, or longitudinal studies to assess long-term outcomes. Ultimately, when madrasah education is positioned strategically and communicated effectively, it can serve as a cornerstone in the national project of cultivating excellent and ethical human resources.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the principal, teachers, and students of MA Darut Taqwa Semarang for their active participation and support throughout the program.

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