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Internalizing Worship Discipline through Voluntary Fasting on Mondays and Thursdays: A Case Study at Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center

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Abstract

This study examined how voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays was implemented at Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center and how participating children, parents, and the teacher perceived its contribution to worship discipline. It also identified conditions supporting and constraining participation. A qualitative descriptive single-case design was employed from June to July 2026. Participants were one teacher, ten children aged 8–15 years, and five parents selected purposively because of their direct involvement in the program. Data were generated through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Following the interactive model of qualitative analysis, data were condensed, displayed, coded, compared across sources, and interpreted through conclusion drawing and verification. Trustworthiness was supported through source, method, and time triangulation. The program connected WhatsApp reminders, parental assistance with the pre-dawn meal, afternoon Qur'anic learning, Thursday collective fast-breaking, congregational Maghrib and Isha prayers, teacher role-modeling, peer companionship, and rewards. Participants perceived development in punctuality, consistency in fasting and daily prayer, honesty, responsibility, and emotional regulation. These patterns were uneven and remained influenced by adult reminders, rewards, family routines, physical capacity, school schedules, missed pre-dawn meals, non-fasting peers, and exposure to the Free Nutritious Meals program. Rather than treating repeated fasting as automatic internalization, this study shows that worship discipline is negotiated across institutional, familial, peer, and school environments. The study proposes a distributed support model of religious habituation in which a non-formal Islamic institution, families, peers, and digital communication jointly sustain children's worship practices. It offers context-sensitive guidance for designing voluntary, developmentally appropriate, and non-coercive religious programs. These findings clarify the distinction between observable compliance and personally endorsed commitment.

Keywords: worship discipline; voluntary fasting; religious habituation; self-regulation; Qur'anic learning center

Introduction

Discipline occupies a fundamental position in Islamic teachings because religious observance requires consistency, adherence to prescribed procedures, and responsibility for one's actions. From an Islamic educational perspective, discipline encompasses both spiritual and moral dimensions: the former concerns an individual's commitment to worship, whereas the latter is reflected in self-control, honesty, responsibility, and respect for shared norms. Obligatory practices such as prayer require Muslims to observe specified times, conditions, and procedures, while fasting requires them to regulate bodily impulses and behavior over a defined period. Worship discipline, therefore, should not be understood merely as formal compliance with religious rules but as the gradual development of an internally regulated commitment to religious practice. Such discipline does not emerge instantaneously; it requires a structured, gradual, and continuous educational process through which religious values are repeatedly practiced and progressively integrated into everyday conduct (Nurwahyudin & Supriyanto, 2021).

The development of self-control during childhood is particularly important because children are still learning to regulate their attention, emotions, impulses, and goal-directed behavior. Longitudinal evidence indicates that childhood self-control is associated with consequential outcomes in adulthood, including health, financial stability, and law-abiding behavior (Moffitt et al., 2011). This evidence does not imply that religious practices automatically produce such outcomes; rather, it demonstrates the broader developmental significance of providing children with age-appropriate opportunities to practice self-regulation. In the context of worship, discipline may be observed through punctuality, consistency in performing religious practices, adherence to religious rules, honesty in reporting one's behavior, and the capacity to regulate emotions and impulses. Nevertheless, observable compliance should be distinguished from internalization because children may initially participate in a religious activity to obtain a reward, conform to group expectations, or respond to adult supervision rather than because they have personally accepted its value.

Education in Indonesia is provided not only through formal institutions but also through non-formal educational settings, including *Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an* (TPA), or Qur'anic learning centers (Syaadah et al., 2022). A TPA supplements formal schooling by providing children with instruction and practical guidance in Qur'anic literacy, Islamic beliefs, worship, and commendable conduct. Its educational role therefore extends beyond teaching children how to read and memorize the Qur'an; it also includes creating a social environment in which religious values can be demonstrated, practiced, discussed, and reinforced. Through regular participation in TPA activities, children can learn to respect time, follow religious norms, perform worship consistently, and assume personal responsibility for their religious commitments (Munajid, 2025). Despite this potential, non-formal Islamic education remains underrepresented in

research compared with formal schools and pesantren, particularly concerning the processes through which repeated religious practices become personally meaningful to children.

Fasting provides a particularly relevant context in which to examine the cultivation of worship discipline. In Islamic teaching, fasting involves more than abstaining from food and drink; it also requires intention, temporal discipline, honesty, patience, emotional restraint, and awareness of one's relationship with God and other people. Fasting can consequently function as an educational practice through which children learn to manage their behavior and develop religious responsibility (Aryanto, 2022). Normatively, Ramadan fasting is intended to cultivate *taqwa*, as stated in Qur'an 2:183 (Subhi et al., 2025). In addition to obligatory Ramadan fasting, voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays is an established Islamic practice that provides recurrent opportunities for religious training throughout the year. Its schedule requires children to prepare for the pre-dawn meal, refrain from eating and drinking during the day, regulate their emotions and social behavior, and break the fast at the prescribed time. These recurring demands make voluntary fasting relevant to the cultivation of self-control and self-regulation (Miftah et al., 2023).

From the perspective of habit-formation research, repetition in a relatively stable context can gradually strengthen the automaticity of behavior, although the pace of this process varies considerably among individuals (Lally et al., 2010). This insight supports the educational value of recurrent religious practice but also cautions against assuming that repetition alone constitutes internalization. A child may become accustomed to a behavioral routine without necessarily understanding or personally endorsing its religious meaning. Self-determination theory provides a useful distinction in this regard. It conceptualizes internalization as a process through which externally encouraged behavior is progressively accepted as personally meaningful and increasingly performed with a sense of volition. Autonomy-supportive relationships, opportunities to develop competence, and a sense of relatedness can facilitate more autonomous forms of motivation, whereas controlling practices and excessive dependence on rewards may preserve external regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Accordingly, the educational significance of voluntary fasting lies not only in whether children complete the fast but also in how parental guidance, teacher role-modeling, peer support, reflection, and reward practices shape their reasons for participating.

Children's religious development also occurs within multiple and interacting social contexts. The family is a central setting in which religious beliefs and practices are demonstrated, interpreted, and reinforced, while teachers, peers, religious institutions, schools, and the wider community may strengthen or complicate this process. Research on adolescent religiosity has shown that parents, friends, and institutional settings collectively shape religious participation and the subjective importance attributed to religion (Regnerus et al., 2004). Similarly, a relational spirituality perspective emphasizes that specific family practices and parent–child relationships can

either facilitate or constrain the development of religious meaning (Mahoney, 2010). These perspectives are especially relevant to a TPA-based fasting program because much of the practice occurs outside the direct supervision of TPA teachers. Children's ability and willingness to wake for the pre-dawn meal, maintain the fast while attending school, perform prayers, and resist social pressures are likely to depend on the alignment—or tension—between the TPA, family, peer group, and school environments.

Existing studies of voluntary fasting and character formation have primarily examined formal educational settings, including *madrasah ibtidaiyah* and pesantren. Research specifically addressing the cultivation of worship discipline through voluntary fasting in non-formal institutions such as TPAs remains limited (Vitriani & Arifi, 2026). Moreover, previous discussions have frequently emphasized the positive outcomes of fasting without sufficiently examining how discipline is cultivated, how children interpret the practice, how external encouragement may develop into personally endorsed religious commitment, and why participation varies among children. This gap is important because a TPA has limited daily contact with its students and cannot rely on the continuous supervision typically available in full-time formal or residential institutions. A study of a TPA program can therefore contribute a contextually distinctive account of how a non-formal religious institution coordinates with families and mobilizes peer relationships to sustain religious habituation beyond the institution itself.

Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center in Cupak, Solok Regency, introduced a voluntary fasting program on Mondays and Thursdays on August 25, 2025. The program combines reminders and coordination with parents through WhatsApp, collective fast-breaking activities at the surau on Thursdays, congregational Maghrib and Isha prayers, Qur'anic review, religious instruction, teacher role-modeling, and rewards for children's participation. Preliminary observations showed that 38 children had participated in the program, but their involvement and consistency varied. Some children required substantial parental encouragement, and approximately one to three children occasionally missed the pre-dawn meal and did not complete the fast. Children also encountered differences in physical stamina, psychological readiness, family assistance, school activities, and peer environments. These variations suggest that fasting habituation should not be treated as a uniform intervention with an automatic effect. Instead, it should be examined as a situated developmental and educational process involving bodily capacity, individual motivation, adult guidance, peer support, family routines, and religious meaning-making.

Against this background, the present qualitative case study investigates the cultivation and internalization of worship discipline through voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays at Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center. It addresses three questions: (1) How is the voluntary fasting program designed and implemented through collaboration between the TPA and children's families? (2) How do participating children, parents, and the TPA teacher describe the development of punctuality, consistency in worship,

adherence to religious rules, honesty, and emotional self-regulation? and (3) What individual, familial, institutional, and school-related conditions facilitate or constrain children's participation and the internalization of worship discipline? Rather than attempting to establish causal effectiveness, the study seeks to provide a contextually grounded explanation of how religious habituation is experienced and negotiated within a non-formal Islamic educational setting. Theoretically, it connects Islamic religious habituation with habit formation, motivational internalization, and the social ecology of religious development. Practically, it may offer transferable insights for Qur'anic learning centers and families seeking to design voluntary, developmentally appropriate, and relationally supportive programs for cultivating children's worship discipline.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with a single-case-study approach to examine the cultivation of worship discipline through voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays. The study was conducted from June to July 2026 at Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center, Balai Tangah, Paraku Hamlet, Cupak Village, Gunung Talang District, Solok Regency, West Sumatra, Indonesia. The site was purposively selected because it actively implemented a structured voluntary fasting program as part of its religious character education. The case included the program activities, participating children, the TPA teacher, and parental involvement. The study sought to understand the implementation and participants' experiences rather than establish the program's causal effectiveness.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the program. They comprised one TPA teacher who designed and supervised the program, 10 children aged 8 to 15 years who regularly participated in voluntary fasting, and five parents who assisted the children at home. The children provided information about their fasting experiences, motivation, worship routines, and challenges, while the parents described family support and behavioral changes observed at home. The sample was considered adequate because the participants possessed specific and relevant experience of the case, consistent with the principle of information power in qualitative research (Malterud et al., 2016). To protect confidentiality, participants were identified as T1 for the teacher, C1 to C10 for the children, and P1 to P5 for the parents.

Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations covered Qur'anic memorization review, religious learning, Thursday collective fast-breaking, communal meals, and congregational Maghrib and Isha prayers. Field notes documented children's participation, punctuality, interactions, emotional responses, teacher role-modeling, and difficulties during the program. Individual interviews were conducted in Indonesian using age-appropriate and non-leading questions. The teacher was interviewed about the program's

objectives, implementation, motivational strategies, rewards, and challenges. Children were asked about their reasons for fasting, experiences of the pre-dawn meal, physical and emotional challenges, school-related temptations, prayer routines, and understanding of fasting. Parents were asked about household support, children's worship practices, behavioral changes, and communication with the TPA. Documentary data included program records, attendance information, WhatsApp reminders, activity photographs, and teachers' notes.

Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively following the interactive model of data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification (Dhewa et al., 2023; Zulfirman, 2022). Interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were read repeatedly and coded according to program implementation, punctuality, worship consistency, adherence to religious rules, honesty, emotional regulation, motivation, family support, teacher role-modeling, peer influence, physical difficulties, and school-related constraints. Both deductive codes derived from the research questions and inductive codes emerging from the data were used. Related codes were grouped into categories and themes following the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data from children, parents, the teacher, observations, and documents were compared to identify convergence, differences, and negative cases. Particular attention was given to children who missed the pre-dawn meal, discontinued fasting, experienced physical difficulties, or still depended on external encouragement.

Trustworthiness was established through source, method, and time triangulation. Source triangulation compared information from the teacher, children, and parents. Method triangulation compared interviews, observations, and documents, while time triangulation involved collecting data during different program activities and periods. The researcher maintained field notes and analytical memos to distinguish participants' accounts from personal interpretations. Contradictory evidence was retained rather than excluded from the analysis. Preliminary interpretations were also compared with the original data to ensure that the themes accurately represented participants' experiences. The reporting of the study followed the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research and the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (O'Brien et al., 2014; Tong et al., 2007).

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the management of Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center. Parents or legal guardians were informed about the study, and children received an age-appropriate explanation before participating. Participation was voluntary, and the children could decline to answer questions or withdraw without affecting their TPA activities or access to educational support. Participant identities were replaced with codes, and personal information from interviews, WhatsApp communications, and photographs was kept confidential. Research participation was separated from participation in the fasting program. Children were not required to continue fasting when they felt unwell, and

voluntary fasting was not treated as a condition for receiving education or favorable treatment at the TPA.

Results and Discussion

Results

This qualitative case study was conducted at Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center in Cupak Village, Gunung Talang District, Solok Regency, West Sumatra. Data were obtained from observations and interviews involving one TPA teacher, 10 children aged 8 to 15 years, and five parents. The analysis produced three principal themes: the organization of the voluntary fasting program, perceived changes in children's worship discipline, and factors supporting or constraining program participation.

Organization of the Voluntary Fasting Program

Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center introduced its voluntary fasting program on Mondays and Thursdays on August 25, 2025. The program was designed as a recurring religious practice through which children could learn punctuality, consistency in worship, adherence to religious rules, honesty, and self-control. Its implementation involved collaboration between the TPA teacher and parents because fasting took place across two interconnected settings: the TPA and the children's homes.

Preparation began on the evening before each fasting day. The teacher sent reminders through the parents' WhatsApp group and encouraged parents to prepare the children, wake them for the pre-dawn meal, and monitor their physical condition. This communication also allowed parents to report difficulties such as children not waking up, feeling unwell, or being unable to participate because of family activities. The data indicated that parental involvement was necessary because the teacher could not directly supervise the children during the pre-dawn meal or while they were at home and school.

On fasting days, the children were expected to arrive at the TPA at 4:30 p.m. to participate in Qur'anic memorization review and religious learning activities. The program followed different arrangements on Mondays and Thursdays. On Thursdays, the TPA organized a collective fast-breaking activity at the surau. The children participated in Qur'anic learning, broke their fast together, performed the Maghrib prayer in congregation, shared a meal, attended a short religious lesson, and concluded the activities with the congregational Isha prayer. On Mondays, the children completed their afternoon lessons at the TPA and broke their fast with their families at home.

Observations indicated that the Thursday arrangement created a more communal atmosphere because the children completed the final hours of fasting with peers who were experiencing the same physical challenges. The Monday arrangement gave parents a larger role in accompanying the children and maintaining their worship routines at home. The two arrangements

therefore connected institutional guidance with family-based religious practice.

The program also employed positive reinforcement. Children who demonstrated regular participation and discipline received praise, school supplies, or support for educational trips. The available data suggested that these rewards encouraged participation, particularly during the early stages of the program. However, the findings did not establish that rewards always led to intrinsic religious motivation. For some children, participation continued to depend on reminders, adult supervision, peer involvement, or the expectation of recognition.

Perceived Changes in Children's Worship Discipline

The interview and observation data indicated perceived changes in three related dimensions of worship discipline: punctuality, consistency in worship, and adherence to religious rules. These changes were not identical among all participants and were more evident among children who participated regularly and received consistent support at home.

Before the program, some children were described as frequently arriving late for Qur'anic learning activities. Several children also found it difficult to wake for the pre-dawn meal, which sometimes affected their ability to complete the fast and perform the dawn prayer on time. Following repeated participation, some children reportedly began using alarms and preparing themselves to wake earlier. Regular participants also became more attentive to the scheduled starting time of 4:30 p.m. at the TPA. Parents and the teacher further observed that several children became more responsive to the call to prayer and required fewer reminders to prepare for prayer.

These patterns suggest an emerging awareness of worship time. Nevertheless, the degree of independence varied. Some children could wake for the pre-dawn meal and attend TPA activities on time, while others still required repeated assistance from their parents. The findings should therefore be interpreted as perceived behavioral development rather than evidence that every child had achieved independent time management.

A second perceived change concerned consistency in fasting and daily prayer. At the beginning of the program, several children depended strongly on encouragement from parents and the teacher. After participating repeatedly, some children appeared more familiar with the physical and religious routines of voluntary fasting. They showed greater willingness to prepare for the fast and, when physically able, complete it until sunset.

Parents also associated repeated fasting with greater regularity in the five daily prayers. Some children reportedly became more attentive to prayer times and more willing to join congregational prayers at the TPA or perform prayers with their families. Participation in voluntary fasting was also perceived as helping children become more familiar with the routines required during Ramadan. However, these findings were based on participant accounts and observations during the study period. The study did not use systematic

before-and-after measurements, follow the children into a subsequent Ramadan period, or compare participants with children who did not join the program. Consequently, the findings do not establish a causal or long-term effect.

The third perceived change involved honesty, responsibility, and emotional regulation. Before the program, children were described as sometimes becoming irritable, arguing with peers, or responding emotionally when they felt tired, hungry, or thirsty. During repeated participation, some children reportedly made greater efforts to control their anger, speech, and interactions with others because they understood that fasting involved behavioral restraint as well as abstinence from food and drink.

Honesty was observed when children informed their parents or the teacher that they had broken the fast or had missed the pre-dawn meal. Such disclosures were interpreted as emerging responsibility because the children chose to report their actual condition rather than conceal it. A child's inability to complete the fast was not necessarily evidence of poor discipline. It could also reflect physical limitations, insufficient nutritional preparation, family circumstances, or an appropriate response to feeling unwell.

Overall, the findings indicate that the program provided repeated opportunities for children to practice punctuality, worship consistency, honesty, and emotional restraint. However, the data did not demonstrate that all participants had fully internalized these values. Their behavior remained influenced by parental reminders, teacher expectations, rewards, peer participation, and physical capacity.

Supporting and Constraining Factors

Parental support emerged as a central factor in sustaining children's participation. Parents prepared the pre-dawn meal, woke the children, monitored their physical condition, reminded them about prayer, and communicated with the TPA teacher through WhatsApp. Some parents also fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, allowing their children to observe the same religious practice at home. This form of role-modeling helped children feel accompanied rather than being the only family members who were fasting.

Family support was not uniform. Some parents were consistently available to prepare the children, while others experienced difficulties because of sleep schedules, work, travel, or other household responsibilities. When a child or parent woke late, the child sometimes missed the pre-dawn meal and became too weak to continue fasting. Family travel and other commitments also interrupted participation. These findings indicate that children's consistency depended partly on the stability of household routines and parental availability.

The teacher also supported participation through role-modeling and positive reinforcement. The teacher fasted with the children, accompanied them during collective fast-breaking, supervised congregational prayers, and provided encouragement throughout the program. This visible participation

connected verbal instruction with actual practice. Rewards in the form of praise, school supplies, and educational travel support also encouraged children to remain involved. Nevertheless, the continued use of rewards requires careful consideration because excessive reliance on external incentives may make it difficult to determine whether children participate because they personally value the practice or because they expect recognition.

Peer support was especially visible during Thursday activities. Collective fast-breaking created a sense of companionship and allowed the children to complete the final hours of fasting with friends. The shared experience appeared to reduce feelings of isolation and strengthened children's willingness to continue fasting. The pleasant atmosphere during collective meals and congregational worship also made the program more attractive. However, peer participation should not automatically be interpreted as intrinsic motivation. Religious commitment, group belonging, friendship, and social recognition may have operated simultaneously.

Physical discomfort was the most prominent constraint. Children experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue, and daytime sleepiness, particularly after attending formal school. These experiences differed because the participants ranged from 8 to 15 years of age and therefore varied in physical development, stamina, and daily activities. Children who missed the pre-dawn meal were more likely to feel weak and unable to continue fasting. Physical difficulty should therefore be understood as a developmental and health-related consideration rather than a lack of commitment.

The formal school environment created further challenges. Children encountered classmates who were not fasting and were exposed to food and drink during school hours. The distribution of food through the Free Nutritious Meals program, known as MBG, was described as particularly challenging because children could see and smell the food and sometimes received invitations from friends to eat. Resisting these temptations required self-control, but children's responses varied according to hunger, peer relationships, family preparation, and personal motivation.

Taken together, the findings show that children's participation was shaped by interactions among personal motivation, physical capacity, parental support, teacher role-modeling, peer relationships, household routines, and the school environment. The program created a structured setting in which worship discipline could be practiced, but its outcomes were neither uniform nor determined solely by fasting. The evidence supports a cautious interpretation that repeated voluntary fasting, when accompanied by family and institutional support, was perceived as contributing to the cultivation of worship discipline among participating children.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the voluntary fasting program at Surau Bansa Qur'anic Learning Center provided a recurring setting in which children could practice punctuality, consistency in worship, honesty, and emotional restraint. These findings can be understood through Al-Ghazali's concepts of

riyadhah, or practical spiritual training, and *ta'wid*, or habituation. According to Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, moral character is not formed solely through theoretical instruction but through the repeated practice of valued actions until they become more stable dispositions. In this case, voluntary fasting, congregational prayer, and Qur'anic memorization review gave children opportunities to practice religious discipline rather than merely learn its normative principles.

The program also corresponds with Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's emphasis on habituation and adult role-modeling in *Tarbiyatul Aulad fi al-Islam*. The teacher and several parents did not simply instruct the children to fast but participated in the practice themselves. Their involvement connected verbal religious instruction with observable behavior. This finding supports the view that children's religious education is strengthened when adults demonstrate the practices they expect children to adopt. Nevertheless, repeated behavior should not automatically be equated with complete internalization. Habit-formation research indicates that behavioral automaticity develops through repetition in relatively stable contexts, but its pace differs considerably between individuals (Lally et al., 2010). The variation found among the children, including missed pre-dawn meals, incomplete fasts, and continued dependence on reminders, is therefore consistent with the understanding that habituation is gradual and nonuniform.

From a psychological perspective, the findings indicate a possible movement from external regulation toward more personally accepted forms of religious motivation. At the beginning of the program, children's participation was influenced by parental reminders, teacher expectations, peer involvement, and rewards. Some children later appeared more willing to wake for the pre-dawn meal, attend the TPA on time, and complete the fast. However, the data do not establish that external motivation had been fully transformed into intrinsic motivation. Self-determination theory distinguishes intrinsic motivation from internalized extrinsic motivation. A child may voluntarily perform a religious practice because it is personally valued even when the practice is not inherently enjoyable (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Thus, the most appropriate interpretation is that some children showed signs of increasingly autonomous regulation, while others continued to rely on external support.

The use of rewards requires particular attention. School supplies, praise, and educational trips may have helped initiate and sustain participation, but rewards alone cannot demonstrate internalization. If rewards are experienced as controlling, children may focus on the expected outcome rather than the religious meaning of fasting. Conversely, when recognition communicates encouragement, competence, and appreciation without coercion, it may support participation. The educational challenge is therefore to use rewards temporarily and proportionally while increasing opportunities for children to reflect on the meaning of fasting, make age-appropriate choices, and develop personal reasons for worship. This distinction is important because compliance under supervision is not equivalent to worship discipline grounded in personal responsibility.

The findings concerning punctuality and emotional regulation are consistent with Vitriani and Arifi's (2026) conclusion that fasting may contribute to children's self-control. Fasting required the children to attend to specific times for the pre-dawn meal, TPA activities, prayers, and breaking the fast. This temporal structure is also compatible with the Islamic emphasis on the responsible use of time expressed in Surah Al-Asr, verses 1 to 3. At the behavioral level, children were encouraged to manage anger, speech, and interactions with peers while experiencing hunger and fatigue. Contemporary research similarly conceptualizes self-regulation as the capacity to direct attention, emotion, and behavior in accordance with goals and contextual expectations (McClelland & Cameron, 2012). However, observed improvements cannot be attributed exclusively to fasting because children were simultaneously exposed to teacher supervision, congregational prayer, parental guidance, peer support, and rewards.

Participants also perceived voluntary fasting as preparation for obligatory Ramadan fasting. Repeated experience with waking early, managing hunger, and observing fasting times may reduce unfamiliarity with Ramadan routines. Nevertheless, the present study did not follow the children into a subsequent Ramadan period or directly assess physical and psychological readiness. The finding should therefore be understood as a perceived preparatory benefit rather than a demonstrated long-term effect. Children's age, health, nutritional preparation, school schedule, and physical capacity must remain central considerations. An inability to complete a voluntary fast should not be interpreted as moral failure or insufficient discipline.

A major contribution of the case lies in the interaction between the TPA and the family. Because the TPA met the children only for limited periods, parents were responsible for the pre-dawn meal, physical monitoring, prayer reminders, and Monday fast-breaking. This pattern is consistent with research showing that children's religious development is shaped by the combined influence of family, peers, and institutional environments (Regnerus et al., 2004). Mahoney (2010) further emphasizes that religious development within families depends not merely on religious identification but on specific relational practices through which religious meaning is communicated and negotiated. At Surau Bansa, parental role-modeling and supportive communication appeared to help children sustain the practice beyond the direct supervision of the teacher.

The importance of family involvement is also consistent with the religious responsibility described in Surah At-Tahrim, verse 6. However, the findings show that parental support was not equally available to all children. A child's participation could be interrupted when parents woke late, family members traveled, or household routines changed. Therefore, differences in fasting consistency should not be attributed solely to children's motivation. They also reflected variations in parental availability, family organization, and material circumstances. This ecological interpretation prevents the analysis from placing excessive responsibility on individual children.

Communication through WhatsApp functioned as a practical connection between the TPA and participating families. It enabled reminders, reports about children's health, and coordination of program activities. Nevertheless, the study did not directly compare families who actively responded to WhatsApp messages with those who did not. It also did not establish that digital communication reduced school-related challenges such as exposure to non-fasting peers or the Free Nutritious Meals program. WhatsApp should therefore be understood as a coordination mechanism rather than proof of program effectiveness.

Peer relationships had both supportive and challenging functions. At the TPA, collective fast-breaking created companionship and allowed children to complete the final hours of fasting with friends. At formal school, however, the presence of non-fasting peers and food distribution through the MBG program created temptation. These contrasting conditions support an ecological understanding of religious development in which the same peer environment may encourage or complicate religious practice depending on the setting. The children's responses were likely influenced by the interaction of personal motivation, hunger, age, peer relationships, and perceived social expectations.

The present study extends the findings of Vitriani and Arifi (2026), who examined fasting and self-control in a formal Islamic elementary school context. Its contribution is not that it proves non-formal education to be more effective than formal education, but that it identifies a different mechanism for sustaining religious habituation. Surau Bansa relied on coordination across the TPA, family, peer group, and digital communication rather than continuous institutional supervision. The case therefore suggests that limited instructional time in a non-formal institution can be partly addressed through distributed support across children's immediate social environments.

Several alternative explanations must nevertheless be considered. Perceived behavioral changes may have been influenced by children's increasing age, parental attention, group belonging, teacher expectations, or the reward system rather than fasting alone. The selection of children who regularly participated may also have favored more positive accounts and underrepresented children who discontinued the program. In addition, the findings relied substantially on reports from the teacher and parents, both of whom were directly invested in the program. Social desirability may have encouraged children to describe their experiences positively. These factors limit causal claims and require the findings to be interpreted as context-dependent perceptions and observed patterns.

Overall, the study suggests that voluntary fasting can provide a practical setting for cultivating worship discipline when it is implemented voluntarily, supported by adults, adapted to children's physical capacities, and connected to reflection on religious meaning. Its principal contribution is the identification of a collaborative model in which a non-formal Islamic institution, families, peers, and digital communication jointly support

religious habituation. The transferability of this model to other Qur'anic learning centers depends on local family involvement, teacher capacity, safeguarding practices, and the social conditions surrounding participating children.

Conclusion

This study found that the cultivation of worship discipline through voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays extended beyond the repeated performance of fasting itself. It involved the interaction of structured TPA activities, parental assistance, teacher role-modeling, peer support, collective worship, digital communication, and positive reinforcement. Participating children showed perceived development in punctuality, consistency in worship, honesty, responsibility, and emotional regulation. The broader role of family and social support was more prominent than initially assumed, challenging the view that religious discipline can be developed through institutional instruction or behavioral repetition alone. However, these changes were uneven, and some children continued to depend on adult reminders, rewards, and supportive household routines.

The study supports previous findings that repeated religious practice can provide children with opportunities to develop self-control and worship discipline. At the same time, it questions the assumption that repeated participation automatically demonstrates complete internalization or intrinsic motivation. Its principal contribution is the concept of a distributed support model of religious habituation, in which a non-formal Islamic institution, family members, peers, and digital communication jointly sustain children's religious practices across different settings. This model enriches discussions of Islamic habituation by connecting *riyadhah*, *ta'wid*, role-modeling, motivational internalization, and the social ecology of children's religious development.

This study was limited to a single Qur'anic learning center and involved one teacher, 10 children, and five parents. The purposive selection of children who regularly participated may have underrepresented those who participated inconsistently or discontinued the program. The findings also relied substantially on accounts from participants who were directly involved in the program, making social-desirability bias possible. Differences related to age, gender, health, family circumstances, and length of participation were not examined systematically. In addition, the study did not employ a comparison group, systematic before-and-after measurements, or long-term observation. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all Qur'anic learning centers or interpreted as evidence that the fasting program independently caused the reported behavioral changes.

Future research should involve multiple Qur'anic learning centers, larger and more diverse participant groups, and children with regular, irregular, and discontinued participation. Longitudinal or mixed-method studies could examine how worship discipline and motivation develop over

time and whether perceived changes continue during Ramadan and after the program ends. Future studies should also distinguish observable compliance from personally endorsed religious commitment and examine how rewards, age, physical capacity, parental support, and school environments influence participation. For practice, TPA administrators should maintain close communication with families, use rewards proportionally, provide opportunities for children to reflect on the meaning of fasting, and ensure that participation remains voluntary and appropriate to each child's health and developmental condition.

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