

Implementation of the Independent Quran Study Program as an Alternative Form of Islamic Religious Education in a Remote Muslim-Minority Area: The Case of Ujung Deleng Village

Mustika H. Bako¹

¹ Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia; mustikabako41@guru.smp.belajar.id

* WhatsApp Number

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Abstract

Islamic religious education plays an important role in developing students' faith, character, and Islamic identity. However, the provision of Islamic education services still faces various challenges, particularly in remote areas with limited availability of Islamic education teachers and environments dominated by non-Muslim communities. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program as an alternative Islamic religious education model in a remote area with a Muslim minority in Ujung Deleng Village. This research employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving Islamic education teachers, Muslim students, parents, and community religious leaders as research informants. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the Ngaji Mandiri Program functions as an alternative form of non-formal Islamic education through Qur'an learning activities, worship guidance, character development, and continuous religious mentoring. The program positively influences students' Qur'anic reading skills, understanding of Islamic worship practices, discipline, and strengthening of Islamic identity. The novelty of this research lies in proposing a conceptual model of the Ngaji Mandiri Program as a community-based Islamic education strategy that can support Muslim minorities living in remote areas with limited access to formal Islamic education services

Keywords

Ngaji Mandiri Program; Islamic Education; Muslim Minority; Remote Area; Non-formal Education



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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education aims to develop students who possess faith, noble character, and the ability to practice religious teachings in their daily lives. Islamic education is not merely oriented toward mastering religious knowledge but also plays an important role in developing students' character, morality, and Islamic identity. From the perspective of Islamic education, education

is a conscious and planned effort to develop all human potential so that individuals are able to fulfill their role as khalifah in accordance with Islamic values. Therefore, Islamic religious education is a fundamental need for every Muslim, including Muslim communities living in social and geographical environments with limited access to education (Daradjat, 2018).

The equitable provision of Islamic religious education services remains one of the challenges in national education development, particularly in remote areas, border regions, and areas with difficult geographical conditions. Limited educational infrastructure, a shortage of teachers, and inadequate learning facilities have resulted in some communities being unable to access optimal religious education services. This condition demonstrates that the problems of Islamic education are not only related to curriculum and learning but also to the capacity of the education system to reach all segments of society fairly and sustainably (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Remote areas have social and geographical characteristics that differ from those of urban areas. Long distances, difficult accessibility, and limited human resources often become obstacles to the provision of education. In the context of Islamic education, these conditions become even more complex when Muslim communities live in predominantly non-Muslim environments. Under such circumstances, the sustainability of Islamic education requires alternative strategies that do not depend solely on formal educational institutions but also involve families, communities, religious leaders, and local organizations as key supporters of Islamic education (Nata, 2021).

Islamic education in minority Muslim communities faces more complex challenges than in areas where Muslims constitute the majority population. Limited Islamic educational institutions, a shortage of Islamic Religious Education teachers, and the absence of a supportive social environment for religious practices may affect the process of transmitting Islamic values to younger generations. In fact, religious education plays an important role in maintaining religious identity and developing students' religious awareness in accordance with Islamic teachings (Muhaimin, 2019).

Several studies have demonstrated that minority Muslim communities frequently experience difficulties in obtaining adequate religious education. Research on Islamic education in Muslim-minority areas has found that shortages of religious teachers, learning facilities, and institutional support are major factors affecting the sustainability of Islamic education. Under these conditions, communities tend to develop various forms of nonformal education to meet their religious education needs, such as community religious study groups, community-based Qur'anic learning, and religious activities in mosques (Rahman & Hakim, 2021).

Nonformal Islamic education plays an important role as an alternative when formal education is unable to adequately meet community needs. Through community-based education, religious learning can take place more flexibly and in accordance with local needs. Sudjana (2016) explains that nonformal education is a form of education organized outside the formal education system with the purpose of providing learning services that correspond to community needs. In the context of Islamic education, this approach enables communities to

participate actively in maintaining the continuity of religious education through various Islamic development and guidance activities.

One relevant approach to addressing these challenges is the development of community-based Islamic education programs. This model positions the community not merely as a recipient of educational services but also as an active part of the educational process. Community involvement becomes an important strength in creating an educational environment that supports the development of students' character and religious understanding. This is consistent with the view that Islamic education has a social dimension in which families and communities constitute integral components of the overall educational process (Mulyasa, 2022).

In this context, the existence of alternative Islamic education programs is important to examine, particularly in areas experiencing limited access to formal Islamic religious education. One such alternative Islamic education practice can be found in Ujung Deleng Village, Kutabuluh District, Karo Regency, North Sumatra. The village is characterized as a remote area in which the majority of the population is non-Muslim, making access to Islamic education for Muslim communities a particular challenge. This condition encouraged the emergence of the Ngaji Mandiri Program as an initiative to fulfill the Islamic religious education needs of Muslim students in the area.

According to the 2025 Ujung Deleng Village Profile, the total population of Ujung Deleng Village is 957 people, consisting of 270 households. Of these, approximately 50 households ($\pm 18\%$) are Muslim, while approximately 220 households ($\pm 82\%$) are Protestant, Catholic, or adherents of other religions. This composition indicates that the Muslim community constitutes a minority and consequently faces limitations in accessing Islamic religious education services, both through formal educational institutions and religious development activities within the community. This situation has implications for the limited access of Muslim students to continuous religious learning and the lack of a social environment that supports the strengthening of Islamic values.

This condition is also reflected at SMP Negeri Satu Atap 2 Kutabuluh, which serves as the research site. The number of Muslim students at this school is only approximately 10 students from six villages. Consequently, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education faces various challenges, both in terms of the small number of students and limited educational resources. Furthermore, from the establishment of the school in 2004 until 2019, SMP Negeri Satu Atap 2 Kutabuluh had never had an Islamic Religious Education teacher. As a result, Muslim students did not receive optimal Islamic Religious Education services. A similar situation occurred at SD Negeri Ujung Deleng, which, from its establishment until the time of the research, had not had an Islamic Religious Education teacher. Consequently, many Muslim students entered the junior secondary level with limited basic religious abilities, including Qur'anic reading skills, knowledge of religious rituals, and basic understanding of Islamic teachings. Islamic religious education, however, plays an important role in shaping Muslim

identity, increasing religious understanding, and instilling moral values in students' lives (Daradjat, 2018).

The shortage of Islamic Religious Education teachers in remote areas is one of the major challenges in achieving equitable Islamic education. The relatively small number of Muslim students, geographical distance, and limited educational resources often prevent religious education services from operating optimally. Under such circumstances, Islamic education requires alternative strategies capable of addressing community needs through more flexible approaches based on the social environment. Islamic education does not take place only through formal institutions but can also develop through families, mosques, and communities as part of the broader educational ecosystem (Muhaimin, 2019).

One such alternative strategy is realized through the Ngaji Mandiri Program in Ujung Deleng Village. The program emerged as a response to the needs of Muslim students who experience limited access to Islamic religious education. The Ngaji Mandiri Program is not limited to developing Qur'anic reading skills but also includes religious worship guidance, strengthening of religious character, habituation of Islamic behavior, and continuous religious mentoring.

The existence of the Ngaji Mandiri Program demonstrates that community-based Islamic education plays an important role in fulfilling religious education needs when formal institutions face limitations. This is consistent with Choeroni (2019), who explains that Islamic Religious Education can be developed through various social and religious spaces, including mosques and community organizations, by positioning religious institutions as centers for providing educational services to the Muslim community. In the context of Ujung Deleng Village, the mosque and surrounding community serve as supportive spaces that strengthen the continuity of Islamic education for Muslim students as a minority group.

In addition to functioning as a means of religious learning, the Ngaji Mandiri Program also serves as a medium for developing students' religious character. Habituation through Qur'anic reading, collective worship, and participation in religious activities gradually develops discipline, responsibility, and religious awareness. This is consistent with the research of Anwar and Choeroni (2019), which explains that strengthening religious culture through the habituation of Islamic values within educational environments contributes to the development of students' character.

From the perspective of Islamic education development, the existence of community-based programs such as Ngaji Mandiri demonstrates the adaptability of Islamic education to the social conditions of society. Islamic education is required not only to maintain conventional learning patterns but also to develop innovations according to changing times and the characteristics of the community. Choeroni and Anwar (2024) explain that Islamic educational institutions need to transform and adapt to social changes in order to continue performing their educational functions effectively. This principle is relevant to the Ngaji Mandiri Program, which represents an adaptation of Islamic education to a remote area characterized by a Muslim minority population.

Several previous studies have examined Islamic education among Muslim minority communities and in remote areas. Studies of minority Islamic education indicate that shortages of religious teachers, learning facilities, and institutional support are factors affecting the sustainability of Islamic education. Other studies on community-based education have also demonstrated that community involvement can serve as a solution for maintaining religious education in areas with limited formal educational services.

However, previous studies have largely focused on the general obstacles faced by minority Islamic education. Studies specifically examining how an alternative community-based Islamic education program is implemented, how it affects students' religious development, and how such a model can be applied within Muslim minority communities in remote areas remain relatively limited.

Based on these conditions, this study identifies a research gap in the implementation of alternative community-based Islamic education programs. This study does not merely examine the problems associated with limited access to Islamic education but also analyzes the community's strategy for providing solutions through the Ngaji Mandiri Program as a form of nonformal Islamic education.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of a conceptual model of the Ngaji Mandiri Program as an alternative form of community-based Islamic religious education for Muslim minority communities in remote areas. This model emphasizes that the sustainability of Islamic education can be strengthened through synergy among teachers, families, communities, and local religious institutions, enabling religious education to continue despite limitations in formal educational services.

Based on the background described above, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program as an alternative form of Islamic religious education in a remote area with a predominantly non-Muslim population in Ujung Deleng Village. The study focuses on the program's planning, implementation, and evaluation processes; its impact on students' Qur'anic abilities, religious practices, character, and Islamic identity; as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its implementation..

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program as an alternative form of Islamic religious education in the remote, predominantly non-Muslim area of Ujung Deleng Village. A qualitative approach was selected because this study focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of the program implementation process, students' experiences, community involvement, and the factors influencing the sustainability of Islamic education within a Muslim minority environment. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), qualitative research is used to understand the meaning of a phenomenon based on the experiences and perspectives of individuals or groups involved in a particular context.

The study was conducted in Ujung Deleng Village, Kutabuluh District, Karo Regency, North Sumatra Province. The research site was selected purposively because it possesses characteristics relevant to the research focus, namely a remote area with a predominantly non-Muslim population and an initiative to strengthen Islamic education through the Ngaji Mandiri Program. The program represents an important phenomenon to examine because it emerged as an alternative form of Islamic religious education for Muslim students who experience limited access to formal educational services.

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, namely the selection of informants based on the consideration that they possess knowledge and experience relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. The research informants consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers as the primary implementers of the program, Muslim students as the beneficiaries of the program, students' parents, and religious and community leaders who have knowledge of the development of religious activities in Ujung Deleng Village.

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine the implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program, Qur'anic learning activities, religious practices, and interactions among students, teachers, and community members. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding the background of the program, its implementation process, its impacts, and the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its implementation. Documentation was used to complement the research data, including photographs of activities, program records, learning materials, and other supporting documents.

Data analysis in this study employed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation was conducted through the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. The data were then presented in narrative form so that relationships among the findings could be systematically understood. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the patterns and meanings identified throughout the research process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020)..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program as an Alternative to Islamic Religious Education

The implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program in Ujung Deleng Village represents a response to the limited provision of Islamic religious education services in a remote area with a predominantly non-Muslim population. The program does not merely function as an additional activity but serves as an alternative Islamic education strategy to fulfill the basic religious needs of Muslim students who previously had not received optimal religious guidance.

From the perspective of policy implementation, the success of a program is influenced by several aspects, namely communication, resources, disposition of implementers, and

implementation structure (Edward III, 1980). These four aspects can be identified in the implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program, beginning with the planning process, implementation of activities, and evaluation of program outcomes.

The planning of the Ngaji Mandiri Program began with the identification of the needs of Muslim students in Ujung Deleng Village. Based on observations and the experiences of Islamic Religious Education teachers, it was found that some Muslim students had limited understanding of basic Islamic teachings because they had previously lacked continuous religious education. This condition became the basis for initiating a more intensive Islamic religious guidance program through independent Qur'anic learning activities.

Program planning was conducted by considering the social conditions of the community and the characteristics of the students. The program was not designed like formal classroom instruction but employed a more flexible approach by adjusting the learning schedule, students' abilities, and the surrounding community environment. The planned materials included Qur'anic reading skills, basic tajwid, memorization of prayers, procedures for ablution, procedures for performing prayers, and the development of Islamic character.

This approach demonstrates that the Ngaji Mandiri Program applies the principle of Islamic education based on community needs. Muhaimin (2019) explains that Islamic education should be developed according to the context of students' lives so that Islamic values are not only understood theoretically but also implemented in everyday life.

In addition to the Islamic Religious Education teacher as the primary initiator, program planning also involves support from families and the community. Social environmental involvement is important because Islamic religious education in minority communities cannot rely solely on formal schools. This is consistent with the view of Choeroni (2022) that mosques and community environments have strategic functions as spaces for providing Islamic educational services to the Muslim community.

The Ngaji Mandiri Program is implemented through regular and continuous Islamic religious learning activities. The main activities include Qur'anic reading instruction, introduction to Arabic letters (hijaiyah), tajwid instruction, memorization of daily prayers, ablution practice, prayer instruction, and moral development.

At the initial stage of implementation, students experienced various limitations in basic religious abilities. Some students were unable to read the Qur'an properly and did not yet understand the correct procedures for performing religious practices. However, through gradual guidance, students began to demonstrate improvements in Qur'anic reading skills and religious practices.

The program is also implemented through habituation to religious activities, such as reciting prayers before activities, regularly studying the Qur'an, and performing congregational prayers at the mosque. Such habituation constitutes an important strategy for developing students' religious character. According to Anwar and Choeroni (2019), a religious culture developed through habituation plays an important role in shaping students' character because religious values are not merely learned but directly practiced.

The program also demonstrates that Islamic education can be conducted through a nonformal approach. Students gain religious learning experiences that are closer to their daily lives. This is consistent with the concept of nonformal education, in which education outside the formal system can serve as an alternative for fulfilling the learning needs of communities (Sudjana, 2016).

Evaluation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program is conducted continuously by observing students' development. Evaluation does not focus solely on academic religious abilities but also examines changes in attitudes and habits in everyday life.

Program evaluation indicators include improvements in Qur'anic reading skills, the ability to perform religious practices, discipline in participating in religious activities, and student involvement in mosque activities. The evaluation results indicate that the program has generated positive changes in the religious development of Muslim students.

One indication of program success is the improvement in students' ability to read the Qur'an, understand the procedures for ablution and prayer, and demonstrate confidence in carrying out religious roles within the community. Some students have even become capable of leading prayers and participating in community religious activities.

These findings demonstrate that the Ngaji Mandiri Program functions not only as a means of transferring religious knowledge but also as a process of developing Muslim identity within a minority environment. This strengthens Nata's (2021) view that Islamic education aims to develop individuals who possess a balance of religious understanding, morality, and the ability to practice Islamic values in social life.

The Impact of the Ngaji Mandiri Program on Students' Islamic Education

The implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program in Ujung Deleng Village demonstrates positive changes in the development of Islamic education among Muslim students. Initially designed as a solution to the limited provision of Islamic religious education services, the program has developed into a space for religious guidance encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. The impact of the program is evident not only in improved Qur'anic reading skills but also in changes in religious practices, the development of religious character, and the strengthening of students' Islamic identity.

Islamic education fundamentally aims to develop individuals who not only possess religious knowledge but are also capable of practicing Islamic values in their daily lives. Zakiah Daradjat explains that religious education functions to guide individuals toward establishing good relationships with Allah, fellow human beings, and the environment. Therefore, the success of Islamic education can be observed through changes in students' attitudes, habits, and behavior, rather than merely through their mastery of religious material (Daradjat, 2018).

Based on the research findings, the impact of the Ngaji Mandiri Program can be observed through several aspects.

One of the primary impacts of the Ngaji Mandiri Program is the improvement of students' Qur'anic reading abilities. Before participating in the program, some Muslim students lacked basic abilities in reading hijaiyah letters and did not understand the correct rules for Qur'anic recitation. This condition constituted an initial challenge that had to be addressed through gradual learning.

Through regular Qur'anic learning activities, students received guidance beginning with the recognition of hijaiyah letters, pronunciation of the makharijul huruf, application of basic tajwid rules, and practice in reading the Qur'an in a tartil manner. The learning approach was conducted individually according to each student's level of ability, making the learning process more effective.

The improvement in these abilities demonstrates that community-based nonformal Islamic education can serve as an alternative for providing religious learning services in areas with limited formal education. This is consistent with Sudjana's (2016) view that nonformal education provides flexibility in delivering educational services according to community needs.

In addition to Qur'anic reading skills, the program also strengthens students' learning through memorization of short surahs and daily prayers. These activities help students develop a closer relationship with the Qur'an while simultaneously establishing religious habits in their daily lives.

The Ngaji Mandiri Program also has an impact on improving students' understanding and practice of religious worship. Before the program was implemented, some students did not understand the procedures for purification, prayer movements, prayer recitations, and basic prayers used in everyday life.

Through learning activities and direct practice, students gain more concrete religious experiences. Learning is not conducted solely through the delivery of theoretical material but also through demonstration and habituation methods, such as ablution practice, prayer exercises, and congregational prayer.

Such practical approaches are important because Islamic education is not sufficient when it only provides theoretical understanding; it must also develop students' ability to practice religious teachings. Muhaimin (2019) explains that Islamic education should integrate the dimensions of knowledge, internalization, and practice of Islamic values.

One indicator of the program's success can be seen in students' increased confidence in performing religious practices independently. Some students who previously did not understand the procedures for prayer have gradually become capable of performing prayers correctly and participating in collective worship with the community.

In addition to religious abilities, the Ngaji Mandiri Program also influences students' character development. Regular habituation to religious activities fosters discipline, responsibility, politeness, and social awareness.

Religious character develops through a continuous habituation process. Activities such as reciting prayers before learning, regularly studying the Qur'an, respecting teachers, and

maintaining behavior consistent with Islamic values become part of the character education process.

These findings are consistent with the research of Anwar and Choeroni (2019), which states that a religious culture within an educational environment can serve as an effective strategy for developing students' character. Religious values that are habituated in daily life are more likely to shape behavior than values conveyed solely through theoretical instruction.

In the context of Ujung Deleng Village, the development of religious character is particularly significant because Muslim students live in a predominantly non-Muslim social environment. The Ngaji Mandiri Program provides students with a space to understand Islamic values while also developing confidence in expressing and practicing their religious identity positively.

Another important impact of the implementation of the Ngaji Mandiri Program is the increased confidence and strengthened Islamic identity of Muslim students in Ujung Deleng Village. As a minority group living in a predominantly non-Muslim environment, students need a supportive space that not only provides religious knowledge but also develops their confidence to perform religious roles in the social life of the community.

The Ngaji Mandiri Program has gradually developed students' abilities to participate in various religious activities. Students who previously lacked an understanding of the basic principles of Islamic worship have, after participating in the program continuously, become increasingly capable of performing religious practices independently. Some students have developed the ability to deliver the adhan, lead obligatory congregational prayers, and lead community religious activities.

These developments demonstrate that the program has not only improved individual students' abilities but has also contributed to creating young religious leaders within the Muslim minority community. One important achievement of the program is that some students have been entrusted with delivering Friday sermons, leading Eid al-Fitr prayers, and leading Eid al-Adha prayers within the community. The community's trust in these students indicates that the Ngaji Mandiri Program has made a tangible contribution to preparing a Muslim generation with religious competence and the confidence to participate in public religious activities.

In addition to their abilities in performing worship, students have also developed their participation in community-based religious activities. Participants in the Ngaji Mandiri Program have become capable of reciting takhtim and tahlil during Friday-night religious gatherings and participating in various Islamic religious activities within the community. During Islamic religious commemorations, students have also begun to participate as qari' and saritilawah. Such involvement demonstrates that Islamic education through the Ngaji Mandiri Program does not stop at theoretical learning but develops into social and religious experiences that foster confidence and a sense of responsibility as Muslims.

Another change reflecting the success of the program is increased awareness among Muslim students in expressing their Islamic identity within the school environment. To date,

the Ngaji Mandiri Program continues to operate and remains part of students' religious development. The sustainability of the program has influenced the religious culture within the school environment, one indication of which is the increased use of hijab among Muslim female students. Based on research observations, nearly 90% of Muslim female students at the elementary and junior secondary levels wear the hijab while at school. This phenomenon indicates an increase in religious awareness and the strengthening of Muslim identity developed through education, habituation, and exemplary behavior.

These findings demonstrate that the Ngaji Mandiri Program has an impact that extends beyond improving Qur'anic reading skills or understanding religious practices. The program has become a means of developing religious character, strengthening Islamic identity, and regenerating religious leadership within the Muslim minority community. This is consistent with Nata's (2021) view that Islamic education aims to develop individuals who possess a balance of faith, knowledge, morality, and the ability to perform social roles within community life.

Thus, the success of the Ngaji Mandiri Program in Ujung Deleng Village demonstrates that community-based Islamic education can serve as an effective strategy for sustaining Islamic religious education in remote areas with predominantly non-Muslim populations. The program not only produces.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the Ngaji Mandiri Program is a form of community-based, nonformal Islamic education established in response to the limited availability of formal Islamic Religious Education services for the Muslim minority in the remote area of Ujung Deleng Village. The program is neither a TPA (Qur'an Education Center) nor a formal educational institution; rather, it is a religious development program involving Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, religious leaders, mosque administrators, parents, and the wider community. Its implementation consists of planning, implementation, and evaluation stages, with activities including Qur'anic reading, memorization of surahs and daily prayers, religious worship practices, and the development of moral character and religious habits.

The research findings indicate that the Ngaji Mandiri Program has a positive impact on students' Qur'anic reading abilities, understanding and practice of religious worship, religious habits, Islamic character development, and confidence in participating in religious activities. The success of the program is supported by the commitment of PAI teachers, support from religious leaders and mosque administrators, parental involvement, and the solidarity of the Muslim community. The challenges faced include limited facilities, geographical conditions, time constraints, and differences in students' initial levels of religious competence. Conceptually, this study demonstrates that the Ngaji Mandiri Program can serve as an alternative model of community-based, nonformal Islamic education for Muslim minority communities in remote areas.

Therefore, local governments and the Ministry of Religious Affairs are expected to provide support through the provision of PAI teachers and learning facilities, as well as by strengthening community-based religious education programs. Schools need to sustain and further develop the Ngaji Mandiri Program through synergy among teachers, families, religious leaders, and the community. PAI teachers are expected to continue developing innovative learning strategies tailored to students' conditions, while parents and religious leaders should maintain continuous religious guidance. Future research could expand the study to other regions or Muslim minority communities through multi-site or comparative research designs in order to develop a more comprehensive model of nonformal Islamic education..

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