

# The Strategy of Islamic Study Groups in Increasing Women's Religious Literacy: A Case Study of the Islamic Study Group of Nurur Rahmah, Medan

Indah Wardani, Manshuruddin, Hadi Saputra Panggabean

## Abstract

This study is motivated by the importance of the role of majelis taklim as a non-formal Islamic educational institution that functions not only as a place for religious learning but also as a forum for moral, spiritual, and social development for women amid the currents of modernization. The purpose of this study is to analyze the strategies of Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan in enhancing women's religious literacy, including the forms of religious literacy developed, the strategies implemented, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, using data collection techniques such as observation, in-depth interviews, and document studies, analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, and validated through source and technique triangulation. The results indicate that Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan develops four forms of religious literacy: Sufi literacy, women's fiqh literacy, socio-religious literacy, and Islamic history literacy. The strategies implemented include kitab (Islamic book) study sessions, lectures, dhikr, sholawat, social activities, and the utilization of digital media. The main supporting factors for the success of these strategies are the leadership of the majelis, the support of the congregation, and the relevance of the learning materials, while the inhibiting factors include the limited time available for participants and the need for the majelis leadership to balance family responsibilities with preaching activities. Thus, it can be concluded that the strategies of Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan are proven effective in improving women's religious literacy while also empowering them in social and religious life within the community. The implication is that religious literacy can serve as an instrument for character and moral development in community-based Islamic education, thereby strengthening the role of women in building a religious and morally upright society.

**Keywords** : Strategy, Majelis Taklim, Women's Religious Literacy.

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and morally upright Muslim women; second, creating religious families; and third, building a civilized society. Thus, religious literacy obtained through *majelis taklim* strengthens women's roles as primary educators in the family and as agents of positive change in society.

In this context, Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan is particularly interesting to study. In addition to conducting regular religious gatherings, this *majelis* integrates classical *kitab* study, *maulid* recitations, lyrical praise (*syair*), and socio-religious activities involving female participants. This pattern of development reflects a specific strategy in fostering religious literacy that is not only text-based but also oriented toward spiritual experience, social role strengthening, and internalization of Islamic values in daily life. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the specific forms of religious literacy among female participants at Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan, identify the strategies implemented to enhance women's religious literacy, and examine the supporting and inhibiting factors in this process. Academically, this research enriches the study of non-formal Islamic education from a gender perspective, particularly in understanding how *majelis taklim* becomes a platform for empowering women's religious literacy. Practically, this study is expected to provide insights for *majelis taklim* administrators in designing more adaptive development strategies that meet the needs of Muslim women in the modern era.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at examining the strategies of Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan in enhancing the religious literacy of female participants, as well as the factors influencing the implementation of these strategies. According to Muri A. (2019), the qualitative approach is a research strategy that focuses on seeking meaning in social phenomena through descriptive, naturalistic, and holistic processes, emphasizing the quality of data collected through various methods.

Data collection in this study was conducted using three methods: observation, in-depth interviews, and document review. Observation was conducted directly on activities at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan to understand the types of activities, learning methods, and interactions among members. The observation was of a passive participatory nature, where the researcher was present in activities but did not participate directly. Through observation, the researcher recorded behaviors, atmosphere, and interaction patterns that reflect the religious literacy strategies applied.

The next method, in-depth interviews, was conducted semi-structurally with key informants, including the *majelis* leaders, administrators, and members. Interviews were used to explore information regarding strategies, methods, supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of religious literacy activities to enhance women's religious understanding. Interview questions were designed flexibly to allow for development according to the context of the conversation.

The third method, document review, involved examining and interpreting written documents owned by Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan. The review was not limited to collecting photographs or evidence of activities but focused on analyzing the content of documents that reflect the *majelis*' efforts in enhancing religious literacy. Documents reviewed included *majelis* profiles, activity programs, and lecture materials derived from *kitab* studies. Through document analysis, the researcher could observe the continuity between planning, implementation, and the outcomes of *majelis* activities.

Data collection procedures employed source and method triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Informant inclusion criteria were based on direct involvement in *majelis* activities and the ability to provide relevant information aligned with the research focus.

Data analysis focused on the methods applied in implementing the strategies and the factors influencing their success, such as *majelis* leadership and administration, participant enthusiasm, and technology integration. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (Miles, 2014), which consists of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was verified through source and method triangulation (Sugiono, 2019).

## Result and Discussion

In an effort to understand the strategies of *majelis taklim* in enhancing women's religious literacy at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan, this study examines the practices applied in the field through a series of observations, interviews, and document studies. The results of observations and interviews with the *majelis* leaders, administrators, and members indicate that Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan implements various strategies to improve women's religious literacy.

### 4.1 Forms of Religious Literacy Developed at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan

#### 4.1.1 Sufi Literacy

The study shows that one form of religious literacy developed at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan is Sufi literacy. This literacy is implemented through Islamic character building that emphasizes the values of patience, gratitude, sincerity, and honesty. The congregation's spirituality is strengthened through practices such as *dhikr*, prayers, and daily devotional acts. The distinctive feature of this literacy lies in the use of Sufi texts as the primary source of learning, differentiating it from other forms of religious literacy that are more normative or fiqh-based.

The findings demonstrate that religious literacy at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan extends beyond the cognitive dimension of understanding religious texts, emphasizing the affective and spiritual dimensions of the congregation. The model of Sufi literacy is practiced through the internalization of patience, gratitude, sincerity, and honesty, in line with the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), which is central to Islamic education, as also emphasized by Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*.

This aligns with Yunus et al. (2024), who found that Sufi-based *majelis taklim* contribute to moral and spiritual development. The approach of Majelis Nurur Rahmah is unique because it uses Sufi texts as primary references rather than supplementary materials, maintaining consistency with pesantren literacy traditions but adapted to a women-focused learning environment.

The implication of this finding is that Sufi literacy can serve as a model for strengthening the spirituality of participants amid the challenges of modern materialistic society. Focusing on Islamic character building demonstrates that religious literacy is not solely oriented toward fiqh understanding but also toward ethical and spiritual dimensions, which are crucial for developing moral resilience in society.

#### 4.1.2 Women's Fiqh Literacy

Another form of religious literacy developed at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan is women's fiqh literacy. This literacy is implemented by equipping female participants with knowledge emphasizing spiritual values and daily religious practices, fostering awareness of their roles according to Sharia. Spiritual reinforcement is achieved through understanding fiqh studies related to women, such as *aurat*, *thaharah*, menstruation (*haid*), postpartum bleeding (*nifas*), irregular bleeding (*istihadha*), and other relevant topics.

The distinct feature of this literacy is that the learning material is sourced from fiqh texts, primarily *Tadzkirah Alhadrahmiyah* by Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Hazh of Tarim, Hadhramaut,

focusing on fiqh laws relevant to women. The study shows that women's fiqh literacy encompasses three main aspects: cognitive (knowledge), affective (religious attitudes), and psychomotor (behavior). Thus, fiqh literacy is not merely theoretical but must be internalized through habituation, role modeling, and practical application in daily life.

This model is practiced through the internalization of obedience values in accordance with Sharia and awareness of Islamic laws relevant to daily life. The approach is distinctive because fiqh studies are integrated with practical application, consistent with pesantren literacy traditions but adapted to the needs of women in the *majelis taklim* setting.

The implication is that women's fiqh literacy can serve as a model to strengthen the religious capacity of women amid contemporary challenges, enhancing both religious understanding and legal awareness.

#### 4.1.3 Socio-Religious Literacy

The study also identifies socio-religious literacy as a key form of religious literacy at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan, based on social awareness. This literacy is realized through activities fostering social consciousness, such as strengthening Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah islamiyah*) via social programs, charity for orphans, and almsgiving (*sedekah*). Its distinctive feature lies in the focus on religious practice that extends beyond ritual obligations to social actions that have direct impact on the community.

The findings indicate that socio-religious literacy at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan emphasizes not only cognitive understanding of religious texts but also affective, ethical, and social dimensions. This literacy model is practiced through the internalization of care and solidarity values into tangible actions, aligning with the Islamic concept of *hablun minannas* (Al-Qardhawi, 2001), which views strengthening human relationships as an integral part of religious education.

This is consistent with other research showing that *majelis taklim* play a crucial role in fostering harmonious relationships among humans, with God, and the environment in community development (Nasution et al., 2025). Majelis Nurur Rahmah's approach is unique in prioritizing socio-religious practices as a primary reference, emphasizing women's empowerment within social settings.

The implication is that socio-religious literacy can be an effective strategy for strengthening social bonds and community resilience. Teaching values of care and solidarity shows that religious literacy encompasses more than ritual knowledge, extending to social dimensions that cultivate harmony and collective responsibility.

#### 4.1.4 Islamic History Literacy

Finally, Islamic history literacy is another form developed at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan. This literacy is implemented through cultivating Islamic knowledge that emphasizes the exemplary character, struggle, and wisdom of historical Islamic figures. Understanding is reinforced by linking historical events to daily practices, social care, and the cultivation of patience, gratitude, and sincerity. Its distinctive feature lies in using classical history texts as supplementary references.

The findings show that Islamic history literacy at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan extends beyond cognitive understanding of historical texts, focusing also on affective and moral dimensions. The model is practiced through the internalization of values such as perseverance, steadfast faith, and moral character, aligning with Khaldun (2002), who emphasizes understanding history as a means to build civilization and character.

This aligns with research by Qiyatus Shalihah et al. (2024), indicating that *majelis taklim* significantly strengthens religious understanding and morality. Majelis Nurur Rahmah's approach is distinctive in using historical narratives as supporting materials, integrating classical Islamic education traditions with adaptations for women participants.

The implication is that Islamic history literacy can serve as a model for strengthening identity and spirituality amid globalization. Focusing on Islamic history shows that religious literacy extends beyond fiqh, incorporating historical, moral, and civilizational dimensions to enhance awareness and cultural resilience in Muslim communities.

In conclusion, the forms of religious literacy developed at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan reflect Tilaar's view that religious education should aim at holistic human development: intellectually intelligent, morally upright, and socially active (Tilaar, 2011).

#### **4.2 Implementation of Majelis Taklim Strategies in Enhancing Women's Religious Literacy**

Based on field findings, the implementation of strategies at Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan to enhance women's religious literacy is holistic, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of the congregation. Regular activities are held every Tuesday and Friday, including programs such as *hadrah basaudan*, *dhikr*, *sholawat*, collective prayers, and lectures focusing on fiqh and Sufism texts. The learning methods applied include lectures and *kitab* studies, combined with an inclusive and compassionate approach by the *majelis* leaders, who gradually guide participants, most of whom are laypeople requiring empathetic education.

Additionally, the *majelis* utilizes digital media, such as social media platforms and WhatsApp groups, to disseminate information about activities, prayers, and inspiring Islamic stories. A participatory approach is also reflected in socio-religious activities, such as charity for orphans and almsgiving, serving as tangible implementations of religious values in daily life.

These findings show that the strategies implemented by Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan align with Riza Halimah (2024), who asserts that strategies are a series of activities aimed at achieving specific goals (Rahmah & Tumiran, 2024). The approach reflects contextual and transformative religious learning, combining lectures and *kitab* studies with empathetic guidance, digital da'wah, and social participation. This strategy not only enhances women's religious understanding but also strengthens social cohesion among participants, positioning the *majelis* as a center for spiritual and moral development in urban communities. Thus, the adaptive and humanistic implementation at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan creates an inclusive and effective learning environment for improving women's religious literacy.

#### **4.3 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Majelis Taklim Strategies**

The supporting factors in implementing the *majelis taklim* strategies include:

##### **a) Leadership and Management**

Field findings indicate that the *majelis* leaders play a crucial role in driving all religious activities. They demonstrate decisive yet wise leadership, fostering harmonious relationships between administrators and participants. The management of the *majelis* is well-structured, with clear task allocations and consistent scheduling of activities. Regular programs, religious literacy development, and social activities are conducted according to planned schedules.

Effective leadership and organized management are key factors supporting the sustainability and effectiveness of the *majelis*. Visionary leaders with managerial skills can synergistically mobilize all elements to achieve common goals. Good governance creates a conducive atmosphere for active participation in learning and religious literacy development. Research findings indicate that the success of Majelis Nurur Rahmah in enhancing women's religious literacy is inseparable from the role of its leaders and organized management, where leaders act as motivators, guides, and role models for participants.

b) Congregational Support

Observations and interviews show that active participation of the congregation significantly influences *majelis* activities. Members consistently attend regular religious sessions, demonstrating enthusiasm and solidarity that strengthen the *majelis*' presence within the community.

Congregational support is a critical factor because the sustainability and growth of the *majelis* depend on active participation. Without member involvement, activities would be inconsistent and less effective. Active participation fosters a sense of ownership, motivating members to maintain and develop the *majelis* as a center for religious and social development. Findings indicate that strong congregational support enhances the effectiveness of religious literacy programs, creates a conducive learning environment, strengthens *ukhuwah islamiyah*, and increases collective motivation to deepen religious knowledge.

c) Learning Materials

Research shows that the learning materials provided are highly relevant to participants' religious needs. They include women's fiqh and Sufi studies, presented in simple, understandable language. The diversity and depth of the materials stimulate enthusiasm and active engagement.

Learning materials are considered a supporting factor because the effectiveness of a *majelis taklim* in improving religious literacy depends heavily on the quality and relevance of the content. Systematic and contextually applicable materials enhance understanding and religious awareness. The variety of topics keeps the learning dynamic, sustaining participants' interest and engagement. Findings reveal that diverse and relevant materials at Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan significantly contribute to improving religious literacy, strengthening faith, and fostering moral character. Learning materials are therefore a primary pillar supporting the success of non-formal religious education programs.

The inhibiting factors include:

a) Time and Busy Schedules of Congregants

Field research found that limited time and busy schedules are common obstacles for participants, especially those with domestic responsibilities or external work commitments. Some attend only occasionally, leading to fluctuating and inconsistent attendance.

This directly affects participation intensity, as daily routines make it difficult to attend sessions regularly. Frequent absences can disrupt understanding of the material. Nevertheless, the *majelis* addresses this challenge by scheduling sessions in the late afternoon at 4 PM, allowing participants to attend despite time constraints.

b) Role of the Majelis Leader

Findings indicate that the leader of Majelis Taklim Nurur Rahmah Medan faces challenges in balancing family responsibilities with da'wah activities. Despite these challenges, the leader remains committed to attending sessions and guiding participants. This demonstrates dedication and strong commitment to enhancing congregants' religious literacy, even while carefully managing time between family and religious duties.

Although the dual role presents challenges, it also reflects maturity and responsibility, as the leader collaborates effectively with administrators and participants. Their resilience and adaptability show that time limitations are not absolute barriers but rather motivators to creatively and efficiently manage *majelis* activities productively.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan plays a strategic role in enhancing women's religious literacy through various non-formal educational programs that are participatory, practical, and contextual. The strategies implemented include lectures, kitab studies on fiqh and Sufism, maulid recitations, dhikr, collective prayers, and the use of digital media as means of preaching and communication. Through these activities, the majelis taklim is able to broaden the religious knowledge of its participants, strengthen spirituality, and foster Islamic character reflected in daily life. The forms of literacy developed include Sufi literacy, women's fiqh literacy, socio-religious literacy, and Islamic history literacy, which collectively nurture the cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects of female participants. The success of these strategies is supported by visionary leadership, the enthusiasm of participants, and the relevance of the teaching materials. However, their implementation faces challenges such as limited time availability for participants and teaching methods that remain largely one-way. Nevertheless, Majelis Nurur Rahmah Medan has proven effective as a forum for empowering Muslim women by strengthening religious knowledge, building moral character, and enhancing socio-religious roles within the community. With adaptive strategies and sustained support, the majelis taklim can continue to contribute as a center for women's religious literacy and empowerment.

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