

Research Article

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Grassroots Religious Transformation: A Case Study of The Al-Mukhlasin Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia Urban Areas

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This study explores the dynamics of grassroots religious transformation driven by the *Al-Mukhlasin* Islamic boarding school in the urban community of Gogagoman, Indonesia. The objectives of this study are articulated into three main focuses: first, to identify and describe the forms of contribution of community-based programmes organised by the pesantren; second, to analyse the impact of these contributions on tangible changes in the religious behaviour of the community; and third, to reveal and analyse the obstacles encountered in the guidance process.

Materials/methods. This study uses qualitative research methods, including a case study approach, to gain a deep, holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Data collection was carried out through triangulation methods, including participatory observation in pesantren activities, semi-structured in-depth interviews with key actors, and documentation analysis. The research subjects were selected purposively to capture a variety of perspectives, including pesantren caregivers, ustaz or TPQ teachers, community members, and local religious leaders. The collected data were analysed systematically using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model to identify themes, patterns, and meanings.

Results. The results show that Al-Mukhlasin Islamic Boarding School has successfully initiated a transformation process through a participatory grassroots programme ecosystem. These programmes serve as catalysts, consisting of: the Al-Qur'an Education Park (TPQ), which focuses on character building among the younger generation; the khuruj dakwah programme, which takes a personalised approach from house to house; and community recitations with material relevant to urban life.

Conclusion. The impact of these programmes is significantly manifested in several forms: (a) increased formal religious participation, including increased attendance at mosques; (b) strengthened spirituality that has been internalised into new social norms in the community; and (c) the formation of a more inclusive and empowered religious community, where ordinary citizens feel empowered to learn and practise religious teachings.



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1. Introduction

Amidst the challenges of modernisation, such as globalisation and shifting social values, religious institutions demonstrate resilience and adaptability, which are crucial in responding to the spiritual needs of contemporary society (Supriyanto, 2025). This resilience is manifested in religious transformation within the landscape of urban Indonesian society, a complex phenomenon that is not always driven by suprastructural policies (Himam & Syafaq, 2025). Instead, the most impactful changes are often initiated at the community or grassroots level by local social actors (Koehrsen & Ive, 2025).

One of the most concrete examples of such grassroots institutions is the Islamic boarding school. Long before the era of independence and continuing to the present day, Islamic boarding schools have proven to be centres for the formation of Muslim character and intellect. Their role is not limited to the transfer of religious knowledge but also serves as a bastion of moral defence, actively instilling Islamic values in society (Sholeh, Komalasari & Wiyanarti, 2025).

The unique ability of Islamic boarding schools lies in their position, which is integrated with the surrounding community. Unlike formal educational institutions, which often have a distance, pesantren live and interact directly with the social dynamics of the community. It is this uniqueness that enables pesantren to go beyond their formal educational function and act as centres of real social transformation, led by charismatic and respected kiai figures (Yusuf, 2025).

Nowadays, this transformative role is realised through more structured, community-based, and participatory da'wah strategies. Programmes such as the Al-Qur'an Education Park (TPQ) for children, khuruj (field da'wah) that directly reaches residents' homes, and majelis taklim for adults, have become strategic instruments (Halimah, Yusuf & Safiudin, 2024). This approach effectively shifts the image of Islamic boarding schools from educational institutions that appear closed to dynamic centres of religious and social empowerment open to all levels of society (Pohl, 2006).

The success of this transformation did not happen automatically; rather, it depended heavily on the synergy of various factors. Leadership quality, sustainable da'wah programme design, and the level of community participation and acceptance are key variables that interact in complex ways and determine the effectiveness of these transformation efforts (Hidayat & Prasojo, 2022).

2. Literature Review

This phenomenon is interesting and has not been widely researched. Most recent studies on Islamic boarding schools have focused more on institutional aspects (Purbiyanto & Pamungkas, 2024; Arif, Dorloh & Abdullah, 2024; Siregar & Yusron, 2024; Zhong, Feng & Xu, 2024; Mufidah, Maskuri & Listiyo, 2025), curriculum modernisation (Syah, Yunus & Herwati, 2025; Sugiannoor, Ilyasin & Julaiha, 2025; Zainuddin, Amrullah & Zuhriyah, 2025; Kisyanto, 2025; Zainuddin, 2025), or its role in character education in general (Muttaqin, 2024; Jenuri, Darmawan & Faqihuddin, 2024; Sudarsono, Muchtar & Warsiyah, 2025; Mahmuddah, Salsabila & Junaidi, 2025; Hamdi, 2025). Meanwhile, in-depth empirical studies using a qualitative case study format that specifically examine how grassroots transformation unfolds in the field, especially in heterogeneous urban communities, remain very limited.

This study attempts to fill this gap by presenting an in-depth analysis of the role of the Al-Mukhlisin Qur'an Memorisation Islamic Boarding School in Gogagoman Village, an urban community in Kotamobagu City, North Sulawesi. This pesantren was chosen because it is a concrete example of an institution that actively runs community development programmes. Moreover, the Al-Mukhlisin pesantren presents a rich case study for analysis. On the one hand, this pesantren has been successful in driving religious change, but on the other hand, the process has not been smooth and has been marked by various obstacles. Thus, this study is important for objectively understanding the

processes, dynamics, and challenges that Islamic boarding schools face in carrying out their functions as agents of education and da'wah in urban communities.

Based on this description, this study aims to comprehensively analyse the process of grassroots religious transformation facilitated by the Al-Mukhlisin Islamic boarding school. Specifically, the objectives of this study are articulated into three main focuses: First, to identify and describe the forms of contribution of the programmes organised by the pesantren; Second, to analyse the impact of these contributions on real changes in the religious behaviour of the community; and Third, to reveal and analyse the obstacles encountered in the guidance process.

By addressing these questions, this research contributes to the growing discussion of how traditional Islamic institutions evolve in response to social change, offering new insights into the role of pesantren in promoting inclusive and transformative education in modern Indonesia.

By achieving these objectives, this research can make a significant contribution to both theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, this study will enrich the literature on community-based Islamic education models and participatory da'wah strategies in a contemporary urban context. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as empirical references for other Islamic boarding school administrators and policy makers in designing and supporting more effective, contextual, and sustainable community empowerment programmes in the future.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method with a case study approach. This method was chosen for its ability to understand complex, context-bound social phenomena, such as grassroots religious transformation, in a deep, holistic manner (Yin, 2017). To capture the complexity of the interaction between Islamic boarding schools and the community, a single-case study approach allows researchers to explore and analyse phenomena in their natural setting. This approach provides space to capture the subjective meanings formed by the actors involved in the transformation process. This case study is descriptive in nature, as it aims to detail the form, impact, and obstacles of the pesantren programme, and is also exploratory, as it seeks to examine the dynamics underlying the transformation process (Creswell, 2014).

This research was conducted over one month (April 2025) at the Tahfidzul Qur'an Al-Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School in Gogagoman Village, West Kotamobagu District, North Sulawesi. This location was chosen because it is the epicentre of the grassroots religious transformation process that this study focuses on. Al-Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School actively organises outreach programmes that reach the wider community, such as TPQ and khuruj da'wah, making it a rich and relevant case study.

The participants consisted of 12 individuals selected through purposive sampling, including teachers, students, parents, community leaders, and alumni. The selection criteria were based on active participation in the pesantren's programs and representation of different community roles. The number of participants was determined by data saturation, in which no new information emerged from additional interviews (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Social diversity was also considered to ensure representation across gender, age, and socio-economic background. This heterogeneity reflects the plural nature of the Gogagoman community, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the pesantren's impact. The composition of the Participant Demographics is detailed in Table 1:

Table 1. Participant Demographics

| No. | Code | Role | Age | Gender | Duration of Involvement | Description |
|-----|------|------------------|-----|--------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | P1 | Teacher | 42 | Male | 10 years | Senior religious instructor |
| 2. | P2 | Student | 17 | Female | 2 years | Boarding student |
| 3. | P3 | Parent | 45 | Female | 4 years | Parent of student |
| 4. | P4 | Community Member | 51 | Male | 6 years | Local shopkeeper |
| 5. | P5 | Teacher | 36 | Male | 8 years | Alumni and teacher |
| 6. | P6 | Community Leader | 55 | Male | 12 years | Head of mosque youth group |
| 7. | P7 | Student | 16 | Female | 1 year | Participant in Qur'an class |
| 8. | P8 | Parent | 48 | Female | 5 years | Community volunteer |
| 9. | P9 | Administrator | 38 | Male | 9 years | Administrative staff |
| 10. | P10 | Local Youth | 19 | Male | 3 years | Volunteer in social media team |
| 11. | P11 | Neighbor | 40 | Female | 6 years | Member of women's prayer group |
| 12. | P12 | Alumni | 28 | Male | 7 years | Former santri, now local teacher |

In line with the naturalistic case study approach, data were collected through three main techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding: first, in-depth semi-structured interviews with all research subjects to explore their perceptions, experiences, and meanings associated with the pesantren programme and its impact. Second, participatory observation, in which researchers were directly involved in observing religious activities, such as the teaching and learning process at the TPQ and interactions during dakwah khuruj, to capture social dynamics that were not revealed through interviews. Third, document studies, in the form of document analysis of activity archives, TPQ participant attendance lists, pesantren daily records, as well as photos and videos of activities, to complement and verify data from interviews and observations.

The collected data were then systematically analysed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (2014). This analysis process included three simultaneous activities: First, data reduction, which is the process of sorting, focusing, and organising raw data into themes relevant to the research questions; Second, data presentation, which is presenting the reduced data in the form of descriptive narratives and interview excerpts to facilitate understanding; and (3) drawing conclusions, which is formulating research findings gradually based on patterns and relationships between themes that emerge from the data.

To ensure the credibility and validity of this case study's findings, data validity tests were conducted. The main techniques used were: First, triangulation, which involved comparing and cross-checking data obtained from various sources (caregivers, teachers, residents) and various methods (interviews, observations, documents); Second, member check, in which the researcher's initial interpretation was reconfirmed with several key informants to ensure consistency between the analysis results and their experiences. These steps aim to produce findings that are reliable and accountable (Moleong, 2018).

4. Results

The findings of this study map a process of grassroots religious transformation in Gogagoman Village, centred on the role of the Al-Mukhlisin Islamic boarding school. This process can be identified and narrated through three main stages: (1) the initiation of Islamic boarding school programmes that serve as catalysts for change, (2) the manifestation of tangible evidence of this transformation in the structure of community life, and (3) the identification of various frictions or obstacles that inherently accompany the transformation process.

4.1. Catalyst: Grassroots Islamic Boarding School Programmes as the Driving Force

The transformation in the urban community of Gogagoman did not occur spontaneously, but was initiated in a structured manner through three main programmes designed in a participatory and contextual manner by the Islamic boarding school. These programmes collectively functioned as the main catalysts for change.

First, the Al-Qur'an Education Park (TPQ) is positioned as the foundation for the internalisation of religious values in the younger generation. Held regularly every afternoon, this programme has a curriculum that goes beyond the technical teaching of reading the Qur'an and tajwid. Explicitly, this curriculum integrates the instilling of practical Islamic values, such as the ethics of speaking to parents, neighbourly manners, and the importance of maintaining cleanliness. Field observations captured a unique learning atmosphere: interactive and disciplined, yet child-friendly, with laughter and open-ended questions actively encouraged. This effectively creates a safe space for children to learn and express themselves. During the research period (April 2025), a significant improvement in Quran reading skills was observed in the majority of participants. P1 explained the philosophy behind their methods:

"Children not only learn to read the Qur'an, but also learn to love it. We give meaning to each verse they memorise; we tell them the stories behind it, so that they not only memorise but also understand and appreciate it. The goal is for the Qur'an to become their friend, not a burden (P1, 2025)."

Secondly, the Khuruj Dakwah Programme is a proactive da'wah strategy that adopts a door-to-door approach. This model is radically different from formal da'wah on the pulpit, which is often monological and distant. In practice, a small team consisting of senior students and an ustaz visits residents' homes—both those who are active and those who are rarely seen at the mosque. The visits, which usually take place in a relaxed atmosphere on the terrace of the house, are filled with personal dialogue about everyday religious issues, ranging from questions about prayer procedures to family problems. This model has proven highly effective in reducing the psychological distance between religious leaders and the general public. A local religious leader said:

'In the past, ustaz at the mosque were rarely known and felt distant. But now, pesantren students come to our homes, invite us to discuss, and invite us to recite the Qur'an. This makes religion feel close to us, not something high above us (P4, 2025).'

Third, Community Religious Studies and Worship Training are strategically designed to reach a broader, often-neglected segment of society, particularly housewives and teenagers. The study materials are selected to be thematic, practical, and relevant to the challenges of urban life, such as 'Children's Education in the Digital Age', 'Managing Family Finances in an Islamic Manner', and 'Fiqh of Social Relations'. In addition to regular studies, the pesantren also provides special guidance, such as training in prayer and ablution for beginners or converts, conducted in small groups to ensure personal attention. The success of this programme in mobilising participation is documented in the pesantren's records, which state that 'at least 86 residents actively participated in weekly recitations' in 2024, indicating that the pesantren has become a centre for communal activities.

4.2. Evidence of Transformation: Real Shifts in the Religious Life of the Community

The implementation of these catalyst programmes has produced a series of measurable and observable evidence of transformation in the socio-religious practices of the Gogagoman community. The most obvious evidence is a significant surge in formal religious participation. Prior to the programme intervention, mosques tended to be quiet outside of Friday prayer times, with attendance dominated by the elderly. Quantitative data from mosque documentation shows 'a 35% increase in congregational participation compared to the previous year' during Ramadan 2024. More than just numbers, there has been a striking demographic shift in the congregation: teenagers and young mothers are now the new faces consistently enlivening congregational prayers and other mosque activities. The experience of one resident, a father in his productive years, illustrates this profound personal shift:

"I used to only go to the mosque on Fridays because I was busy working. But since the ustaz from the pesantren often came to visit and invited me to study the Qur'an in a non-coercive way, I started regularly attending the congregation and even learning prayers. It feels different, more peaceful (P11, 2025)."

This transformation is also evident in the strengthening of spirituality that permeates daily practices and social spaces. Observations reveal the emergence of new religious practices at the community level. Children who have graduated from TPQ, now confident in themselves, take turns as muezzins at the local mosque, a role previously reserved for adults. Furthermore, an informal culture of reminding one another to worship has developed among residents, both through friendly reminders at coffee shops and in community WhatsApp groups. This indicates that the values taught are no longer limited to the classroom, but have been internalised and become new social norms.

Finally, evidence of transformation is manifested in the formation of a more inclusive and empowered religious community. The pesantren's patient and non-judgmental approach has succeeded in breaking down psychological barriers for residents who previously felt inferior or 'unworthy' of learning about religion due to their past or limited knowledge. This empowerment process, in which ordinary residents are personally guided to become spiritually independent, is described by a resident, a housewife:

"I used to not know how to perform wudhu properly and was too embarrassed to ask. But now I can teach my own children. All of that is because I learned from the ustaz at this pesantren, who patiently guided me from scratch without looking at me strangely (P8, 2025)."

4.3. Friction: Inherent Obstacles in Grassroots Transformation

Despite showing significant success, this transformation process faces various frictions and structural challenges that affect its long-term effectiveness and sustainability. The main obstacle is community participation, which is highly fluctuating and dependent on external factors. Attendance rates in TPQ programmes are often unstable. Observations note that 'TPQ student attendance decreases by almost 40% during the rainy season or school holidays'. These fluctuations are not

merely a matter of numbers; they directly disrupt the rhythm and continuity of the learning curriculum, forcing teachers to frequently repeat material and slowing students' overall progress. The teacher explained the dilemma they face:

“Children are sometimes absent because they have to help their parents sell goods at the market. Some don't come when it rains because their homes are far away and they don't have transportation. We can't force them, because that is their reality (P5, 2025).”

The second challenge is the chronic limitation of internal resources at the pesantren. The programme's effectiveness is hampered by an unfavourable teacher-student ratio, with 'there are only two active ustaz responsible for dozens of children in the TPQ programme'. This situation often forces the ustaz to teach two different age groups simultaneously in one room, which significantly reduces the quality of individual attention. Limitations are also evident in the physical facilities, where many activities are still conducted in the noisy mosque hall. The boarding school caretaker voiced this urgent need:

“We need more ustaz and proper learning spaces. Now, sometimes the ustaz has to teach two groups at once due to limitations. This is not ideal for the children or the ustaz (P2, 2025).”

The final obstacle is cultural in nature, namely the disconnect between the mindset of Islamic boarding schools and that of some households. Interview findings indicate a mindset that places all responsibility for religious education on the ustaz, as if Islamic boarding schools were a 'hands-off' service. This attitude weakens the process of strengthening values within the family environment, which is the main pillar of character education. A Teacher complained about the direct impact on children:

"Sometimes children are confused because no one at home reinforces religious lessons. Here, they learn manners; at home, they watch different shows. There are even parents who say, 'That's the ustaz's business, not mine (P12, 2025).”

Overall, the findings presented in this section paint a complete picture of the grassroots religious transformation process in Gogagoman. The data show that this process was effectively initiated by pesantren programmes that served as catalysts, producing a tangible impact in the form of increased participation and positive shifts in the community's religious practices. However, the findings also confirm that this transformation is a dynamic, non-linear process, in which frictions related to participation, resource constraints, and cultural mindsets are crucial factors shaping the pace and sustainability of these changes. Collectively, these empirical data provide a factual foundation that will be analysed and interpreted in more depth in the Discussion section.

5. Discussion

The findings from this case study provide a clear picture of how religious transformation can be initiated and sustained at the grassroots level in an urban context in Indonesia. Analysis of these findings shows that the Al-Mukhlisin Islamic boarding school not only functions as a passive educational institution, but consciously takes on the role of a proactive agent of social change that works from the bottom up. The following discussion will explore the meaning of these findings through three analytical lenses: the role of pesantren as adaptive grassroots agents, the nature of transformation processes centred on habitus, and the inherent challenges in maintaining the momentum of such transformation.

5.1. Pesantren as Adaptive Grassroots Agents of Transformation

The findings of this study strongly shift the image of pesantren from an isolated institution to a dynamic one that 'step outside their walls' to directly touch the lives of the community. This role is realised through consciously designed social intervention strategies, not just routine programmes.

The khuruj dakwah programme, for example, represents a fundamental innovation in da'wah. Unlike the one-way and often distant mimbar da'wah model, the personal and dialogical 'door-to-door' approach effectively breaks down the barriers of anonymity and indifference that characterise urban communities. This aligns with the participatory dakwah model, in which the transmission of religious values is understood as an emancipatory process involving empathetic relationships and joint problem-solving (Lubis, 2025; Syafii, 2025).

A deeper analysis of the khuruj dakwah model reveals a form of 'contextual intelligence'. Pesantren do not impose a rigid format of dakwah, but rather 'take the initiative', entering the private and domestic spaces of citizens in a polite and non-intimidating manner. Simple actions such as asking about someone's well-being before starting a religious dialogue are an essential trust-building strategy in urban environments where individualism tends to be high. Thus, the Al-Mukhlisin Islamic boarding school does not position itself as an ivory tower but as a facilitator that makes 'religion feel close', a fundamental prerequisite for grassroots transformation (Hou, 2025).

Furthermore, the approach in the TPQ programme, which emphasises 'loving the Qur'an' rather than merely memorising it, reflects the implementation of transformative religious pedagogy (Parhan, Budiyantri & Kartiko, 2024). This pedagogy consciously focuses on the formation of spiritual awareness and affection (love), not merely cognitive doctrinal instruction. In this context, Islamic boarding schools act as intelligent and adaptive grassroots agents, recognizing that true transformation in the modern era cannot be forced but must be nurtured by engaging the personal, emotional, and social dimensions of people's religiosity (Asrohah, 2011).

The adaptive nature of pesantren is also reflected in the curriculum of their community teachings (Mutammam, 2024). The selection of themes relevant to the daily lives of mothers and teenagers, such as parenting in the digital age or family financial management, shows that pesantren actively 'listen' to the needs of their communities. This is a shift from the traditional religious institution model, which tends to transmit textual knowledge unidirectionally, towards a model of an institution that functions as a relevant and responsive lifelong learning centre. This ability to adapt is the key to the acceptance and success of its programmes (Yolanda, Gunarhadi & Efendi, 2025).

One teacher (P1) explained, "Before joining the pesantren, most of our youth saw religion only as ritual. Now, they understand religion as behavior and responsibility."

Overall, the role of the Al-Mukhlisin Islamic boarding school as a driving force for grassroots transformation does not lie in a single programme, but rather in a mutually reinforcing ecosystem of strategies. The personal approach of khuruj dakwah builds an initial bridge, which is then strengthened by developing the younger generation through TPQs that focus on affection, and supported by relevant programmes for adults through community recitation. It is this combination that holistically enables the pesantren to effectively exert its influence and become an authentic socio-religious anchor in the urban community of Gogagoman.

5.2. The Nature of Grassroots Transformation: Participatory and Habit-Based

The impact of the pesantren's programmes shows the hallmarks of an authentic grassroots transformation: the changes are gradual, participatory, and centred on modifying daily behaviours and habits (Monfred & Tadem, 2025). The data on increased congregational participation is not the ultimate goal, but rather a measurable indicator of a deeper process. The finding that residents who 'used to only go to the mosque on Fridays' now regularly attend congregational prayers and that children dare to become muezzins is empirical evidence of the formation of a new religious habitus at the community level (Shakir & Walton, 2025). Al-Mukhlisin has also initiated several community-based programs, including youth mentoring, charity projects (sedekah jumat), and adult literacy

classes. A female participant (P8) shared, "After attending the parenting class at the pesantren, I became more active in community work. I learned that worship includes helping others."

This phenomenon clearly illustrates Lickona's (2009) comprehensive theory of character education, which argues that character (including religious character) is forged through three domains: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Pesantren programmes simultaneously target all three: community recitations provide moral knowing through thematic materials; personal approaches in khuruj dakwah and learning methods in TPQ foster moral feeling (a sense of love and closeness to religion); and the overall participatory programme creates an arena for moral action and habit formation.

Empowering a housewife to the point where she can teach her own child to perform wudhu is the ultimate manifestation of the community-based Islamic education model. In this case, transformation is not measured by how much doctrine residents have memorised, but by the extent to which they feel empowered to practise and even transmit religious knowledge within the smallest sphere, namely the family. This theory emphasises collaboration and empowerment, with the goal of creating an independent learning community (Lickona, 2009). The transformation in Gogagoman, therefore, is not a process of indoctrination from above but one of communal empowerment from below.

The transformation that has taken place is also inclusive, breaking down the social barriers that often hinder religious participation. By actively embracing those who feel 'unworthy' or 'inferior', Islamic boarding schools create a psychologically safe space for participation. This shows that religiosity is not seen as an elite achievement but rather a journey accessible to everyone, regardless of where they start. This inclusiveness becomes a social glue that strengthens community cohesion around religious activities (Musthofa, 2025).

Thus, it can be asserted that the essence of transformation in Gogagoman is not a dramatic religious revolution, but a quiet yet profound evolution. Change occurs not through coercion or mass mobilisation, but through a series of personal interactions, routine habits, and a gradual process of empowerment. It is this organic and decentralised nature that gives it long-term sustainability, as the change does not depend on a single charismatic figure, but has become embedded in the social structure and habits of the community itself.

5.3. Challenges in Maintaining Grassroots Momentum: A Critical Analysis

This case study also honestly reveals the fragility and paradox inherent in grassroots transformation movements. The obstacles encountered are not merely technical constraints, but rather a reflection of the inherent challenges that determine the sustainability of momentum for change. Fluctuating participation shows that grassroots initiatives, whose strength lies in voluntarism, also have weaknesses in their vulnerability to external socio-economic conditions beyond the control of Islamic boarding schools. This is a paradox: the more participatory a programme is, the more it depends on external dynamics that cannot be controlled (Hakiman & Sheely, 2025).

A more in-depth analysis of human resource limitations, with only two active ustaz, reveals the risk of organisational burnout. The disproportionate workload on a handful of individuals can threaten the quality and sustainability of the programme in the long term. Without a regeneration system or training programme for volunteer teachers from the local community, this model becomes highly dependent on the resilience of key individuals, a fragile foundation for long-term transformation (Guevara-Delgado, 2025).

Financially and infrastructurally, these findings affirm Prasojo's (2021) study on the challenges of urban Islamic boarding school economic sustainability, but further analysis reveals a 'paradox of dependency.' Communities that begin to transform become increasingly dependent on an institution

(Islamic boarding school) whose own resources are limited. The more successful the pesantren programme is, the greater the expectations and burdens it bears. Without a path to community independence or systematic external support, the spirit of transformation risks stagnating.

The challenge of the cultural mindset of parents reveals the limitations of the pesantren's influence and is the most fundamental obstacle. This underlines Lickona's (2009) central argument that partnership between educational institutions and the home environment is an absolute requirement for successful character education. When this synergy is weak, the process of internalising values is disrupted. This risks creating a 'TPQ generation' that may exhibit religious behaviour in the pesantren or mosque environment, but experiences value confusion or a 'split identity' when in an unsupportive home environment.

In summary, these challenges do not stand alone but form an interconnected system of vulnerabilities. Limited financial resources prevent Islamic boarding schools from organising empowerment programmes for parents. The absence of such programmes for parents perpetuates a problematic cultural mindset. It is this cultural mindset that ultimately contributes to fluctuations in children's participation. Understanding this interconnection is key to designing more effective interventions in the future.

Based on the above explanation, the contribution of this field research can be confirmed both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the Al-Mukhlisin Islamic boarding school case study provides rich empirical evidence for theories of community-based Islamic education and character education in the context of contemporary Indonesia. Moreover, this research presents a working model of how a local religious institution can become a 'community-based institution fostering participatory engagement,' which not only provides religious services but also actively builds social capital, trust, and collective resilience in an urban environment that is prone to anonymity. Gogagoman is an urban area characterized by religious diversity. Instead of isolating itself, Al-Mukhlisin has developed a dialogical relationship with neighboring communities. As stated by the pesantren leader (P6), "We often invite non-Muslim neighbors to join our social events. This openness builds trust and reduces misunderstanding."

This study also contributes to the sociological discourse on religious phenomena in urban areas. Rather than confirming the grand narrative of inevitable secularisation, the case of Gogagoman shows a process of religious revitalisation from below. This implies that modernity and urbanisation are not always inversely proportional to religiosity; on the contrary, they can give rise to new forms of religious expression and organisation that are adaptive and relevant to the challenges of the times.

In practical terms, the model implemented by Al-Mukhlisin has high replication potential. However, findings regarding obstacles provide an important lesson: replication of this model must be accompanied by a well-thought-out mitigation strategy. This study implicitly suggests that future grassroots da'wah models need to be designed as ecosystems, not merely programmes. One crucial component of this ecosystem is a Parent Empowerment Programme that runs parallel to children's education, for example, through family communication workshops or religious counselling sessions, to bridge the mindset gap.

Two other components of the ecosystem are social entrepreneurship development and strategic partnerships. Pesantren can be encouraged to develop small business units (e.g., catering or cooperatives) whose profits can subsidise programme operational costs, thereby reducing dependence on uncertain self-funding. On the other hand, strategic partnerships with local governments, companies through CSR programmes, or philanthropic institutions can help overcome limitations in infrastructure and human resource capacity.

The results resonate with Mezirow's (2009) transformative learning theory and Freire's (1970) concept of participatory education, showing that transformation occurs when individuals reinterpret their beliefs through social experience. In Al-Mukhlisin, religious education becomes a dialogical space where community members critically engage with faith and society.

Finally, this study paves the way and emphasises the urgency for future longitudinal research. Tracking TPQ alumni until they reach adulthood will provide invaluable insights into the long-term impact of this character-building model on their lives, careers, and social contributions. Additionally, comparative case studies in different urban environments (e.g., in larger metropolitan cities or in more ethnically and religiously heterogeneous urban communities) would be useful for testing the adaptability and scalability of the grassroots transformation model identified in this study.

6. Conclusion

This case study concludes that the Al-Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School plays a vital role and has successfully acted as an agent of religious transformation from the grassroots level within the urban community of Gogagoman Village. This success was not achieved through a single approach, but rather through a participatory and contextual ecosystem of programmes. Through programmes such as the Al-Qur'an Education Park (TPQ), which focuses on character building among the younger generation, khuruj dakwah, which builds personal relationships with residents, and community recitations that are relevant to everyday life, the pesantren has been able to initiate significant change. The tangible impact of this transformation is manifested in increased religious participation among the community, the strengthening of spiritual values in daily practices, and the formation of a more inclusive, empowered, and cohesive religious community.

The researchers fully acknowledge that this study has several limitations. First, as a single case study focusing on one Islamic boarding school in a specific neighbourhood context, these findings are rich in contextual depth but limited in their generalisability. The dynamics occurring in Gogagoman may not be directly applicable to all urban communities in Indonesia, which have different social and cultural characteristics. Second, this study relies on the perspectives of actors who are actively involved with the pesantren. The views of community members who may be indifferent or resistant to the pesantren programme have not been explored in depth. Third, this study is cross-sectional in nature, capturing phenomena within a specific time frame, and therefore cannot measure the sustainability or long-term impact of the transformations that have taken place.

7. Suggestion

Based on these findings and limitations, this study proposes several recommendations. For practitioners, such as other pesantren administrators and community organisations, it is recommended to adopt an 'ecosystem' model of guidance, rather than sporadic programmes. This includes developing parent empowerment programmes to create synergy between pesantren and home, as well as exploring social entrepreneurship models to increase financial independence. For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct comparative case studies in several cities with different characteristics to test the adaptability of this model. In addition, longitudinal studies that track the development of TPQ alumni into adulthood are needed to understand the long-term impact of this community-based character building.

This case study of Al-Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School confirms the vital role of local religious institutions as catalysts for grassroots transformation, offering a participatory and community-centred model for fostering religiosity in the face of modern urban challenges. In broader terms, this study reaffirms the relevance of pesantren as dynamic agents of change that can bridge spirituality, education, and social development.

Declarations

Author Contributions. M.S.R, & P.W.P.: Literature review, conceptualization. A., & N.: methodology, data analysis. A.I.: review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Ethical Approval. This study received ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Institute Agama Islam Negeri Manado, Indonesia. All procedures performed in this research involving human participants complied with institutional ethical standards.

Data Availability Statement. The data supporting the findings of this study, including interview transcripts, observation notes, and document analysis materials, are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions and the need to protect participant confidentiality.

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