

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COUNSELOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC ARTS IN LANGKAT REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

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The development of Islamic art plays a crucial role in religious education and character building for the younger generation. However, the practice and training of Islamic art at the community level still face various challenges. This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic religious instructors as agents of change in developing Islamic art in Batang Serangan District, Langkat Regency. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, incorporating in-depth interviews with four religious instructors, complemented by qualitative participatory methods and data analysis. The results indicate that religious instructors actively participate in introducing Islamic art, guiding arts groups, instilling religious and moral values, and increasing community participation in Islamic art activities. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating participatory methods and the active role of instructors as agents of change in cultural transformation and religious education. This research empowers practitioners, historians, and stakeholders to optimize Islamic art training and opens up opportunities for broader, further research combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

Keywords: religious instructors, Islamic art, agents of change, participation, religious education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of Islamic art in Langkat Regency demonstrates the increasingly complex dynamics of community life. Social change, the increasing need for spaces for religious expression, and the diversification of local culture have made Islamic art an adaptive medium for da'wah (Islamic outreach). In several sub-districts, such as Stabat, Tanjung Pura, and Secanggang, communities actively hold Islamic-themed arts activities, such as nasyid (Islamic nasyid), marhaban (Islamic calligraphy), calligraphy, and tilawah (Islamic recitation) as part of local religious traditions (Langkat Kesbangpol Agency, 2023). This situation confirms that Islamic art plays a strategic role in building the religious and socio-cultural identity of the Langkat community.

The role of religious instructors in the development of Islamic art has received attention in various academic studies. Many studies confirm that religious instructors function not only as worship guides but also as motivators and facilitators in the development of religious culture. According to Siregar (2021), religious instructors have a socio-cultural role in encouraging Islamic-themed artistic creativity, which can support the effectiveness of da'wah. Furthermore, Hidayat (2020) found that Islamic art can improve religious literacy if supported by structured mentoring from religious instructors.

This literature demonstrates that strengthening Islamic art is closely linked to the capacity of religious instructors as agents of socio-religious transformation. This paper aims to analyze the role of Islamic instructors in the development of Islamic art in Langkat Regency. This study is crucial for understanding how extension programs can support the development of Islamic art in a region with diverse religious cultures. The analysis focuses on the forms of instructor involvement, mentoring strategies, and the impact on the growth of Islamic art in the community. Thus, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the contribution of instructors in strengthening Islamic art as a medium for da'wah and cultural exchange.

The role of Islamic instructors is thought to have a significant influence on the development of Islamic art in Langkat Regency. Extension workers have direct access to the community, facilitate religious activities, and are able to direct artistic creativity to maintain relevance to Islamic values. This hypothesis is supported by the theoretical assumption that extension workers are change agents who can mobilize community participation in religious activities, including Islamic art (Syafii, 2019). Therefore, strengthening the competence and role of extension workers is seen as a key factor in advancing Islamic art at the local level.

The researcher's interest in this topic stems from the importance of examining the relationship between the role of Islamic religious instructors as missionaries and the relationship of Islamic art within the context of local communities. Islamic art is often understood solely as a cultural expression, yet it holds great potential as a means of internalizing religious values. The author's initial observations of several Islamic arts activities in Langkat indicate that instructors play a prominent role in organizing, guiding, and enlivening these activities. Therefore, research on the role of instructors in the development of Islamic art in Langkat is not only academically relevant but also has practical significance for the development of culture-based da'wah.

Religion from a Scientific Perspective

Religion is one of the most fundamental institutions in human life, serving as a system of beliefs, values, and practices that regulate human relationships with God, fellow humans, and the universe. In scientific studies, religion is not only understood as a normative theological aspect but is also viewed as an objective phenomenon that can be analyzed through various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and communication science. Etymologically, the term "religion" in Indonesian refers to a system of rules or teachings that bind individuals or groups to regulate their lives. Meanwhile, in Arabic, "al-dīn" means a way of life, obedience, or a system that directs a person's life toward a specific goal. Scientific perspectives then expand this understanding by viewing religion as a cultural mechanism that gives meaning to reality, provides moral guidance, and creates a more orderly social structure (Durkheim, 1912). In Emile Durkheim's view, religion is understood as a collective system of beliefs and practices that function to integrate individuals into society and generate social solidarity. Meanwhile, Clifford Geertz (1966), through his anthropological approach, views religion as a symbolic system that functions to build strong moods and motivations by formulating a comprehensive conception of reality. Thus, religion from a scientific perspective does not stand as a single concept, but rather as a multidimensional entity that possesses spiritual, moral, social, symbolic, and cultural aspects all at once. In the Islamic context, religion has a broader scope, as it regulates not only the vertical relationship between humans and God but also horizontal relationships between people, including social structures, legal systems, art, culture, and the principles of collective life. A comprehensive understanding of the basic concepts of religion serves as an important theoretical foundation for this research, as the development of Islamic art cannot be separated from the values, beliefs, and social structures of Muslim communities, especially in areas like Langkat Regency, which have strong religious traditions.

Religion as a System of Values, Culture, and Community Identity

Religion exists not only as a system of beliefs and ritual practices, but also as a value system integrated with the culture and identity of a community. In the context of cultural studies, religion is seen as an entity that shapes the mindset, lifestyle, interaction patterns, and cultural expressions of a community. This aligns with Koentjaraningrat's (2009) view that culture consists of ideas, activities, and artifacts; and religion significantly influences all three. At the ideational level, religion provides moral and ethical concepts that determine how a society understands right and wrong. At the activity level, religion forms the basis for rituals and organized social activities. Meanwhile, at the artifact level, religion gives rise to art forms, symbols, and material works that reflect spiritual

values. In the Islamic context, Islamic art is a cultural artifact that explicitly embodies the values of monotheism, Islamic symbols, and the religious traditions of the community. Calligraphy, Islamic music, tilawah (recitation of the Koran), marhaban (prayer chants), and even mosque architecture are concrete examples of how religion shapes the visual and spiritual identity of a community. In areas such as Langkat Regency, the community's Islamic identity has a significant influence on the development of local culture, including Islamic arts activities that are part of daily life and religious ceremonies. Furthermore, religion also functions as a mechanism for forming group identity. Through collective Islamic art, such as nasyid or marhaban groups, communities build a sense of togetherness, social solidarity, and pride in their religious identity. Religious instructors, in this context, play a role in strengthening this identity by providing guidance, guidance, and consolidation of religious values so that Islamic art remains within the framework of sharia. Therefore, understanding religion as a system of values, culture, and identity is crucial as is an important foundation in seeing how Islamic art developed and how the role of religious instructors became relevant in maintaining and directing this development.

Islamic Art as a Tool for Religious Communication

Islamic art is one of the most effective media for da'wah (Islamic outreach) because it conveys religious messages through aesthetic and emotional approaches. In da'wah communication theory, religious messages are more easily accepted when packaged in a form that appeals to the emotions and is culturally appropriate (Aziz, 2017). Islamic art, such as nasyid, qasidah, and marhaban, combines elements of poetry, rhythm, and religious symbols, allowing the da'wah message to be conveyed more subtly and pleasantly. This art form allows for the transmission of values without resistance, as people tend to respond positively to art. In the context of cultural da'wah, Islamic art serves as a means of harmonizing Islamic teachings and local traditions. Religious educators also utilize art as an effective medium for strengthening religious literacy through a dialogical and humanistic approach.

Islamic art is not only a means of communication but also a means of internalizing values, working through the mechanisms of habituation, emotional appreciation, and role modeling. Nasyid verses, which convey messages of morality, patience, and love for the Prophet, can gradually shape religious awareness without coercion. From an Islamic educational perspective, values combined with aesthetics are more easily instilled because they involve the emotional (affective) dimension, in addition to the intellectual (cognitive) dimension. Arts such as Quranic recitation and calligraphy even have a spiritual dimension: reciting holy verses and writing the Kalimah (the sentence of tawhid) can foster a sense of submission and love for Allah. In communities like Langkat, Islamic arts activities routinely performed at religious events serve as a non-formal educational vehicle, where children and adolescents naturally learn about Islamic norms.

Islamic Art in Moral Development

Moral development is a primary goal of da'wah (Islamic outreach), and Islamic art contributes to this process by strengthening moral character. From an educational psychology perspective, repetitive art involving social interaction (such as marhaban or hadrah exercises) fosters discipline, cooperation, and respect for religious values. Islamic art also fosters love for the Prophet, strengthens etiquette in worship, and fosters a culture of shame against unethical behavior. Religious instructors utilize arts activities to foster youth groups in mosques, women's communities, or religious study groups as part of their moral development programs. Thus, Islamic art not only beautifies culture, but becomes a strategic instrument in building the character of the people.

Functions and Scope of Work of Religious Counselors

Religious counselors have educational, consultative, facilitative, and advocacy functions. The educational function relates to providing a correct and contextual understanding of religion. The consultative function positions counselors as advisors when communities face religious and social issues. The facilitative function is carried out by connecting communities with religious institutions, the government, or local leaders to support guidance activities. The advocacy function, meanwhile, is to help communities resolve moral, social, or religious issues through a da'wah and empowerment approach. The scope of work of religious counselors includes fostering Islamic study

groups (Majelis Taklim), mosque youth groups, traditional religious activities, and mentoring Islamic arts as a means of da'wah.

As agents of change, religious counselors have a role in mobilizing communities to embrace religious and cultural innovations. They serve as motivators, facilitators, catalysts, and educators. In Islamic arts activities, religious counselors motivate communities to preserve religious arts, facilitate training, and act as catalysts, bridging local traditions with Islamic teachings. This role allows religious instructors to influence social norms and improve the quality of Islamic arts activities. In practice, religious instructors apply an intervention model that includes: (1) a group approach, such as fostering marhaban or nasyid; (2) a cultural approach, namely utilizing local customs and arts as a medium for preaching; and (3) a participatory approach, namely involving the community in designing and implementing Islamic arts activities. This intervention model makes Islamic arts an effective vehicle for changing religious behavior. The empowerment model emphasizes the community's ability to organize themselves, make decisions, and implement their own programs. Islamic arts can be a means of empowerment through fostering creativity, strengthening religious identity, and increasing social competence. With a participatory approach, religious instructors involve the community in training processes, arts competitions, or religious festivals.

Rogers' Theory of Change Agents

In the Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers, 2003), a change agent is an individual tasked with introducing new knowledge, influencing public attitudes, and facilitating the process of social transformation. Religious instructors fit this definition because they convey religious messages, introduce worship practices, and reinforce positive Islamic culture. In the context of Islamic art, instructors play a role in introducing sharia-compliant art models, refining poetic content, and fostering arts groups to align with Islamic educational values.

The Diffusion of Innovations theory proposed by Rogers (2003) is one of the most influential theories explaining how an innovation is introduced, accepted, and adopted by society. Within this theoretical framework, a change agent is defined as an individual or institution with the ability to influence innovative decisions within a social system through communication, guidance, and facilitation. Change agents play a role in accelerating the spread of innovation by providing information, instilling understanding, building trust, and bridging relationships between innovators and community members who become adopters (Rogers, 2003). This concept is highly relevant to understanding the role of Islamic religious instructors in the context of Islamic art development, as they serve as carriers of religious ideas and practices that have been adapted to the needs of the community and local social and cultural conditions.

In Rogers' model, change agents perform several core functions: (1) diagnosing community needs and conditions, (2) developing strategies for delivering innovations, (3) introducing and explaining innovations, (4) facilitating the adoption process, and (5) ensuring the sustainability of change through mentoring (Rogers, 2003). When this theory is applied to the context of religious education, religious instructors can be viewed as agents of change who work not only to bring technical innovations but also social and cultural innovations. These innovations can include a more contextual understanding of Islamic teachings, more humanistic methods of preaching, and even the development of Islamic art as a medium for internalizing values. Thus, religious instructors not only convey teaching materials but also serve as bridges for change, connecting Islamic values with the needs of modern society.

In the context of Islamic art development, the role of religious instructors as agents of change is evident in their role in introducing Islamic art forms that align with sharia teachings and are relevant to current developments. For example, instructors can introduce contemporary nasyid models that maintain Islamic etiquette, poetic content, and aesthetics. They can also facilitate the improvement of traditional art forms such as marhaban or qasidah to ensure they remain within the bounds of religious and educational values. According to Rogers, innovations are more readily accepted if they are understood, perceived as beneficial, and aligned with the needs of the community (Rogers, 2003). Therefore, religious instructors often employ an interpersonal communication approach, providing examples, and directly guiding arts groups to ensure a natural transformation process that avoids resistance.

Furthermore, the theory of agents of change explains that social change does not occur instantly, but rather through stages of awareness, interest, evaluation, experimentation, and adoption (Rogers, 2003). In this regard, religious instructors play a crucial role at each stage. In the initial

stage, instructors provide information to the community about the benefits of Islamic art as a medium for da'wah. During the evaluation stage, religious instructors engage in dialogue with the community regarding the suitability of certain art forms to religious norms. During the adoption stage, religious instructors foster and assist arts groups to develop works that are both aesthetically pleasing and imbued with religious values. This demonstrates that religious instructors play a role not only as transmitters of messages but also as cultural activators influencing social structures and practices.

Thus, Rogers's theory of agents of change provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how Islamic religious instructors play a role in the development of Islamic art in society. They perform educational, facilitative, consultative, and catalytic functions that contribute to the transformation of religious culture. This role makes religious instructors not only religious communicators but also agents of social change, capable of harmonizing Islamic values with local artistic expressions in a sustainable manner (Rogers, 2003).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to describe the role of Islamic religious instructors in the development of Islamic arts in Batang Serangan District, Langkat Regency. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and practices of Islamic religious instructors in fostering Islamic arts in the community. Therefore, emphasis was placed on data quality and the social context underlying the phenomena studied (Creswell, 2014). Data analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software that facilitates the systematic organization, coding, and interpretation of interview data and displays relationships between thematic categories.

In addition to interviews, this study also employed a participatory qualitative method. The researcher, who also served as a religious instructor, directly participated in Islamic arts development activities, thus obtaining data from direct experience, observation, and reflection on daily practices. This participatory approach enabled the researcher to understand the internal dynamics of arts groups, the real challenges they face, and effective development strategies, resulting in richer and more authentic data (Creswell, 2014; Berg & Lune, 2012).

The research location was chosen in Batang Serangan District, Langkat Regency, because this area has active Islamic arts activities and is supported by religious instructors who play a role in fostering arts groups. The research period was conducted from January to November 2025, allowing for a sufficiently long observation period to understand the dynamics of the instructors' role in Islamic arts development.

The research data sources consisted of four religious instructors directly involved in Islamic arts development: Sri Ningsih, S.Ag; Putri Rahmadhani Lubis, S.PdI, S.H, M.A; M. Qusyairi Batubara, S.PdI, M.Pd; and M. Syahrial, S.Sy. Each informant was interviewed using seven structured interview questions designed to explore their understanding of the role, strategies, challenges, and impact of Islamic arts development in the community.

The validity of the data was tested using triangulation, which involves comparing data from various sources and methods, including interviews, participant observation, and official documents related to religious education. This triangulation ensures the consistency and credibility of the information, resulting in valid and reliable findings.

Data analysis was conducted through several stages: (1) transcription of interviews and field notes from participants, (2) initial coding using Atlas.ti to identify key themes, (3) categorization and mapping of relationships between themes, and (4) interpretation of the findings based on Rogers' (2003) change agent theory framework and Islamic art literature. This participatory approach allows researchers to become not only observers but also participants in the social processes being studied, resulting in richer, more in-depth, and more accurate descriptions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

No	Interview Guidelines	Key Findings	Example of Informant Statement
1	Understanding Islamic Art	Islamic art instructors understand Islamic art as a cultural expression aligned with sharia values, morals, and da'wah (Islamic outreach). They focus on Islamic aesthetics, poetic content, and educational media.	"Islamic art is not just entertainment, but a means of instilling Islamic values in the younger generation." (Sri Ningsih, S.Ag)
2	The Role of Extension Workers	Islamic art instructors act as facilitators, motivators, and mentors for art groups, introducing innovative Islamic art forms that align with Islamic teachings.	"We accompany children and teenagers in reciting qasidah and nasyid, ensuring that the lyrics and presentation are Islamic." (Putri Rahmadhani Lubis, S.PdI)
3	Coaching Methods	They utilize participatory methods, hands-on training, demonstrations, group discussions, and ongoing guidance.	"We accompany them at every practice, demonstrating how to deliver the lyrics and movements appropriately." (M. Qusyairi Batubara, S.PdI)
4	The Contribution of Art to Religious Education	Islamic art serves as a medium for da'wah (Islamic outreach) that instills morals, strengthens religious understanding, and builds the character of the younger generation.	"Through art, children more easily understand Islamic values, such as patience, perseverance, and cooperation." (M. Syahrial, S.Sy)
5	Challenges and Obstacles	Challenges include limited facilities, lack of interest among the younger generation, and limited knowledge of art.	"Some children are less interested because they prefer modern entertainment, so we have to be creative in combining Islamic art with a contemporary approach." (Sri Ningsih, S.Ag)
6	Collaboration with the Community	Islamic art instructors collaborate with religious leaders, teachers, and local art groups to support the sustainability of Islamic art.	"We always involve community leaders and teachers to ensure that Islamic arts activities are widely accepted by the community." (Putri Rahmadhani Lubis, S.PdI)
7	Evaluation and Impact	There has been an increase in community participation, the quality of Islamic art, and religious understanding; Islamic art serves as an effective educational medium.	"Now our qasidah and nasyid are more structured, and the children are more disciplined in their practice." (M. Qusyairi Batubara, S.PdI)

The summary of the interview response analysis shows that religious instructors act as agents of change, in accordance with Rogers' (2003) theory, facilitating, motivating, and guiding the community in adopting Islamic art innovations. Participatory methods have proven effective in increasing participant understanding and engagement. Islamic art serves a dual function as a medium for da'wah and religious education, in line with Al-Faruqi (1986) and Aziz (2017). Supporting factors include community collaboration, the instructors' internal motivation, and creativity in coaching methods. Inhibiting factors include the interests of the younger generation and limited facilities.

The results of this study confirm Rogers' (2003) theory of agents of change. Religious instructors, as agents of change, successfully introduced and guided Islamic art innovations through the following stages: awareness, interest, evaluation, experimentation, and adoption. The researcher's active participation as an instructor added depth to the data and strengthened the validity of the qualitative approach (Berg & Lune, 2012).

The contribution of Islamic art to religious education is evident in the internalization of moral values, discipline, and cooperation. These findings align with Al-Faruqi's (1986) study, which stated that Islamic art is not merely aesthetic, but also a means of moral and spiritual education.

Furthermore, Islamic art as a medium for da'wah confirms Aziz's (2017) research, which found that art can be an effective means of communicating religious values.

The difference with previous research lies in the coaching method. Previous studies (e.g., Koentjaraningrat, 2009) emphasized general cultural aspects, while this study emphasizes the integration of religious values into contemporary art and the direct participation of instructors. This emphasizes that instructors play a role not only as observers but also as promoters of Islamic culture in the community. This implies that instructors need to be structurally empowered and provided with Islamic arts training to be more effective. Active community participation, including local leaders, is a crucial factor in the sustainability of Islamic art. This model can be applied in other regions as an integrative approach between da'wah and art.

Framework for increasing community participation, religious understanding, quality of Islamic art

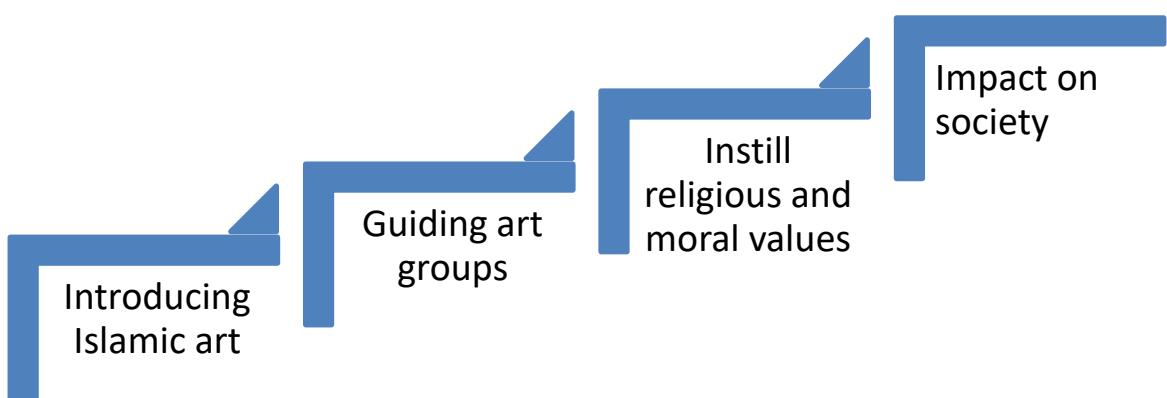


Image caption:

- a) Islamic Religious Instructors as agents of change who initiate the innovation and development process.
- b) Introduction to Islamic Art and Instructors introduce Islamic aesthetic values, poetry, movement, and educational media.
- c) Development of Arts Groups through participatory methods, practice, and ongoing guidance.
- d) Internalization of Islamic Values through interaction with Participants learning moral values, discipline, cooperation, and the practice of Islamic teachings.
- e) Impact on the Community: Increased artistic quality, religious awareness, and active community participation.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and data analysis, it can be concluded that Islamic Religious Instructors in Batang Serangan District, Langkat Regency, play an effective role as agents of change in the development of Islamic art, through the introduction and development of arts groups, and the internalization of religious and moral values. The active participation of Instructors as facilitators and practitioners of arts activities enables the community, especially the younger generation, to better understand and appreciate Islamic art while instilling moral and religious values. These findings reinforce Rogers' (2003) theory of change agents by demonstrating how

social innovation, in the form of Islamic art, can be adopted through direct guidance and participatory methods. Socially and culturally, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating religious education and art as an effective medium for da'wah (Islamic outreach), while academically, the results add to the literature on the role of religious instructors in local cultural transformation. Limitations of the study include the limited number of informants and the specific location, so generalizing the findings requires caution; therefore, further research is recommended that expand the scope of the area, increase the number of participants, and incorporate quantitative methods to evaluate the impact of Islamic art more objectively.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that practitioners and religious instructors continue to develop participatory methods in Islamic arts development, expand collaboration with community leaders, teachers, and local arts communities, and utilize technology for educational and da'wah media. For academics, the results of this study can serve as a basis for a more systematic study of the integration of Islamic arts in religious and cultural education and as a reference for developing theories of agents of change in local contexts. For further research, it is recommended to explore the social, psychological, and economic aspects of Islamic arts development, use broader data triangulation, and combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to more comprehensively analyze the impact and sustainability of Islamic arts. This approach will enrich understanding of the role of religious instructors as agents of change in cultural transformation and religious education in society.

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