

MODEL OF MUALLAF DEVELOPMENT BASED ON LOCAL WISDOM IN MUSLIM MINORITY VILLAGES: A CASE STUDY OF NGADAS VILLAGE, EAST JAVA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines a model for guiding converts based on local wisdom in minority Muslim communities, using a case study in Ngadas Village, Poncokusumo Subdistrict, Malang Regency. The socio-religious configuration of this village is unique, as Muslims are a minority group that has grown mainly through conversion due to marriage and social interaction. Therefore, guidance must not only be doctrinal but also adaptive to local culture and interfaith relations. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed interactively through condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing with data triangulation. The findings show that the guidance of converts takes place through a non-directive and dialogical community-based model, integrating local wisdom into socio-religious traditions such as tahlilan, Friday prayers/sermons, and daily interactions. The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of a model for guiding converts in the context of pluralistic Muslim minority villages, with guidance mechanisms that also maintain social cohesion. As an implication, the study offers a practical guidance model for similar villages, integrating guidance into established communal forums, increasing the capacity of mentors in non-directive mentoring, and developing concise modules that are flexible to the rhythm of agricultural work. However, the sustainability of the model is still constrained by limited resources and guidance planning.

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INTRODUCTION

Conversion to Islam is not only a theological event, but also a social process that touches on identity, family relationships, position in the community, and access to religious knowledge (Ahsanti, 2025; Ismail et al., 2024). Various studies on converts in Indonesia show that many of them experience a problem of "religious gap." They are administratively Muslim, but their understanding of faith, ability to worship, and religious social support are still

limited, making them prone to identity confusion and wavering in religious practice (Fadhilatunnisa et al., 2022). Weak guidance also contributes to the vulnerability of converts, causing some to return to their original religion (Al-Fairusy et al., 2024).

In the context of Muslim minority communities, the issue of guidance becomes more complex because converts learn and build their Islamic identity in a social environment dominated by followers of other religions, while access to formal Islamic educational institutions and guidance facilities is also limited (Ahsanti, 2025). Research on the guidance of converts in Karo Regency, Sumatra, and several other areas shows that guidance is often sporadic, dependent on the initiative of religious leaders or certain institutions, and not yet systematically planned (Ramadhani & Tanjung, 2023).

Research on the guidance of converts in Indonesia has also developed considerably, including studies examining guidance models implemented by the government, Islamic organizations, and local communities. Juwairiani, for example, describes the pattern of guidance for converts in Sidrap Regency, which tends to be incidental and fluctuating, with guidance activities that are not yet sustainable (Juwairiani et al., 2024). Most studies focus on Muslim-majority areas, formal institutional settings (Aryati et al., 2025; Hadinata et al., 2023; Imam Taufik Alkhotob, 2025), or urban contexts (Aldi Candra Sumawan, 2023; Ikran et al., 2022; Lubis & Irwansyah, 2025). Therefore, there are still limited studies that explicitly explain the model of muallaf guidance in Muslim minority mountain villages and how local wisdom is operationalized as a guidance strategy as well as a guardian of social harmony. This is where there is a gap that needs to be addressed. This article responds to this gap by examining a model for guiding converts based on local wisdom in Ngadas Village. Empirically, this article describes the socio-religious context of the village, the profiles of converts and their guides, and the forms of local wisdom that color inter-community relations.

This study has the following objectives: *first*, to map the socio-religious context of Ngadas Village and the forms of local wisdom relevant to the guidance of converts. *Second*, to analyze the existing guidance model, including the actors, approaches, materials, methods, and media, as well as how local wisdom is integrated into practice. *Third*, to examine its impact on strengthening the faith, worship habits, and social integration of converts, along with the factors that support or hinder its sustainability.

In terms of scientific contribution, this study expands the study of muallaf guidance in the context of Muslim minorities in mountain villages, which has received little attention. It offers a conceptual formulation of community-based guidance that integrates local wisdom as a mechanism for learning religion and a strategy for maintaining social cohesion. It also provides practical implications in the form of a reference framework for strengthening the capacity of mentors and designing more systematic guidance in similar communities.

METHOD

This research was conducted in Ngadas Village, Poncokusumo Subdistrict, Malang Regency, East Java. This village was chosen because it has a unique religious configuration: Muslims are a minority group, while the majority of the population embraces other religions, with strong local socio-cultural traditions. This configuration creates a special dynamic in religious guidance, especially for converts who must strengthen their Islamic identity in a pluralistic environment. In addition, there are no formal institutions for convert guidance in Ngadas Village; guidance takes place through community-based religious activities such as tahlilan and congregational prayers, thus providing a natural context for observing convert guidance based on local wisdom. Within this framework, the case studied is the model of convert guidance in Ngadas Village, while the unit of analysis includes guidance practices, interactions between mentors and converts, and the role of local wisdom in the process.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical case study design (Yin, 2013). A qualitative approach was chosen because the purpose of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning, process, and dynamics of muallaf guidance in the context of local wisdom and their position as a Muslim minority, something that cannot be reduced to numbers or quantitative variables. A case study design was used because the research focused on one specific case (Sugiyono, 2019), namely the model of muallaf guidance in Ngadas Village, which is considered unique in terms of religious configuration, local wisdom, and community-based guidance practices. The research is descriptive in nature because it attempts to describe in detail the socio-religious context,

forms of local wisdom, and patterns of muallaf guidance, as well as analytical because it relates these three aspects to the theoretical framework used. The data used consists of primary and secondary data (Creswell, 2014) .

The primary data sources in this study were three converts residing in Ngadas Village who participated in religious guidance programs. In addition, the study involved several other categories of informants, namely muallaf mentors two religious leaders, and one community leaders who understand the socio-religious dynamics of the village, and members of the muallaf's family who can provide an overview of changes in the muallaf's behavior and religious practices from a domestic perspective. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the researcher's consideration that they had knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the conversion guidance process (Creswell, 2014). At a certain stage, the snowball technique was also used, whereby initial informants recommended other individuals who were considered important to interview due to their position in the village social network (Waters, 2015) . Secondary data was obtained from official village documents, mosque archives, records of religious activities, and literature related to the guidance of converts, local wisdom, and minority Muslim communities.

The research was conducted over a period of three months. Data were collected using three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies (Moleong, 2007). Participant observation was carried out with limited involvement in religious and social activities that served as a medium for guiding converts, such as tahlilan, Friday prayers, recitation of the Quran, and interactions in the mosque environment and other social spaces in the village. Through this observation, the researcher recorded patterns of interaction between mentors and converts, explicit and implicit forms of guidance, and manifestations of local wisdom in daily practices. Observation notes were recorded in descriptive and reflective field notes. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with converts, mentors, community leaders, and family members of converts, using a thematic guide. while still allowing for free narration. The interviews were recorded, as far as possible, and then transcribed in full. The documentation study was conducted by examining village profiles, population and religious data, mosque activity agendas and archives, as well as photographs and other relevant documents.

Data analysis uses the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which views analysis as a cyclical process comprising three main components: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014) . In the data condensation stage, researchers select, focus, simplify, and organize raw data from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents into thematic codes related to the research focus, such as forms of local wisdom, coaching patterns, the role of coaches, the experiences of converts, and the dynamics of Islamic minorities. The codes were then grouped into categories and sub-themes. In the data presentation stage, the condensed data is arranged in a narrative description and, if necessary, a matrix or chart to clarify patterns. In the conclusion drawing and verification stage, researchers formulate the meaning of the patterns that emerge, relate them to the theoretical framework, and examine the robustness of the findings through cross-checking between data sources and re-clarification with informants if necessary.

To ensure credibility, the study applied triangulation of techniques and sources to compare the results of observations, interviews, and documents; as well as comparing the perspectives of converts, mentors, community leaders, and families. Member checking was limited to confirming summaries of key findings/interpretations with several key informants and prolonged engagement & persistent observation through repeated involvement in guidance forums so that researchers could understand the context and reduce reactivity bias. For process traceability, the study compiled an audit trail in the form of notes on methodological decisions regarding informant selection, changes to interview guidelines, field activity logs, coding process documentation, and discussions with supervisors to assess the consistency of the analysis logic and theme justification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

RESULT

The village of Ngadas is located in the Poncokusumo mountainous region and has a unique social structure: Muslims are a small group, while the majority of residents are Buddhist and Hindu. This situation has a direct impact on religious guidance, as there are no formal institutions such as special majelis taklim (religious study groups) for converts or structured guidance centers. Religious activities are centered around a single mosque, which serves as a

center for education, social interaction, and consolidation of the residents' Islamic identity. Most Muslims in this village are converts who converted to Islam through marriage, intense social interaction, or personal spiritual experiences. Their educational backgrounds are dominated by elementary and secondary levels, while their main occupations are farmers and farm laborers.

The practice of guidance takes place in an organic format that is integrated into daily life. Tahlilan is the most stable forum for guidance because it is carried out regularly and attended by almost all Muslim residents. Friday sermons are an important channel for the transfer of religious knowledge in simplified language. Beyond that, coaching takes place in informal conversations in fields, homes, and mosque environments. This model was formed out of adaptive necessity: coaches must convey Islamic teachings without disrupting interfaith harmony and without imposing learning patterns that do not fit the agricultural work rhythms of the residents. As explained by Mr. Rokhim, coach and caretaker of the Ngadas village mosque:

"The people who convert to Islam here are diverse, sir. Some are young, and some are older than me. So, after they recite the shahada, I suggest they observe the worship practices of their Muslim brothers and sisters, their Muslim friends, because if they are given the material directly and on a scheduled basis, they tend to feel shy. Therefore, I incorporate the material into several religious activities such as tahlilan and Friday prayers."

This situation places local religious leaders in a central position. They are not only teachers of worship, but also social mediators who maintain the relationship between converts and non-Muslim families. The lack of supporting facilities means that guidance relies on interpersonal relationships, trust, and strong social solidarity within the community.

Strategies and Models for Convert Guidance

The coaching model in Ngadas Village was formed from the interaction between the needs of converts, the capacity of coaches, and the local wisdom of the village. The main strategy used is a non-directive approach: coaches accompany, facilitate, and provide space for converts to ask questions, reflect, and learn at their own pace. This approach is in line with Carl Rogers' humanistic counseling principles, which emphasize empathy and acceptance, and has proven effective for religious learning among adults. In practice, mentors use casual conversation as a means of monitoring, rather than rigid evaluation.

The integration of local wisdom is the most significant characteristic. The traditions of mutual cooperation, deliberation, and gathering are used as a medium for guidance. In terms of content, the guidance focuses on three pillars:

1. Aqidah, with an emphasis on the meaning of the shahada, tawhid, and the pillars of faith;
2. Worship, especially taharah, salat, fasting, and basic introduction to the Qur'an;
3. Morals, including family manners, social responsibility, and the ethics of living in harmony with neighbors of different religions.

Aqidah guidance is the main subject after converts recite the shahada, as stated by Rokhim, a guidance counselor:

The first thing we instill in the converts we mentor in Ngadas village is the matter of faith, because this is very important to give to converts who previously belonged to other religions. We believe that without a strong faith and belief in Allah SWT as the God we worship and ask for help, they will not understand how important Allah is in life. We continue to teach creed to the converts we mentor in the hope that they will become strong and develop a sense of belonging to the Islamic religion they now believe in. We also hope that with a strong creed, they will not be easily influenced by their previous religion, especially since in one family there are usually still some who are not Muslim."

Tahlilan is an effective means of introducing morals, recitations, and the meaning of togetherness. Friday sermons are delivered in simple language, directly related to the context of farmers' lives, and include basic Islamic material that is easy for converts to understand. This is according to an interview with Mr. Zuhairi, a preacher who is scheduled to deliver sermons in Ngadas Village:

"So here I have been told to be careful in delivering the material, because the community is very diverse, especially since there are few Muslims and many converts. So usually Mr. Rokhim requests specific material to be delivered, or sometimes I prepare it myself. If we already have a book for the khatib's material, then we deliver the material for our study after the Friday khatib."

Daily interactions in the fields are used to review the progress of worship practices without causing psychological pressure. This coaching model is embedded in daily life, not separate from the socio-economic activities of the community.

"So if there are residents who want to convert to Islam, I tell them to register at the KUA (Office of Religious Affairs), where it will be recorded, so that they are serious about it. After that, I advise them to frequently visit the mosque to observe how other Muslims pray, because usually when I teach them directly, they feel embarrassed. And I usually monitor them. When I am in the fields, I ask them if they can pray yet, if there are any obstacles, and so on."

In relation to the implementation of religious guidance for converts in Ngadas village, this can be ascertained based on the author's interview with Rokhim, who stated that:

When teaching or providing guidance on prayer to converts whom we are mentoring in the village of Ngadas, we first make them understand that prayer is a noble act of worship in the eyes of Allah. Through prayer, humans will be closer to their Creator, and through prayer, Allah will also give His mercy and help to humans. Second, we teach the converts the prayer recitations slowly. Actually, the movements are (sitting, standing, bowing, prostrating), but usually the converts already know the movements of prayer by watching people at the mosque."

Furthermore, Mr. Rokhim explained:

"Our hope is that with this guidance on prayer, converts will be able to perform prayers both individually and in congregation. I also hope that converts who are already able to perform prayers will not abandon or neglect them, so that prayer will become a religious necessity in their lives."

Islam is a noble religion revealed by Allah SWT to regulate human life with the Creator, relationships between humans, and relationships between humans and the universe. Noble character must be instilled in everyone so that it becomes a part of their daily behavior. According to Mr. Kartono, a convert and religious leader in the village of Ngadas:

"Guidance on moral conduct is also a priority, because according to him, Islam will be reflected in the behavior of someone who has converted to Islam. As a Muslim in the village of Ngadas, I always set an example of good moral conduct. When I was village head, I also set an example of how to be a good leader. Alhamdulillah, during my tenure, many of my constituents converted to Islam."

Meanwhile, Mr. Rokhim said that "Guiding morals is one of our commitments as mentors in Ngadas village to guide converts to have noble character. Among the morals taught are: morals towards Allah, prophets and messengers, morals towards parents, teachers, friends, including the community, especially the Ngadas village environment. This moral guidance is usually provided after tahlilan activities, so I give a short sermon, sir.

Impact of Guidance, Supporting Factors, and Hindering Factors

Field findings show that community-based guidance and local wisdom in Ngadas Village have had a real impact on converts. At the level of faith, converts are now able to explain what they believe and understand the meaning of the shahada in a more reflective manner. In terms of worship, consistency in prayer has increased, basic worship skills have improved, and their involvement in mosque activities has become more stable. In terms of morals and social aspects, converts show more positive behavioral changes, especially in discipline, work ethics, and social awareness. Interfaith harmony is also maintained because the guidance approach does not trigger resistance from non-Muslim residents. As stated by one convert named Pak Man:

"I converted to Islam at an old age, around 40 years old. Before that, I was just a regular believer, but as I got older, I started to think that my worship of the Lord of the Worlds was unclear. I saw my Muslim friends clearly practicing their worship, with prayers and movements, and then there was the guidebook, the Qur'an. So I decided to convert to Islam, and after reciting the shahadah, I was told to learn how to pray by Mr. Rokhim and to go to the mosque often. Usually, Mr. Rokhim would ask me when we were together in the fields, "How are you doing with your prayers, Pak Man?" and he would ask others the same question.

Supporting factors include local wisdom that strengthens social solidarity, the respected role of mentors, and close interpersonal relationships between mentors and converts. The openness of non-Muslim residents to Muslim activities, as well as the minimal religious conflict in the village, also contribute to the success of the mentoring program. However, there are several significant obstacles. First, the capacity of mentors is limited because there is no formal training or specific mentoring modules for converts. Second, converts' learning time is limited due to

agricultural work that takes up most of their day. Third, the absence of a structured mentoring system makes it difficult to consistently deepen the material. These obstacles indicate the need to strengthen the capacity of mentors and develop more systematic programs.

DISCUSSION

The guidance of converts in Ngadas Village shows that the process of strengthening Islamic identity cannot be separated from the socio-cultural dynamics and minority structures that surround their lives. As shown by the findings, most converts in this village converted to Islam through personal relationships and marriage, not through formal missionary institutions. This makes their religious experience organic and intertwined with cultural values that have long shaped the residents' way of life. These findings confirm the literature on religious conversion, which emphasizes that the sustainability of converts' Islam is highly dependent on social support and mentoring patterns after the shahada (Herni, 2025; Marhamah et al., 2022), not just the initial motivation for conversion. In the Ngadas context, guidance takes place through existing social spaces such as tahlilan, mosques, and agrarian interactions, which allow the process of learning about religion to occur without disrupting social harmony.

On the other hand, the community-based coaching model found in this village is in line with the idea of Islamic education based on local wisdom that emphasizes relevance, context, and the connection between religious values and local culture (Arafat et al., 2024). The traditions of mutual cooperation and deliberation not only facilitate the acceptance of converts into the Muslim community, but also serve as a medium for the formation of stable religious character and habits. These findings confirm that the guidance of converts does not always require a formal structure; it can be effective when local cultural values are able to support the social relations of convert mentors and provide a safe and inclusive learning space (Aryati et al., 2025; Fahmi et al., 2025).

The non-directive approach applied by the mentor is an important element in this guidance. Instead of delivering doctrine in a one-way manner, the mentor uses empathetic interpersonal conversation, adjusts the pace of learning, and respects the background and experiences of the convert. This approach resonates with the humanistic counseling model, which views change as a process of growth from within the individual through sincere emotional support (Ghodbane & Namoune, 2024). In the context of adult converts negotiating a new religious identity in a minority environment, this approach has been shown to reduce resistance, alleviate psychological pressure, and enhance a sense of belonging to the Muslim community. This demonstrates that convert mentoring is not merely a transfer of knowledge but a process of identity accompaniment and cultural adaptation.

The findings also show that the integration of local wisdom is a factor that enables da'wah to take place without disrupting interfaith relations (Fadhilatunnisa et al., 2022). In a pluralistic society such as Ngadas, an overly confrontational approach has the potential to cause tension, both for converts who still have close ties with non-Muslim families and for the village community as a whole. By utilizing local traditions, the guidance actually strengthens the image of Islam as a religion that is in harmony with universal human values such as togetherness, politeness, and mutual cooperation. Such guidance not only strengthens the faith of converts, but also broadens the social bridges between residents so that village harmony is maintained.

However, this guidance also has its limitations. The absence of specific guidance modules causes the process of deepening religious understanding to proceed slowly and be highly dependent on the capacity of the guidance providers. The limited learning time available to converts due to agricultural activities is a structural factor that is difficult to avoid. These obstacles show that although community-based guidance is effective in the early stages, more systematic support is needed so that converts can progress from a basic level to a more mature understanding of religion. Thus, the Ngadas guidance model can be seen as an effective adaptive model in a minority context, but it still requires institutional strengthening for long-term sustainability.

Overall, the guidance of converts in Ngadas Village confirms two things. First, local wisdom is not merely a cultural backdrop, but a strategic component in Islamic preaching and education. Second, the guidance of converts in minority communities requires a contextual, empathetic, and dialogical approach, rather than a normative-formalistic one. This combination makes the Ngadas model worthy of consideration as a reference for other villages with similar social characteristics, while also opening up space for the development of a theory of cultural da'wah based on minority communities.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the guidance of converts in Ngadas Village takes place within a social configuration that is characteristic of Muslim minority communities in the midst of a pluralistic village society with strong traditions. In this context, guidance does not develop as a formal, structured program, but is embedded in socio-religious activities that are integrated into daily life, especially tahlilan, Friday prayers/sermons, and daily interactions in the fields and around the mosque. This pattern proves that strengthening the Islamic identity of converts can be effective through community mechanisms as long as there are trusted mentors and adequate social support networks.

The guidance model found has two main characteristics: community-based and integrated with local wisdom. The mentor applies a non-directive and dialogical approach, providing learning space in accordance with the rhythm of the converts, accommodating their previous religious experiences, and utilizing informal conversations as a medium for guidance. Local wisdom (mutual cooperation, deliberation, culture of harmony) serves as both a value and a strategy for da'wah so that guidance does not create tension with non-Muslim residents; therefore, strengthening faith, practicing worship, and character building can go hand in hand with maintaining social harmony in the village.

The impact of coaching is evident in three areas: (1) clarity of religious beliefs and commitment, (2) improvement in the quality and consistency of worship, and (3) more positive changes in social behavior. However, the sustainability of this model is still limited by the limited capacity of the trainers, the absence of systematic training modules, and limited learning time due to agrarian work patterns; thus, capacity building and institutional support are prerequisites for training to move from the basic stage to a more mature and sustainable level.

Theoretical Implications. The findings confirm that local wisdom is not merely a "cultural backdrop," but rather a strategic component in Islamic education/da'wah among minority communities because it functions as a mechanism for social acceptance and a non-confrontational medium of learning. This study reinforces the development of a community-based cultural da'wah theory in the context of minorities: the effectiveness of guidance is determined by contextual appropriateness, social network support, and an empathetic-dialogical mentoring approach. Conceptually, the findings emphasize the importance of context-sensitive guidance design that integrates theological, psychological, and socio-communal dimensions into a single guidance framework.

Policy and Practical Implications. Capacity building policy for mentors: Regional KUA/Ministry of Religious Affairs, mosque administrators, and mass organizations/communities can organize non-directive-dialogic mentoring training (basic counseling, empathetic communication, mentoring adult converts) to improve the quality of mentoring services. Flexible modular standardization: Develop concise, step-by-step modules (creed–worship–morals) that are adaptable to the agricultural work rhythm (micro-learning format, pocket materials, target achievements per stage) to overcome the absence of modules and limited learning time. Institutional support & local funding: Village/sub-district governments can include guidance for converts in their social-religious program plans (mosque-village-KUA partnerships) to ensure more stable resource support (transportation for mentors, teaching materials, regular forums).

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