

Integrating *Khidmah* and *Tarbiyah*: A Service-Learning Model in Indonesia's Islamic Boarding School Education

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the Khidmah Tholabah program at Nurul Qur'an Praya Islamic Boarding School, an innovative model integrating community service into Islamic education. The research addresses three objectives: analyzing the program's conceptual foundations by blending Islamic pedagogy with service-learning theory, evaluating its sociological impact on local communities, and investigating student competency development. Using a qualitative case study approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with 22 participants (4 administrators, 10 students, and 8 community members), participant observation across all program phases, and analysis of institutional documents and student reflection journals from March to April 2024. Findings reveal that the program's three-stage implementation framework successfully merges classical Islamic concepts like khidmah (service) and tarbiyah (holistic education) with experiential learning methodologies. Students developed enhanced religious understanding, teaching skills, and leadership capabilities through structured community engagement activities including Quranic instruction, Islamic lectures, and environmental clean-ups. The program strengthened community ties through reciprocal learning relationships and revived communal religious practices. The study's originality lies in its detailed documentation of how traditional pesantren education can systematically incorporate service learning while maintaining religious authenticity. Key limitations include the single-site nature of the study and the relatively short observation period. The findings offer valuable insights for Islamic educators seeking to develop curriculum models that combine spiritual formation with social responsibility.*

Studi ini mengkaji program *Khidmah Tholabah* di Pondok Pesantren Nurul Qur'an Praya, sebuah model inovatif yang memadukan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ke dalam pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini membahas tiga tujuan: menganalisis landasan konseptual program dengan memadukan pedagogi Islam dengan teori pembelajaran berbasis pengabdian kepada masyarakat, mengevaluasi dampak sosiologisnya terhadap masyarakat lokal, dan menyelidiki pengembangan kompetensi siswa. Dengan menggunakan

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pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan 22 peserta (4 pengurus, 10 siswa, dan 8 anggota masyarakat), observasi partisipan di seluruh fase program, dan analisis dokumen kelembagaan dan jurnal refleksi siswa dari Maret hingga April 2024. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa kerangka kerja implementasi tiga tahap program berhasil menggabungkan konsep-konsep Islam klasik seperti *khidmah* (pengabdian) dan *tarbiyah* (pendidikan holistik) dengan metodologi pembelajaran eksperiensial. Siswa mengembangkan pemahaman agama yang lebih baik, keterampilan mengajar, dan kemampuan kepemimpinan melalui kegiatan keterlibatan masyarakat yang terstruktur termasuk pengajaran Al-Qur'an, ceramah Islam, dan pembersihan lingkungan. Program ini memperkuat ikatan komunitas melalui hubungan pembelajaran timbal balik dan menghidupkan kembali praktik keagamaan komunal. Orisinalitas penelitian ini terletak pada dokumentasi terperinci tentang bagaimana pendidikan pesantren tradisional dapat secara sistematis menggabungkan pembelajaran berbasis pengabdian masyarakat sambil mempertahankan keaslian agama. Keterbatasan utama meliputi sifat penelitian yang hanya dilakukan di satu lokasi dan periode observasi yang relatif singkat. Temuan ini menawarkan wawasan berharga bagi para pendidik Islam yang ingin mengembangkan model kurikulum yang menggabungkan pembentukan spiritual dengan tanggung jawab sosial.

Keywords: *Islamic Boarding School Education, Service-Learning, Community Engagement, Experiential Learning, Curriculum Integration.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Boarding School (*pesantren*) system in Indonesia represents one of the world's most enduring models of religious education, having transmitted Islamic knowledge (*tafaqquh fi al-din*) and fostered community leadership for centuries (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). However, contemporary globalization and social transformation present unprecedented challenges for these institutions as they navigate the tension between preserving their Islamic identity and meeting modern educational demands (Marzuki et al., 2022). Research indicates that many Islamic Boarding Schoolface pedagogical stagnation, employing outdated methods that compromise their graduates' competitiveness in the contemporary workforce (Parlan et al., 2024). This challenge has catalyzed calls for educational innovations that integrate classical Islamic teachings with modern competencies, enabling institutions to maintain relevance while preserving religious values (Kurniawati & Anshory, 2024). Indonesia's 2019 Islamic Boarding Schoollegislation exemplifies this reform effort by promoting the coexistence of traditional and modern pedagogical practices, though conservative resistance persists (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). Recent studies highlight the dynamic shifts in Islamic education policies, from marginalization to accommodation, reflecting broader socio-political transformations (Kosim et al., 2023), while others document the contestation among Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia as they compete to define Islamic identity through curricula and ideological affiliations (Maemonah et al., 2023).

Within this context of educational transformation, Nurul Qur'an Praya Islamic Boarding School has emerged as a pioneering institution through its innovative *Khidmah Tholabah* program. This initiative represents a significant departure from conventional Islamic Boarding School models by integrating structured community service directly into the curriculum for second-year Madrasah Aliyah students rather than relegating such activities to post-graduation engagement (Ramdhan, 2025). The program's distinctive design combines intensive religious study with practical community work, creating what may be characterized as an Islamic model of service-learning. This approach directly responds to contemporary scholarship advocating for curricula that balance traditional Islamic values with modern pedagogical practices (Marzuki et al., 2022; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). By embedding service activities within students' formative educational years, the program offers valuable insights into maintaining spiritual foundations while addressing contemporary social needs (Manshuruddin, 2019; Parlan et al., 2024). Notably, similar innovations in spirituality-based Islamic education frameworks emphasize experiential learning and moral refinement, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and spiritual consciousness (Chanifah et al., 2021).

The theoretical foundation for examining the *Khidmah Tholabah* program draws from two complementary traditions: Islamic educational philosophy and community-based learning theory. The Islamic pedagogical framework centres on the classical concepts of *tarbiyah* (holistic nurturing) and *ta'dib* (ethical-social cultivation), as articulated by scholars such as al-Attas (1980) and Wan Mohd Nor (1998). These concepts emphasize the integral relationship between religious knowledge (*'ilm*), righteous action (*'amal*), and moral character (*akhlaq*), providing a robust analytical framework for understanding how the program integrates spiritual formation with social responsibility (Azzam et al., 2025; Sari, 2024). The program's emphasis on "grounding the Qur'an in daily life" (*membumikan Al-Qur'an*) exemplifies this tradition, which views learning as encompassing both intellectual and practical dimensions (Akmansyah, 2015; Romdhoni, 2023).

This Islamic perspective is complemented by contemporary community-based education theories, particularly Dewey's (1938) experiential learning principles and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. These frameworks illuminate how structured community engagement facilitates meaningful learning through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Brifkani, 2023; Santi, 2024). Notably, Saada & Gross (2017) critically examine the challenges of Islamic education in Western democratic contexts, arguing for curricula that foster *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *shura* (consultation) to reconcile religious identity with civic engagement. Their work aligns with the *Khidmah Tholabah* program's goal of balancing Islamic values with participatory learning. The program's mandatory service component embodies this approach by creating intentional opportunities for applying religious knowledge to real-world situations while incorporating guided reflection and integration (Mardiana et al., 2020; Masduki, 2019). Recent studies in faith-based education further underscore the pedagogical value of experiential learning, such as the faith-integrated service-learning model proposed by Kaak & LaPorte (2021), which emphasizes critical reflection and ethical action and Rose (2018) case study on sequenced community engagement in urban geography, which demonstrates how structured service projects foster civic responsibility and social awareness. Additionally, research on reciprocal school-community partnerships highlights the

importance of collaborative relationships in maximizing the impact of service-learning initiatives (Ngai et al., 2010). This theoretical synthesis provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how Islamic education can effectively incorporate service-learning methodologies while remaining anchored in spiritual traditions.

The program's implementation demonstrates sophisticated operationalization of these theoretical principles through three structured phases. The preparatory phase emphasizes the Islamic concept of *niyyah* (right intention) while establishing clear learning objectives consistent with community-based education models (Kurniawati & Anshory, 2024; Sukatin et al., 2023). The service phase operationalizes the Islamic principle of *khidmah* (service) through carefully designed community projects that provide experiential learning opportunities (Abdullah, 2018; Fitriani, 2024). The reflection phase incorporates Islamic *muhasabah* (self-evaluation) and contemporary reflective practice, creating a mechanism for integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience (Azzam et al., 2025; Brifkani, 2023). This systematic approach ensures students develop religious understanding alongside practical skills and social awareness necessary for addressing community challenges (Manshuruddin, 2019; Parlan et al., 2024). Modernization efforts in Salaf Islamic boarding schools, such as those documented by (Alid et al., 2022), further illustrate how traditional institutions can adapt their curricula to balance religious and general education, ensuring graduates are equipped for contemporary societal demands.

Despite substantial advances in Islamic Boarding School education research, particularly regarding collective leadership in character education (Aji & Kulkarni, 2025), service-based learning for social care (Maemonah et al., 2023), and Islamic Boarding School as community-based institutions (Rosita et al., 2024), critical gaps remain. While studies by Hasan et al. (2021); Ibrahim (2016) demonstrate the transformative potential of integrating service learning into Islamic education, three significant limitations persist. First, meso-level processes linking educational design to implementation remain underexplored despite extensive macro-level institutional analyses and micro-level learning outcome studies. Second, the systematic integration of Islamic principles with modern pedagogies receives insufficient empirical attention, particularly in the context of mandatory, curriculum-based community engagement. Third, while studies like those of Alid et al. (2022); Chanifah et al. (2021) address spirituality and curriculum modernization, there is limited research on how Islamic Boarding School institutionalize service-learning as a core component of religious education.

To address these research gaps, this study pursues three specific objectives. *First*, it examines the conceptual foundations and implementation framework of the *Khidmah Tholabah* program, analyzing how Islamic educational philosophy and community-based learning theory inform its design and execution. *Second*, it evaluates the program's sociological impact on recipient communities, assessing how integrated religious and service components affect community development and social cohesion. *Third*, it investigates competency development among participating students (*santri*), focusing on spiritual understanding, social responsibility, and leadership skill acquisition. These objectives aim to contribute both theoretical knowledge and practical insights to Islamic educational reform discourse in Indonesia and beyond.

The significance of this research spans multiple dimensions. Theoretically, it advances understanding of how classical Islamic pedagogical concepts can be operationalized in

contemporary educational programs while maintaining spiritual essence, building on recent studies of Islamic education policies and the contestation of Islamic educational institutions (Kosim et al., 2023; Maemonah et al., 2023). Methodologically, it demonstrates how qualitative research can effectively capture the complex interplay between religious education and community engagement, as seen in analogous studies of faith-based service learning (Kaak & LaPorte, 2021). Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for Islamic educators and policymakers developing curriculum models that combine religious learning with social responsibility, particularly in light of successful reciprocal partnerships documented by (Ngai et al., 2010). Furthermore, by establishing the experiences of Nurul Qur'an Praya Islamic Boarding School, this study preserves institutional knowledge that can inform similar innovations across Islamic educational contexts, contributing to the broader discourse on Islamic Boarding School modernization and relevance in the 21st century.

II. METHOD

This qualitative case study examined the *Khidmah Tholabah* Program at Nurul Qur'an Praya Islamic Boarding School from March to April 2024. The research engaged 22 purposefully selected participants, including four program administrators, ten *santri* (students) representing diverse academic levels and field placements, and eight community beneficiaries from various service sectors. Data collection incorporated semi-structured interviews averaging 35-45 minutes, participant observation across all program phases, and analysis of institutional documents, reflection journals, and community feedback records.

The study employed inductive thematic analysis to examine the qualitative data systematically. Researchers conducted manual coding using colour-coded index cards and thematic matrices to identify and categorize emerging patterns. The analytical process began with thorough familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes, followed by initial coding to capture key concepts. These codes were progressively grouped into broader themes through iterative comparison across data sources, ensuring a comprehensive representation of participants' perspectives.

Multiple verification strategies were implemented to ensure research validity. Methodological triangulation cross-referenced findings from interviews, observations, and documents. Peer debriefing sessions with two external experts validated the analytical framework, while member checking with six participants confirmed interpretive accuracy. The researcher maintained reflexive journals throughout the 1.5-month immersion period to document emerging insights and potential biases, enhancing the study's transparency and reliability. This rigorous analytical approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of how the program bridges Islamic education principles with community development objectives.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual and Implementation Framework of *Khidmah Tholabah*

Nurul Qur'an Praya Islamic Boarding School has emerged as a transformative institution through its innovative *Khidmah Tholabah* program, which represents a significant evolution of the traditional Islamic concept of service (*khidmah*). This

program fundamentally reimagines the relationship between Islamic education and community engagement by integrating direct social practice into the core curriculum for second-year Madrasah Aliyah students. Unlike conventional models where community service occurs after graduation, this initiative embeds service learning during students' formative educational years, thereby creating a dynamic synthesis of textual study and practical application.

Conceptual Foundation

The conceptual foundation of *Khidmah Tholabah* rests upon three key principles that distinguish it from typical Islamic Boarding School programs. First, the program establishes service as an essential component of religious education rather than an extracurricular activity. As Ustadz Ramdhan, the program coordinator, explained:

“The *Khidmah Tholabah* program is an annual mandatory community service for second-year Madrasah Aliyah students. Unlike most *pesantren* that conduct such service after graduation, we implement it while students are still actively studying. This intentional timing reflects a pedagogical philosophy that views knowledge (*‘ilmu*) and practice (*‘amal*) as interdependent elements of Islamic learning that should develop simultaneously” (Ramdhan, 2025).

The second principle expands the traditional notion of *khidmah* beyond simple charitable work into a structured educational experience with measurable learning outcomes. Ustadz Salim elaborated on this comprehensive vision:

“The *Khidmah Tholabah* program aims to develop the mental resilience of *santri*, ground the Qur'an in daily life (*membumikan Al-Qur'an*), disseminate the Qur'anic knowledge gained at the *pesantren*, strengthen community bonds (*silaturahmi*), enliven mosques, build character, and instil Qur'anic values in the community” (Salim, 2025).

These multiple objectives demonstrate how the program connects personal spiritual development with broader social transformation.

The third principle redefines the Islamic Boarding School relationship with surrounding communities. Rather than positioning the school as an isolated centre of religious knowledge, the program establishes reciprocal learning relationships where students both teach and learn from community members. This approach embodies what scholars term “contextual religious education” an educational model that adapts classical Islamic teachings to address contemporary social realities while maintaining theological authenticity.

Program Objectives

Building upon this conceptual framework, the program's objectives encompass four primary dimensions of development. The first dimension focuses on pedagogical outcomes, particularly the translation of religious knowledge into practical skills. As Ustadz Ramdhan noted: “The goal is to provide direct experience in applying religious knowledge while equipping students with social skills to contribute to society” (Ramdhan, 2025). This objective addresses a common critique of traditional Islamic education by ensuring students develop both textual understanding and practical competencies.

Character formation constitutes the second key objective, with particular emphasis on developing leadership qualities rooted in Islamic ethics. The program moves beyond

theoretical moral instruction by creating real-world situations where students must exercise responsibility, problem-solving, and ethical decision-making. Ustadz Salim highlighted this aspect when describing the program's aim to "build character" and "develop mental resilience" outcomes that require students to navigate complex social dynamics during their service placements (Salim, 2025).

The third major objective centres on community transformation, with a specific focus on religious and social development. The program's goals of "grounding the Qur'an in daily life" and "enlivening mosques" demonstrate an intentional strategy to make Islamic teachings relevant to contemporary community needs. This aspect of the program reflects the Islamic Boarding School commitment to what might be termed "applied da'wah" an approach to Islamic propagation that emphasizes practical social benefit alongside spiritual guidance.

The fourth dimension concerns institutional development, positioning the program as a mechanism for strengthening the Islamic Boarding School role as an anchor institution in the region. By "strengthening community bonds" and "disseminating Qur'anic knowledge," *Khidmah Tholabah* enhances Islamic Boarding School social capital while ensuring its continued relevance in a rapidly changing society. This institutional dimension has proven particularly significant given the challenges many traditional Islamic schools face in maintaining community connections amid modernization pressures.

What distinguishes *Khidmah Tholabah* as particularly innovative is how these conceptual elements and objectives interact to create a holistic educational experience. The program does not treat community service merely as a means to reinforce classroom learning nor as simple social work isolated from educational objectives. Instead, it constructs a dynamic learning ecosystem where religious study informs social action, which in turn deepens religious understanding a continuous cycle of reflection and practice that embodies the Islamic ideal of integrated knowledge. This holistic approach is consistent with the broader trends in Islamic education reform discussed by both Ma'arif et al. (2023); Mas'ud et al. (2019), who highlight the importance of balancing tradition with contemporary educational demands to cultivate well-rounded, socially engaged Muslims.

Moreover, the program's emphasis on conducting this integrative work during students' second year of Madrasah Aliyah studies represents a deliberate pedagogical choice. This timing allows students to apply foundational religious knowledge while still having time to reflect on their experiences during subsequent studies. As Ustadz Ramdhan observed: "We want students to test their understanding in real situations while they still have time to process those experiences with their teachers" (Ramdhan, 2025). This approach aligns with contemporary educational research emphasizing the importance of experiential learning in mid-program rather than as a capstone experience.

Implementation Stages of Khidmah Tholabah

The implementation of the *Khidmah Tholabah* program at Nurul Qur'an Praya Islamic Boarding School is structured into three key stages: planning, execution, and evaluation. The table below outlines these stages, their key activities, and outcomes.

Table 1. Systematic stages of *Khidmah Tholabah* implementation

Stage	Key activities	Outcomes
Planning	○ Collaborative location selection (involving community leaders & parents). ○ Group formation based on santri's competencies. ○ Training: <i>tahfidz</i>, <i>tilawah</i>, <i>da'wah</i>, <i>calligraphy</i>. ○ Proposal submission & committee approval.	○ Approved program plans. ○ Trained and mentally prepared santri. ○ Community buy-in and support.
Execution	○ <i>Ceramah ba'da Subuh</i> (Islamic lectures). ○ <i>Taman Pendidikan Qur'an: TPQ</i> (Quranic training for children/teens). ○ <i>Safari Ramadan</i> ○ <i>Tadarusan</i> (group Qur'an recitation). ○ <i>Jum'at Bersih</i> (community clean-up).	○ Active community participation. ○ Enhanced Islamic literacy. ○ Stronger santri-community bonds.
Evaluation	○ Committee monitoring & adjustments. ○ Final reporting by santri groups. ○ Feedback sessions with stakeholders.	○ Documented program impact. ○ Lessons for future improvements. ○ Sustainable community engagement.

The planning stage establishes a strong foundation by engaging community leaders and parents in selecting locations, ensuring the program addresses local needs. For instance, one community leader emphasized, "We chose villages where religious education was scarce but desired." *Santri* are grouped based on their competencies, such as Qur'an memorization or preaching, and undergo targeted training to prepare them for their roles. This phase results in approved plans, skilled *santri*, and community support.

During the execution stage, the program's activities directly engage the community. *Ceramah ba'da Subuh* provides daily religious reminders, while Quranic training improves Islamic literacy among children. Safari Ramadan extends outreach, and *tadarusan* strengthens communal bonds through shared Qur'an recitation. Community clean-up, a weekly clean-up initiative, instills environmental responsibility. These

activities foster active participation and deeper connections between *santri* and villagers.

The evaluation stage ensures the program's effectiveness and sustainability. The committee monitors progress and makes adjustments, such as pairing struggling *santri* with mentors. Final reports and stakeholder feedback sessions document the program's impact and identify areas for improvement. For example, a committee member noted, "After feedback, we added more classes for women, which doubled their participation." This phase solidifies the program's long-term viability and community relevance.

The Activities within Khidmah Tholabah

1. The activities within Khidmah Tholabah

The *Khidmah Tholabah* program at Nurul Qur'an Praya Islamic Boarding School demonstrates a thoughtful integration of Islamic education with community service through carefully designed activities. The following table outlines these activities before we examine their deeper significance:

Table 2. The activities within Khidmah Tholabah

Activity Category	Activities	Description
Religious Outreach	Short Islamic lectures	Brief religious lectures (7-15 minutes) after dawn prayers during Ramadan, covering practical Islamic values.
	Safari Ramadhan	Mobile preaching sessions in mosques/ <i>mushala</i> address worship, ethics, and social issues involving community leaders.
Qur'anic Education	Qur'anic training	Teaching Qur'anic literacy to children and adolescents through interactive methods.
	Qur'anic recitation Training	Training in the art of Qur'anic recitation (<i>tilawah</i>) for TPQ participants and community members.
	Calligraphy Training	Instruction in Arabic calligraphy to enhance engagement with religious texts.
	<i>Tadarrus</i>	Communal Qur'anic reading sessions are held in mosques and facilitated by <i>santri</i> .
Community clean-up	Community-led cleanliness drives in mosques/villages.	Promoted social responsibility and environmental awareness.

The Short Islamic lectures activity exemplified how the program develops both religious understanding and practical skills. Ustadz Ramdhan, the program coordinator, explained:

"We intentionally designed these short lectures to serve dual purposes. For our *santri*, it's an opportunity to organize their religious knowledge into digestible lessons and develop their public speaking abilities. For the community, these daily reminders during Ramadan create a rhythm of spiritual reflection that extends beyond the mosque walls" (Ramdhan, 2025).

One second-year student shared how transformative this experience had been:

“At first, I struggled to condense complex concepts into 10-minute talks. But through weekly practice and feedback from teachers, I learned how to connect Quranic teachings to people's daily struggles—like how patience during fasting relates to patience in family relationships” (Ramdhan, 2025).

Building upon these individual skill-building activities, the Safari Ramadhan initiative extends this engagement further by creating opportunities for intergenerational dialogue. A community elder from Praya described its impact:

“When the *santri* visit our small mosque with visiting scholars, it feels like a special occasion. The young students help translate the scholars' deep knowledge into language we can all understand while also learning from how the scholars interact with different audiences” (Ramdhan, 2025).

This reciprocal learning proved intentional, as Ustadz Salim noted:

“We pair each scholar with two *santri* during these visits. The scholars model nuanced responses to community questions, while the *santri* practice adapting their communication style to different age groups and literacy levels” (Salim, 2025).

Such structured mentorship demonstrates how the program creates multiple layers of learning within each community engagement activity. The pedagogical foundation underlying these activities becomes particularly evident in the Qur'anic Education domain, where the Qur'an Education program revealed how teaching reinforces learning. A female *santri* recounted her experience:

“When I started teaching the children's Qur'an class, I realized I had to master the rules much better than when I was just memorizing for myself. The kids ask unexpected questions that challenge me to research deeper meanings” (Salim, 2025).

This reflective practice aligns with what Ustadz Ramdhan described as the program's pedagogical foundation:

“We follow the prophetic tradition that the best learning happens through teaching. When our *santri* explain tajweed rules to beginners, they uncover gaps in their understanding that they can then address with their teachers” (Ramdhan, 2025).

This approach transforms students from passive recipients of knowledge into active constructors of understanding through their teaching responsibilities. Moving beyond purely academic activities, the *Jum'at bersih* (community clean-up) initiative embodied the program's integration of faith and environmental stewardship. A village head observed:

“Before this program, we had to nag people to clean the mosque courtyard. Now the *santri* come every Friday with their brooms and enthusiasm, and gradually more community members join them. What's remarkable is how they connect this to Quranic verses about cleanliness being part of faith” (Ramdhan, 2025).

One participating *santri* reflected on the broader lessons:

“At first I saw this as just physical work. However, through our discussions with teachers, I came to understand that practising *khalifah* is our responsibility as

caretakers of Allah's creation. This changed how I view all community service” (Ramdhan, 2025).

This transformation from viewing service as mere labour to understanding it as spiritual practice illustrates how the program cultivates deeper theological reflection through practical engagement.

The program's holistic approach to religious education becomes further apparent through its emphasis on calligraphy training, which illustrates how aesthetic engagement deepens spiritual connection. An art teacher at the Islamic Boarding School explained:

“Many students discover through calligraphy that the beauty of Quranic verses isn’t just in their meaning but in their physical form. This deepens their connection to the text in ways that pure memorization sometimes doesn’t” (Ramdhan, 2025).

A student’s perspective confirmed this observation:

“When I spend hours carefully forming the letters of an ayah, I find myself contemplating each word’s meaning more deeply than when I simply recite it” (Ramdhan, 2025).

This integration of artistic practice with religious study demonstrates how the program engages multiple dimensions of learning to create a more comprehensive understanding.

These diverse activities collectively demonstrated how the *Khidmah Tholabah* program creates what Ustadz Ramdhan termed “a continuous” cycle of learning and application. He elaborated:

“The classroom provides the foundation, the community service tests that knowledge in real situations, and the reflection sessions help students synthesize these experiences into deeper understanding. This is how we operationalize the concept of *‘ilm* that is both useful and used” (Ramdhan, 2025).

The program’s success in achieving this integration became evident in a graduating student’s testimony, which captured the transformative nature of this approach:

“Through teaching Qur’an to children, leading clean-ups, and giving sermons, I came to understand that Islamic knowledge isn’t just for personal salvation it’s a responsibility to improve our community in practical ways” (Ramdhan, 2025).

This synthesis represents the program’s ultimate achievement in connecting traditional Islamic learning with contemporary social engagement.

2. The impacts of *Khidmah Tholabah* for *santri* and the community

The findings demonstrate that the *Khidmah Tholabah* program creates a meaningful exchange between *santri* and their surrounding community through integrated Islamic education and service activities. The program’s structured approach yields specific benefits as shown in the following table:

Table 3. The impacts of *Khidmah Tholabah* for *santri* and the community

Activity	Impacts on <i>Santri</i>	Impacts on the community
Short Islamic lectures	○ Improves public speaking and	○ Increases community attendance in dawn

	- religious teaching skills. ○ Builds discipline in delivering daily Islamic reminders.	- prayers. ○ Strengthens religious understanding through short lectures.
Safari Ramadhan	○ Strengthens teamwork with community leaders. ○ Expands preaching experience in diverse settings.	○ Fosters inter-community bonds through religious gatherings. ○ Provides access to Islamic scholars for spiritual enrichment.
TPQ Guidance	○ Enhances teaching skills in Quranic recitation. ○ Deepens memorization (<i>hifz</i>) and Tajweed mastery.	○ Encourages children and youth to learn the Qur'an more enthusiastically. ○ Introduces interactive and engaging learning methods.
Calligraphy Training	○ Develops artistic skills in Islamic calligraphy. ○ Reinforces appreciation for Islamic art.	○ Promotes cultural and religious art among community members. ○ Inspires youth to explore Islamic artistic traditions.
<i>Tadarrusan</i>	○ Reinforces Qur'an memorization and fluency. ○ Encourages consistent Quranic engagement.	○ Revives communal Quranic reading traditions. ○ Strengthens communal worship and brotherhood.
Community clean-up	○ Instills environmental awareness and responsibility. ○ Promotes teamwork and community service values.	○ Improves cleanliness in mosques and public spaces. ○ Encourages communal participation in maintaining hygiene.

This structured approach produces reciprocal benefits, as seen in how the short Islamic lectures serve as a prime example. *Santri* develop confidence in religious instruction

while community members report increased participation in dawn prayers. One *santri* described their transformation:

“At first I struggled to explain basic concepts clearly, but through regular practice I’ve learned to adapt my teaching for different audiences” (Santri, 2025).

This reflects how the program builds both technical preaching skills and adaptive communication abilities.

The *Safari Ramadhan* activities extend this impact by creating spaces for intergenerational exchange. Local leaders particularly value these connections, as one village elder explained:

“The *santri*’s visits during Ramadan have become something our community anticipates each year. Their ability to discuss Islam in ways that resonate with different groups has helped unify our religious understanding” (Santri, 2025).

The Qur’an education sessions reveal how pedagogical innovations reinvigorate traditional education. By introducing interactive methods, *santri* makes Qur’an memorization more engaging while refining their teaching techniques. A mother noted the difference in her children’s attitude:

“They now compete to show me what new surahs they’ve learned through the games the *santri* created” (Guardian, 2025).

Calligraphy training introduces an artistic dimension that expands cultural impact. A teenage participant shared:

“I discovered how each stroke connects to centuries of Islamic scholarship. Now I see the Qur’an as both sacred text and living art” (Guardian, 2025).

Such reflections underscore the program’s multidimensional engagement with tradition.

The *tadarrusan* gatherings perhaps best encapsulate the dual emphasis on individual and community development. An elderly member recalled:

“Hearing dozens of voices reciting together after decades of individual practice transports me back to my childhood mosque” (Elderly Member, 2025).

This restoration of communal practice highlights the program’s capacity to strengthen both personal faith and social cohesion.

These interconnected outcomes suggest the program offers a replicable model for Islamic education. Designing activities that develop student competencies while addressing community needs creates a virtuous cycle where religious education becomes both transformative and socially relevant. The consistent theme is the mutually reinforcing relationship between *santri* growth and community enrichment each strengthening the other in ways that sustain long-term impact. This dynamic deserves attention from educators interested in faith-based programs that effectively serve both students and society.

Reconciling Tradition and Innovation in the *Khidmah Tholabah* Framework

The *Khidmah Tholabah* program at Nurul Qur’an Praya Islamic Boarding School represents a significant advancement in Islamic educational philosophy, successfully bridging classical pedagogical traditions with contemporary learning methodologies. This innovative program merits examination for its integration of three fundamental dimensions: the reconceptualization of service as a core curricular element, the

structural alignment of Islamic learning cycles with modern educational models, and the institutionalization of reflective practice within traditional Islamic Boarding School education. The program's design offers valuable insights into how Islamic educational institutions can maintain religious authenticity while addressing pedagogical demands.

Central to the program's innovation is its transformative redefinition of *khidmah* (service) from an ancillary activity to an obligatory curricular component. This paradigm shift challenges the conventional bifurcation between *ta'lim* (instruction) and *khidmah* observed in many Islamic educational institutions. This dichotomy has contributed to Islamic curricular stagnation (Maryati et al., 2023). Contemporary research identifies this separation as a significant barrier to cultivating socially engaged Muslim scholars capable of addressing modern societal challenges (Ikhwan et al., 2019; Ridwan & Maryati, 2024). This aligns with the findings of Haidir et al. (2021), who emphasize the need for Islamic education to embrace technological and methodological innovations to remain relevant in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0.

By structurally embedding service within the second-year Madrasah Aliyah curriculum, the program addresses the critical gap wherein students achieve theoretical mastery but lack practical application abilities. This integration ensures that knowledge (*ilm*) remains inseparable from its practical application, aligning with broader efforts to revitalize Islamic education through holistic approaches (Ikhwan et al., 2019; Maryati et al., 2023). The program's emphasis on experiential learning resonates with the work of (Bashith et al., 2025), who highlight the importance of integrating economic and entrepreneurial education within Islamic boarding schools to prepare students for real-world challenges. Consequently, the program reflects a broader movement toward reconciling tradition with contemporary needs while fostering both holistic development and societal relevance (Ridwan & Maryati, 2024).

Building upon this reconceptualization, the program's three-phase implementation framework (planning-execution-evaluation) demonstrates systematic integration of classical Islamic pedagogical principles with experiential learning theory (Brifkani, 2023). The planning phase distinguishes itself through emphasis on *niyyah* (intention) as both a spiritual and pedagogical foundation, aligning with Islamic educational concepts of *tarbiyah* (holistic development) and *ta'dib* (moral refinement) (Azzam et al., 2025; Sari, 2024). This approach reflects the broader understanding of *adab* as a framework bridging ethical formation and educational methodology within Islamic pedagogy (Akmansyah, 2015). This approach is further supported by Ahmed & Chowdhury (2024), who advocate for an Islamic conceptual framework that reconstructs K-12 education to align with authentic cultural and religious values while incorporating modern pedagogical methods.

The introduction of competency-based group formation and structured proposal approval processes addresses quality control gaps in traditional Islamic Boarding School programs, which often lack standardized evaluation systems (Uskuniyah & Ashari, 2024). These innovations illustrate deliberate efforts to harmonize Islamic educational values including *ta'lim* (knowledge transmission) and community-based learning with modern pedagogical practices encompassing multidisciplinary and student-centred approaches (Mardiana et al., 2020; Masduki, 2019). The program's alignment with contemporary educational demands is echoed in the work of (Marshallsay, 2012), who discusses the historical evolution of Islamic education and the need for dynamic adaptation to modern realities while preserving spiritual foundations.

The resulting model exemplifies dynamic coexistence between spiritual objectives and secular methodologies, advancing contemporary Islamic education reform (Brifkani, 2023; Uskuniyah & Ashari, 2024).

The implementation phase further demonstrates sophisticated pedagogical integration through activities that effectively merge theoretical and practical learning. Initiatives such as *ceramah ba'da Subuh* (post-dawn lectures) and Safari Ramadhan transform traditional Islamic knowledge transmission into dynamic, community-based learning experiences (Musa, 2015). The structured progression from Qur'anic literacy instruction to *tadarrusan* (communal recitation) reflects systematic reinforcement of foundational knowledge through the application and reflection of an approach aligned with *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib* principles in Islamic education (Azzam et al., 2025; Sari, 2024). This methodology is consistent with the findings of Rissanen & Sai (2018), who highlight the importance of fostering social cohesion through Islamic religious education by bridging intra-religious and inter-religious understanding.

This methodology directly addresses the “application gap” identified in contemporary Islamic education, where persistent disconnection exists between textual knowledge and practical implementation a challenge further emphasized in studies on curriculum integration and experiential learning (Brifkani, 2023; Mardiana et al., 2020; Romdhoni, 2023).

The evaluation phase represents the program's most groundbreaking contribution to Islamic educational reform through institutionalizing reflective practice. By incorporating formal feedback mechanisms from multiple stakeholders and requiring structured reporting from student groups, the program elevates the classical Islamic concept of *muhasabah* (self-evaluation) from individual spiritual exercise to a systematic pedagogical tool (Rasyid, 2016). This development aligns with the recommendations of (Fancourt et al., 2020), who critiques rigid religious education syllabi and advocates for dynamic, pluralistic approaches that encourage critical engagement and reflection. This development aligns with emerging research on quality improvement in Islamic education, emphasizing structured evaluations to measure educational outcomes in knowledge, faith, and good deeds (Huda et al., 2023).

The documentation and analysis of community responses to various initiatives create robust feedback loops incorporating contemporary service-learning best practices while remaining grounded in the Islamic principle of *islah* (continuous improvement) (Achmadin et al., 2024). This systematic approach to reflection and improvement distinguishes the program from traditional models that rely primarily on informal assessment methods. The program's emphasis on structured evaluation resonates with the work of Fontana (2015), who examines the role of religious education in post-conflict societies and underscores the need for inclusive models that promote mutual understanding and social cohesion.

The program's theoretical significance extends beyond its immediate educational context, offering a replicable model for Islamic institutions navigating modernity. Its success lies in preserving classical Islamic pedagogical values while incorporating structural innovations from modern educational theory. The three-phase framework exemplifies how experiential learning methodologies can be integrated into Islamic education without compromising religious authenticity (Brifkani, 2023; Romdhoni, 2023), providing a viable template for reform that honours tradition while embracing pedagogical innovation. This integrative approach is further validated by Jackson

(2012), who argues for a more inclusive and historically informed religious education that fosters dialogue and critical thinking.

This integrative approach directly addresses the scholarly need for models bridging traditional religious education with contemporary learning demands (Abdullah, 2018; Ikhwan et al., 2019). The program creates an ecosystem where spiritual knowledge is applied and refined through community engagement, offering a blueprint for educators developing similar programs in Islamic settings (Maryati et al., 2023; Masduki, 2019).

Finally, the program's implications extend to broader debates about religious education's role in modern societies. Operationalizing classical Islamic concepts through contemporary structures serves as a case study of successful adaptation (Akmansyah, 2015). The careful equilibrium between religious authenticity and pedagogical innovation charts a viable path forward for Islamic institutions facing globalization and social change pressures (Mardiana et al., 2020; Romdhoni, 2023). This balanced approach is exemplified in the study by (Malik, 2023), which explores the emergence of ultra-conservative Islamic schools in Indonesia and highlights the need for adaptive models that reconcile tradition with modernity. This balanced approach demonstrates that educational reform need not compromise religious identity but can instead strengthen it through practical application and community engagement.

Reciprocal Impacts of *Khidmah Tholabah* on Students and Communities

The *Khidmah Tholabah* program exemplifies the intersection of Islamic education and community development, where religious instruction and social service merge to create mutual benefits. The program enables *santri* to acquire pedagogical and leadership skills while communities gain access to spiritual knowledge and social services, fostering a symbiotic relationship (Brifkani, 2023; Romdhoni, 2023). This dynamic aligns with the Islamic educational concepts of *tarbiyah* (holistic development) and *ta'dib* (moral refinement), which emphasize the integration of knowledge and ethical practice (Azzam et al., 2025; Sari, 2024). However, the program's effectiveness could be further enhanced by incorporating reflective practices, as highlighted in studies on experiential learning models (Brifkani, 2023). By grounding the program in Islamic principles while addressing contemporary educational needs, *Khidmah Tholabah* serves as a bridge between tradition and modernity (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022).

From a sociological perspective, the program strengthens communal bonds through activities like *tadarrusan* and *Jum'at bersih*, which reflect the integration of Islamic values into daily life (Parlan et al., 2024). These practices resonate with the concept of *ta'lim* (systematic knowledge transmission), fostering a shared religious identity among participants (Sari, 2024). However, questions remain about whether these activities promote inclusive social cohesion or reinforce insularity, a concern echoed in studies on community-based Islamic education (Masduki, 2019). To address this, the program could adopt multidisciplinary approaches, as suggested by Mardiana et al. (2020), ensuring that religious socialization aligns with broader societal needs. The program's success in cultivating piety as practice (e.g., increased participation in dawn prayers) underscores its potential to shape communal habits while maintaining relevance in a globalized context (Musa, 2015).

Educationally, the program demonstrates the *santri*'s progression from learners to active contributors in religious instruction, illustrating the principles of *hiwar* (dialogue-based learning) and habituation (Romdhoni, 2023). The teaching experiences at TPQ

highlight the development of pedagogical content knowledge, where *santri* adapts Quranic teachings for diverse age groups (Santi, 2024). However, the lack of structured reflection limits the depth of learning, a gap identified in Islamic experiential learning models (Brifkani, 2023). Incorporating reflective practices, as advocated in service-learning methodologies (Santi, 2024), could deepen the *santri*'s professional formation. Furthermore, the program's alignment with *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib* provides a comprehensive framework for balancing intellectual, moral, and spiritual development (Azzam et al., 2025).

The program's dual impact reflects the evolving role of Islamic Boarding School in contemporary Muslim societies, where traditional institutions adapt to modern demands (Marzuki et al., 2022; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). This adaptation aligns with the concept of madrasah as institutions of social change, integrating Islamic and general education to foster socially engaged scholars (Maryati et al., 2023). However, challenges such as curriculum dualism and pedagogical stagnation highlight the need for continuous innovation. To ensure sustainability, the program could incorporate transformative learning principles (Abdullah, 2018), fostering critical engagement alongside religious commitment. By doing so, *Khidmah Tholabah* can serve as a model for Islamic education that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to contemporary societal needs.

The analytical framework connecting empirical findings with their theoretical interpretation is systematically mapped in the following diagrammatic representation.

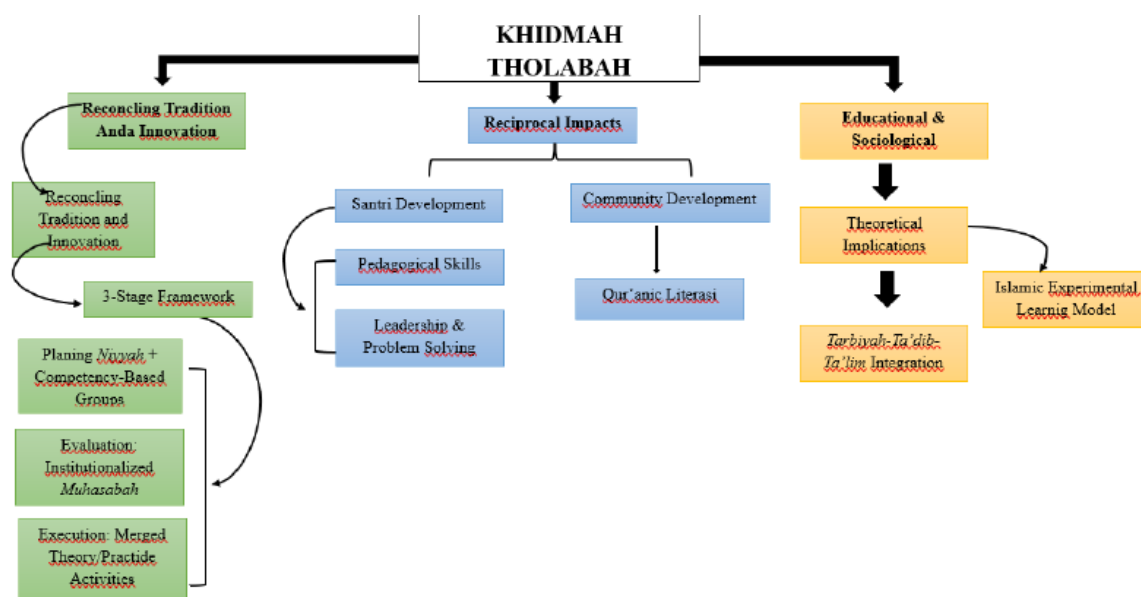


Figure 1. Analytical framework combining khidmah and tarbiyah

IV. CONCLUSION

The *Khidmah Tholabah* program at Nurul Qur'an Praya Islamic Boarding School exemplifies a transformative model of Islamic education that successfully bridges tradition and modernity. By integrating structured community service into the core curriculum, the program fosters a holistic learning environment where religious knowledge (*'ilm*) is continuously applied in real-world contexts (*amal*). This approach not only enhances students' spiritual and ethical development but also strengthens

community bonds, demonstrating the potential of Islamic education to address contemporary societal needs while preserving its religious essence. The program's reciprocal benefits for both *santri* and the community highlight its significance as a case study in educational innovation. Students develop critical leadership, teaching, and problem-solving skills while communities gain access to religious guidance and social services, creating a virtuous cycle of mutual enrichment. The structured three-phase framework - planning, execution, and evaluation - ensures that the program remains adaptable and responsive to local needs, offering a replicable model for other Islamic institutions seeking to balance tradition with pedagogical advancement. Ultimately, the *Khidmah Tholabah* program underscores the importance of reimagining Islamic education as a dynamic, socially engaged practice. Its success lies in its ability to harmonize classical Islamic principles with modern educational methodologies, proving that religious authenticity and innovation are not mutually exclusive. As Islamic educational institutions worldwide grapple with the challenges of globalization, this program provides valuable insights into how faith-based learning can remain relevant, impactful, and transformative.

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