

STRATEGY FOR STRENGTHENING FAITH FOR CONVERTS AT AR-RISALAH CONVERTS CENTER KERINCI DISTRICT, REGENCY PELALAWAN, RIAU PROVINCE

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Abstract

This study explores the roles, strategies, and challenges faced by the Muallaf Center Ar-Risaya in Kerinci District, Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province, in strengthening the Islamic creed (aqidah) of converts. The research highlights the significance of aqidah development as the initial foundation for building faith and facilitating social integration into Islamic life. Employing a qualitative field research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving institutional administrators, converts, and local community members. The findings reveal that the Muallaf Center Ar-Risala functions not only as a provider of theoretical understanding of aqidah but also as a supportive mentoring institution focusing emotional, social, and spiritual approaches. The strategies include routine study sessions, halaqah, practical worship training, open discussions, individual mentoring, and social strengthening through collective activities. Despite encountering obstacles such as diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, limited basic Islamic knowledge, and resource constraints, the center has demonstrated significant positive impacts on converts' understanding of Islam, self-confidence, and active participation in religious practices. This research underscores the importance of a comprehensive and humanistic approach to aqidah development in ensuring the sustainability of converts' Islamic faith and identity.

Keywords: Converts; Aqidah Development; Strategy; Islamic Conversion; Muallaf Center Ar-Risalah

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran, strategi, dan tantangan yang dihadapi Muallaf Center Ar-Risalah di Kecamatan Kerinci, Kabupaten Pelalawan, Provinsi Riau, dalam memperkuat akidah para muallaf. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pembinaan akidah sebagai landasan awal dalam membangun keimanan dan memfasilitasi integrasi sosial ke dalam kehidupan Islami. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif lapangan dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan pengelola lembaga, muallaf, serta masyarakat sekitar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Muallaf Center Ar-Risalah tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai penyedia pemahaman teoretis tentang akidah, tetapi juga sebagai lembaga pendamping yang menekankan pendekatan emosional, sosial, dan spiritual. Strategi yang diterapkan meliputi kajian rutin, halaqah, pelatihan praktik ibadah, diskusi terbuka, pendampingan individu, serta penguatan sosial melalui kegiatan bersama. Meskipun menghadapi kendala seperti perbedaan latar belakang budaya dan agama, keterbatasan pengetahuan dasar keislaman, serta keterbatasan sumber daya, keberadaan pusat ini terbukti memberikan dampak positif yang signifikan terhadap pemahaman Islam, kepercayaan diri, serta keterlibatan muallaf dalam praktik keagamaan. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pendekatan komprehensif dan humanis dalam pembinaan akidah guna menjamin keberlanjutan iman dan identitas keislaman para muallaf.

Kata Kunci: Muallaf; Penguatan Akidah; Strategi; Konversi Islam; Muallaf Center Ar-Risalah

INTRODUCTION

Studies related to the da'wah strategies implemented for Muslim converts have previously been conducted by several researchers. A total of 11 relevant studies can be identified in this area. For instance, the Muallaf Center Yogyakarta (MCY) focuses primarily on spiritual and psychological development for converts, whereas economic empowerment for converts is facilitated by philanthropic institutions such as LAZ Dompot Dhuafa and Rumah Zakat (Sinta and Isbah 2019). Before receiving assistance, converts often faced difficulties in practicing Islamic obligations such as prayer, fasting, and ablution. After receiving structured guidance, they became more knowledgeable about how to perform Islamic duties. Many converts expressed feeling protected and supported, particularly in terms of health, education, and economic stability.

The second study was conducted by Isnaeni (Marhani, Kholisotin, and Hafid 2023), titled “Kauny Method and Psychological Strengthening for Converts at Danau Pantau, Kapuas.” The study highlights that after embracing Islam, converts often face several challenges, including limited knowledge of Islam, adjustment to new forms of worship, and psychological pressures. Converts are required to memorize prayer recitations and Qur’anic verses as prerequisites for valid worship. However, memorizing texts in a completely unfamiliar language is not an easy task. Difficulties also arise in correctly pronouncing Arabic letters according to tajwid rules. Nevertheless, these issues can be addressed through proper guidance-both in group and individual settings-especially regarding aqidah, sharia, and muamalah. A total of 40 participants, consisting of converts and administrators of the Aisyiyah branch of Danau Pantau, took part in the training. The activities were conducted in three stages: lessons on *makharijul huruf* and correct pronunciation of hijaiyah letters, training using the Kauny method, and psychological strengthening. Approximately 90 percent of the participants showed significant improvement. Thus, the Kauny method can serve as an effective alternative for converts in deepening Islamic knowledge, particularly in learning the Qur’an.

Another relevant finding comes from a PAR-based community service project carried out by Yanti Rosalina Naitboho and colleagues (Naitboho et al. 2025). Their program aimed to provide Islamic understanding and faith reinforcement for

converts in Kium Village, using the Al-Muhajirin Prayer House as the center of activity. The central orientation of this program was community empowerment, emphasizing that the converts themselves would become future actors (preachers) who would continue disseminating Islamic teachings to others wishing to embrace Islam, just as they had experienced. The results indicated that the converts in Kium Village were able to understand and apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives.

Furthermore, research by Hamdani Pratama (Hamdani Pratama and Zulkarnain Abdurrahman 2025), titled “Da’wah Strategies of the Mualaf Center Indonesia Peduli (MCIP) Medan in Strengthening the Faith and Islamic Identity of Converts,” found that MCIP Medan implements da’wah strategies based on education, personal mentoring, and community strengthening. Educational activities are delivered through structured Islamic lessons, while personal mentoring involves individual guidance to help converts navigate various challenges. Community strengthening is conducted by building supportive social networks that ensure the sustainability of converts’ faith. This strategy has proven effective in reinforcing the aqidah and Islamic identity of converts.

Similarly, research by Pasi (2024), titled “Da’wah Strategies of the Border Da’wah Forum (FDP) in Enhancing Religious Understanding Among Muslim Minorities in Suka Dame Village, Dairi Regency,” highlights the importance of personal and contextual da’wah approaches. The study emphasizes that communication methods must be adapted to the social and psychological conditions of the target community. This aligns with the strategy used by MCIP Medan, which also employs personalized approaches to assist converts in better understanding Islam. Pasi’s study further stresses that limited resources remain a major obstacle to convert development. Support from various stakeholders, including government bodies and social organizations, is required to ensure sustainable convert empowerment programs. These challenges are likewise encountered by MCIP Medan in implementing its da’wah initiatives.

Previous studies have extensively examined aspects of convert religious understanding, including the conversion process, challenges in practicing Islamic teachings, and strategies used by Islamic institutions in convert development. Therefore, the present research aims to explore this theme by focusing on the title:

“Strategies for Strengthening Faith for Muslim Converts at the Ar-Risalah Muallaf Development Center, Kerinci District, Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province.”

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative field research approach to explore in depth the experiences, roles, and faith-development strategies implemented at the Ar-Risalah Muallaf Center in Kerinci District, Pelalawan Regency. The qualitative method allowed the researcher to understand the coaching process from the perspectives of managers, converts, and community leaders. Data were collected from primary sources—interviews, observations of religious activities, and institutional documentation—as well as secondary sources such as books, journals, and previous studies. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in the guidance process, enabling the researcher to capture their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the institution’s programs.

To ensure data validity, triangulation was applied by comparing data across sources, methods, and time, followed by reconfirmation with informants. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model involving data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Through this approach, the study produced a comprehensive description of the strategies used by the Muallaf Center in strengthening the faith of converts, as well as the contextual challenges faced in a multicultural environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that the Ar-Risalah Muallaf Center plays a crucial role as a religious development institution for new converts. This role extends beyond providing theoretical religious material to include emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. This aligns with the view that faith development for new converts must encompass a holistic approach to enable them to adapt to Islamic life as a whole (Syafuruddin, 2020).

The main strategy implemented is holding regular religious studies and small-scale halaqah (Islamic religious group). These activities focus on teaching the fundamentals of Islamic faith, the pillars of faith, and the concept of monotheism.

Halaqah is an effective method because it allows for two-way interaction between mentors and converts, allowing for prompt resolution of religious issues (Hamidi, 2025). This method has also been shown to support the in-depth internalization of Islamic values (Alwi, 2019). In addition to religious studies, religious practices are also emphasized through training in prayer, ablution, Quranic recitation, and daily prayers. This training provides hands-on experience that strengthens converts' understanding of Islamic teachings. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself guided his companions with concrete examples in worship, making direct practice a highly relevant development strategy (Aziz, 2018). Personal mentoring is another strategy employed. Each convert is accompanied by a mentor who acts as both a religious consultant and a spiritual friend. This mentoring is crucial because many converts face psychological challenges such as doubt and alienation from their former families. With a mentor, converts feel more accepted and confident in living their lives as Muslims (Hamidi, 2025).

The strategy for strengthening faith also encompasses social activities. Converts are involved in community activities, such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), community service, and celebrations of Islamic holidays. These activities aim to strengthen social bonds and foster a sense of belonging to the Muslim community. According to Abdullah (2021), social integration is a crucial aspect in strengthening the faith of converts to prevent them from feeling isolated within their community.

However, the conversion process faces significant challenges. One of these is differences in cultural and religious backgrounds. Some converts still cling to old traditions that are difficult to let go of. This aligns with Nurdin's (2019) opinion that the process of religious conversion is not only a spiritual matter but also involves changes in cultural and social identity.

To nurture individuals who have just embraced Islam, it is essential to provide structured Islamic religious guidance. Islamic religious guidance is an effort to assist individuals in learning to develop and return to their innate nature (*fitrah*) by empowering the faith, intellect, and will bestowed by Allah SWT, particularly in matters related to religion. Such guidance is also crucial in helping individuals realize their full potential as complete human beings so they may attain happiness

in this world and the Hereafter. This explanation underscores that Islamic religious guidance is indeed necessary for strengthening a person's faith—especially for new converts—so that they may become aware of and further develop their existence in accordance with the innate human *fitrah*. (Widodo 2019)

Another challenge is limited basic Islamic knowledge. Many converts lack an understanding of Islamic teachings from the outset, requiring more intensive guidance. This lack of basic knowledge often leaves them confused about carrying out their religious obligations. Therefore, guidance strategies must be tailored to each individual's level of understanding (Hamidi, 2025).

From an institutional perspective, limited human and financial resources pose significant obstacles. The limited number of mentors means that mentoring is not always optimal. Furthermore, limited funding hinders the provision of learning resources such as books, modules, and training facilities. According to Hasanah (2020), resource availability is a crucial factor in ensuring the effectiveness of religious development programs. Despite these challenges, the Ar-Risalah Muallaf Center has had a tangible positive impact. Converts have demonstrated improved understanding of Islam, improved ability to perform religious duties, and increased courage to participate in religious activities. These findings support the theory that comprehensive faith development can strengthen the Islamic identity of converts on an ongoing basis (Rahman, 2018).

Psychologically, faith guidance also increases the self-confidence of converts. Many converts initially felt inferior due to limited religious knowledge, but after intensive guidance, they became more confident in interacting with other Muslims. This self-confidence is a key indicator of successful guidance (Hamidi, 2025).

From a da'wah perspective, the strategy implemented by the Muallaf Center aligns with the principle of *ta'liful qulub* (softening hearts). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was known to use compassion, attention, and material assistance to win the hearts of converts (Narrated by Muslim). This principle demonstrates that strengthening faith must be based on a humanistic and empathetic approach.

Theoretically, the faith development at the Ar-Risalah Muallaf Center reflects the implementation of an integrative Islamic education strategy. This strategy

combines cognitive (understanding of teachings), affective (mental and spiritual development), and psychomotor (practice of worship) aspects. This model aligns with the concept of holistic Islamic education, which emphasizes a balance between knowledge, faith, and good deeds (Hidayat, 2017).

The experiences of converts also demonstrate that a community approach is highly effective. The presence of a welcoming and open Muslim community facilitates social integration. Conversely, if converts face discrimination, they can potentially experience a crisis of faith. Therefore, community support is an equally important external factor in strengthening faith (Suryadi, 2019).

This study also found that faith-strengthening strategies must be implemented sustainably. Temporary strengthening risks weakening new converts' faith again. Therefore, development must be designed with a long-term program that includes regular evaluation. This evaluation is crucial for measuring the extent of the improvement in Islamic faith achieved (Hamidi, 2025).

Overall, this study confirms that strategies for strengthening Islamic faith for new converts require a comprehensive approach, ranging from formal education and personal mentoring to social engagement. With this approach, new converts can build a strong Islamic identity while contributing positively to community life. This finding aligns with the notion that Islamic faith education not only shapes individual faith but also strengthens social cohesion within Muslim communities (Fauzi, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Ar-Risalah Muallaf Center in Kerinci District, Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province plays an important role in strengthening the faith of new converts. The institution functions not only as a place for religious learning but also as a space for emotional, social, and spiritual support. Through programs such as regular religious classes, worship training, mentoring, and community activities, converts receive holistic guidance that helps them understand Islamic teachings and adapt to their new identity.

The strategies implemented have improved converts' religious knowledge, worship skills, and confidence. A humanistic and inclusive approach also supports

their social integration. However, several challenges remain, including differing cultural backgrounds, limited basic Islamic knowledge, and shortages in human and financial resources. These issues require flexible and sustainable mentoring strategies. Overall, the study highlights that strengthening faith is essential for building a firm Islamic identity. The Ar-Risalah Muallaf Center can serve as a useful model for similar institutions in other regions.

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