



Mentoring Strategies and Strengthening the Creed of Converts, Orphans, and the Underprivileged at the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation, Nias Island

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Abstract

This study examines the forms of mentoring and faith (*aqidah*) strengthening implemented by the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation for converts, orphans, and the underprivileged on Nias Island, a Muslim-minority region in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach with field research methods, data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. The findings reveal that the foundation implements a holistic and structured mentoring model encompassing spiritual, emotional, social, and practical dimensions, facilitated by dedicated mentors (*musyrif/musyrifah*) who reside alongside the beneficiaries. Faith strengthening is carried out through a balanced integration of theoretical instruction grounded in classical Islamic texts — such as *Ushul Tsalatsab* and *Aqidah Wasithiyyah* — and the practical habituation of worship, including obligatory and sunnah practices. Diverse pedagogical approaches, including *balaqah*, multimedia-based learning, and competition-based evaluation, contribute to an engaging and effective learning environment. Despite facing significant challenges — including a shortage of qualified personnel, limited financial resources, and the complexities of guiding beneficiaries from non-Muslim backgrounds — the foundation demonstrates a strong institutional commitment through continuous evaluation and a compassionate mentoring culture. This study contributes to the literature on Islamic social education by demonstrating that faith-based mentoring in minority contexts can be effective when grounded in consistent character formation, scholarly tradition, and relational warmth. The findings are expected to serve as a practical reference for similar programs in Muslim-minority regions across Indonesia.

Keywords: Mentoring, Faith (*Aqidah*), Converts (*Muallaf*), Orphans, Underprivileged (*Duafa*)

Abstract

Penelitian ini mengkaji bentuk pendampingan dan penguatan akidah yang diterapkan oleh Yayasan Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu terhadap muallaf, yatim, dan duafa di Pulau Nias, sebuah wilayah minoritas Muslim di Sumatera Utara, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui metode penelitian lapangan, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi langsung, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa yayasan menerapkan model pendampingan yang holistik dan terstruktur yang mencakup dimensi spiritual, emosional, sosial, dan praktis, yang difasilitasi oleh pendamping (*musyrif/musyrifah*) yang tinggal bersama para binaan. Penguatan akidah dilaksanakan melalui integrasi yang seimbang antara pengajaran teoritis yang berlandaskan kitab-kitab klasik Islam — seperti *Ushul Tsalatsab* dan *Aqidah Wasithiyyah* — serta pembiasaan ibadah secara praktis, mencakup amalan wajib maupun sunnah. Pendekatan pedagogis yang beragam, meliputi *balaqah*, pembelajaran berbasis multimedia, dan evaluasi berbasis kompetisi, berkontribusi pada terciptanya lingkungan belajar yang menarik dan efektif. Meskipun menghadapi berbagai tantangan — termasuk keterbatasan tenaga pendamping yang berkualitas, keterbatasan sumber dana, serta kompleksitas pembinaan binaan yang berlatar belakang non-Muslim — yayasan menunjukkan komitmen kelembagaan yang kuat melalui evaluasi yang berkesinambungan dan budaya pendampingan yang penuh kasih sayang. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap literatur pendidikan sosial Islam dengan menunjukkan bahwa pendampingan berbasis keimanan di lingkungan minoritas dapat berjalan efektif apabila dilandasi pembentukan karakter yang konsisten, tradisi keilmuan yang kokoh, dan hubungan pendampingan yang hangat. Temuan penelitian ini diharapkan dapat menjadi rujukan praktis bagi program-program serupa di wilayah minoritas Muslim di seluruh Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Pendampingan, Akidah, Muallaf, Yatim, Duafa

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Introduction

Indonesia's national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, meaning "Unity in Diversity," reflects the spirit of unity amid the nation's diversity. One manifestation of this diversity is the difference in beliefs and religions. Indonesia upholds the value of divinity, as reflected in the first principle of Pancasila: *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* ("Belief in the One and Only God"). In this context, society is called upon to respect differences and strengthen the spirit of religious tolerance.

Among the various religions practiced in Indonesia, Islam has the largest number of adherents. Based on data from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri) up to June 2024, approximately 245.93 million people, or around 87.08% of Indonesia's population, are Muslim.¹ However, the large number of adherents does not automatically reflect the quality of faith or the level of religious practice. There are still segments of the Muslim community who view Islam merely as a social identity or tradition, rather than as a comprehensive way of life.

Some people also believe that practicing religion seriously is overly rigid and incompatible with modern life. They argue that one need not be "too fanatical about religion." In reality, Islam is a flexible and universal religion, with the Qur'an and Sunnah as its primary legal sources. These two sources keep Islam perpetually relevant across all times and places, serving as an ideal moral and legal guide for human life.

This situation differs from regions in Indonesia where Muslims are a minority, such as in Teluk Dalam District, South Nias Regency, which is the site of this research. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of South Nias Regency in 2021, the Muslim population in that area accounts for only approximately 2.5% of the total 367,473 inhabitants.² This small proportion indicates that Muslims in the region face unique challenges in conducting da'wah and Islamic religious education.

Nevertheless, observations at the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation reveal a strong enthusiasm for religious learning among converts (*mualaf*), orphans, and the underprivileged on Nias Island. Despite limited access to Islamic education, their eagerness to study and memorize the Qur'an is remarkable. At Rumah Yatim Yaa Bunayya, which operates under the foundation, there are children who have

¹ "Data Jumlah Penduduk Indonesia Menurut Agama Pada Semester I/2024 - DataIndonesia.Id," n.d.

² "Jumlah Penduduk Menurut Kecamatan Dan Agama Yang Dianut - Tabel Statistik - Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Nias Selatan," n.d.

memorized one *juḥ*, five *juḥ*, and even all thirty *juḥ* of the Qur'an, as well as hundreds of hadiths.³ These achievements are particularly extraordinary given the limited facilities and teaching staff available.

The Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation, established by Ustaz Dedi Iswandi and his colleagues on November 13, 2020, plays a vital role in providing a platform for religious and social development for converts, orphans, and the underprivileged. The foundation's activities include Qur'anic instruction, hadith memorization, character development, and deepening of religious knowledge based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. These efforts demonstrate that Islamic education can thrive and develop even within a Muslim-minority community.⁴

The children's success in memorizing and understanding Islamic teachings underscores the importance of early guidance and the strengthening of *aqidah* (faith) from a young age. Childhood is a strategic phase for shaping character and instilling Islamic values. Strengthening *aqidah* is also an obligation for every Muslim, as explained in the word of Allah ﷻ:⁵

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ
الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

"The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, establish prayer, give zakah, and obey Allah and His Messenger. It is those whom Allah will have mercy upon. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise."

This verse affirms the importance of every believer's role in advising one another toward goodness and preventing wrongdoing, as a means of maintaining the quality of faith so that it remains steadfast. Faith is dynamic in nature it can increase through righteous deeds and diminish through acts of disobedience and therefore requires continuous cultivation to be sustained.

On the other hand, the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation also faces a number of challenges in carrying out its role, including a shortage of teaching staff, limited funds to support the activities of

³ Wawancara dengan ketua Yayasan Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu ustaz Dedi Iswandi pada 9 Januari 2025.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kementerian Agama, *Qur'an Kemenag* (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2022), Q.S. At-Taubah [9]:71.

converts, orphans, and the underprivileged, as well as differences in perspective with the surrounding community, who come from different religious or madhab (school of thought) backgrounds. Nevertheless, the foundation continues to evaluate its programs, strengthen social ties with the community, and optimize the resources at its disposal.

Based on these circumstances, the researcher is interested in examining the effectiveness of the mentoring and faith-strengthening strategies implemented by the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation in guiding converts, orphans, and the underprivileged. This group is considered vulnerable spiritually, socially, and economically, and therefore requires comprehensive guidance to understand and practice Islamic teachings more deeply. Furthermore, the geographical context of Nias Island — which is predominantly non-Muslim — makes the challenges of Islamic education even more complex. As such, an integrated mentoring approach is expected to strengthen Islamic identity and foster a sense of solidarity among the children under the foundation's care.

Research on Islamic mentoring and faith strengthening in minority regions such as Nias Island remains very limited. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by offering new insights into effective mentoring strategies within a local context. The findings are also hoped to serve as valuable input for the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation in developing more optimal guidance methods, in line with the foundation's vision of strengthening faith and improving the quality of life of its beneficiaries.

In this study, the author employs a qualitative approach using field research methods. According to Creswell, as cited in Kusumastuti, qualitative research is a type of research that aims to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem. This research focuses on in-depth exploration to gain insight into their experiences, perspectives, and interpretations. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher endeavors to collect, process, and analyze data in order to arrive at a deep and comprehensive understanding of the verbal and nonverbal communication activities that are the focus of the study.⁶

Result and Discussion

Mentoring Forms at Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation

⁶ Adhi Kusumastuti and Khoiron Ahmad Mustamil, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Semarang: Lembaga Pendidikan Sukarno Pressindo, 2019), hlm. 2.

Mentoring is a process of accompanying an individual or group closely, intimately, and with a spirit of togetherness in facing the various challenges of life. Mentoring is not merely limited to providing direction or assistance, but also involves building relationships grounded in care, attention, and direct involvement in helping individuals achieve shared goals.⁷ In practice, the mentor serves as a guide who provides motivation, exemplary conduct, and solutions so that the individuals being mentored can develop progressively.⁸

A social mentor is an individual or group with the ability to collaborate with the community and stakeholders to help develop potential and resolve various social problems. Mentoring is carried out through personal, educational, and participatory approaches, so that the individuals being mentored also play an active role in the process of their own transformation. In this way, mentoring aims to build self-reliance, improve quality of life, and create sustainable positive change.

The primary goal of mentoring is to help bring about real change in the lives of individuals and communities, while also providing moral, mental, and spiritual support.⁹ Within social and religious institutions, mentoring serves as an important method of guidance, as it is capable of fostering a close relationship between the mentor and those being guided. This is evident in the mentoring practices carried out by the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation for its converts, orphans, and underprivileged beneficiaries.

Every morning after performing the Fajr prayer, the students recite the morning *dhikr* using a booklet entitled "*Zikir Pagi & Petang*" (Morning and Evening Remembrance) that had previously been distributed to them. The students are also required to memorize the Qur'an and submit their memorization to the designated *musyrif halaqah* (memorization supervisor),¹⁰ in accordance with the memorization targets that have been set. In addition, they are also required to submit their hadith memorization, drawn from books such as the *Arba'in Nawawi* or *100 Selected Hadiths*. Students are only

⁷ Mulyati Purwasasmita, "Strategi Pendampingan Dalam Peningkatan Kemandirian Belajar Masyarakat," *Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan* 7, no. 2 (2017): hlm. 1, <https://doi.org/10.17509/jap.v12i2.6379>.

⁸ Astuti Tri et al., "Pendampingan TKA/TPA Al-Jihad Pada Anak Usia Dini Dalam Meningkatkan Nilai-Nilai Keagamaan Dengan Menggunakan Beberapa Metode Pembelajaran Di Desa Muara Kec. Tonra Kab. Bone" 2, no. 1 (2023): hlm. 36.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Halaqah adalah bentuk majelis belajar agama Islam yang dilakukan dalam kelompok kecil secara rutin dengan bimbingan seorang pembina atau ustaz.

permitted to leave the *halaqah* session and proceed with their preparations for morning school activities after completing their memorization submission.

After finishing the morning activities, the students then prepare themselves to bathe and have breakfast before departing for school. The students' daily meals are prepared independently by the female students, who are responsible for cooking in the foundation's kitchen under the direct supervision of the *ummi* (house mother). This activity not only meets their daily nutritional needs but also forms part of their life skills education, particularly in the areas of cooking and kitchen management. In this way, the female students gain practical experience that will be beneficial for their future lives, both within the family and in the broader community.

After breakfast, students enrolled at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI, elementary level) and *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs, junior secondary level) depart for school in the morning. Meanwhile, students attending *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA, senior secondary level) follow their classes in the afternoon. This arrangement is due to limited classroom availability at their school, which necessitates a rotating schedule for learning sessions. The school is located quite close to the foundation approximately a five-minute walk making it easily accessible for the students without the need for additional transportation.

Upon returning from school in the afternoon, the students typically rest briefly, have lunch, or engage in other leisure activities. However, on certain occasions, they are also asked to assist the construction workers who are working on the building project adjacent to the foundation. This activity is not only intended to expedite the construction process, but also serves as a learning opportunity for the students. By being directly involved in the work, students can acquire basic carpentry skills that will be useful in their future lives.

In the afternoon, after performing the *Ahr* prayer, the students continue with activities such as reciting the evening *dhiker* or reviewing their Qur'an memorization (*muroja'ah*). Afterward, they are given time for physical exercise as a form of refreshment. The students typically play football in the foundation's yard. Occasionally, they are also permitted to swim at the nearby harbor, provided that an adult is present to supervise them. These activities serve as a means of relieving the monotony of a packed daily routine, while also maintaining a balance among spiritual, intellectual, and physical activities.

After the Maghrib prayer, the atmosphere at Musalah Al-Bayyinah, located within the foundation's premises, becomes lively as children from the surrounding area arrive to take part in Qur'anic recitation sessions. The number of participants can reach nearly one hundred children each evening. In this setting, the students of the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation serve as teachers at the Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an (TPQ, Qur'anic Education Center). The students appointed to teach are those who have already demonstrated strong Qur'anic recitation and solid memorization. These activities also remain under the direct supervision of the *musyrif*, who actively participate in teaching at the TPQ as well. Beyond benefiting the surrounding community, this activity also serves as an opportunity to cultivate character, leadership, and a spirit of service among the students.

In the evening, after performing the *Isha* prayer, the students continue their learning in a quieter atmosphere. On certain occasions, they participate in additional study sessions lasting approximately one hour, guided directly by the *musyrif*. These sessions provide an opportunity to deepen their understanding of religious material as well as other subjects previously studied. Once the study session concludes, the students prepare to rest and sleep in order to maintain their stamina for the following day's activities.

The Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation has dedicated mentors and supervisors known as *musyrif* for male students and *musyrifah* for female students. These mentors are directly involved in all of the students' daily activities. To ensure optimal supervision, they reside together with the students in the dormitory, enabling them to monitor the students' activities from the moment they wake in the morning until they retire for the night.

As guides, the *musyrif* are obligated to set a good example for the students, as this constitutes an essential element of the mentoring method employed. As the Javanese saying goes, "*Guru digugu lan ditiru*" ("A teacher is obeyed and emulated"), a *musyrif* is expected to be a role model, particularly in matters of moral conduct, etiquette, and the consistent practice of daily worship. They must embody this through steadfast and consistent observance of religious duties. Through such exemplary conduct, students will be inspired to follow and emulate the behavior of their teachers. Ustaz Dedi commented on how the mentoring process is carried out:

“The ustaz need to be good role models not merely delivering material, but also applying it in their daily lives, and remaining steadfast in doing so.”¹¹

The Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation does not yet have a formally written curriculum for either its mentoring activities or its teaching and learning processes. Nevertheless, it continues to implement a structured learning system. The instruction is based on works by well-known Islamic scholars in the fields of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tawhid* (theology), and hadith, such as *Ushul Tsalatsab* and *Aqidah Ahlus Sunnah*. The methods employed are similar to general teaching practices, namely through a *ta'lim* and *tarbiyah* approach that is, the direct delivery of material using whiteboards and other teaching media such as projectors and televisions.

On certain occasions, the students are also presented with educational viewing material in the form of lectures and study sessions by well-known domestic scholars as well as *masyaikh* (senior scholars) from the Middle East, covering topics related to the science of *Tawhid*. The presentation of material in video format serves as one means of creating a more engaging and varied learning atmosphere. In this way, students do not only learn through direct lectures, but also gain broader perspectives from a diverse range of scholarly figures. Furthermore, this method is hoped to cultivate a greater enthusiasm for learning and prevent the monotony that can arise from an overly repetitive classroom setting.

After all activities have been running for approximately one month, the *musyrif* conduct an evaluation together with Ustaz Dedi and his wife, affectionately addressed as “*Ummi*” by both the students and the dedicated ustaz, who is regarded as a senior figure and a source of advice and guidance. This evaluation covers various aspects, including religious knowledge, adab (etiquette), moral conduct, worship practices, Qur'an memorization, student violations, and other related matters. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which the planned program's objectives have been achieved, as well as to formulate the necessary solutions for future improvement.

One of the methods employed by the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation to measure learning outcomes is by organizing Islamic knowledge competitions (*cerdas cermat*) among the students, testing their understanding of Islamic subject matter such as tawhid, fiqh, hadith, and Islamic history that had been previously taught. The groupings are arranged fairly and evenly based on the students' age categories, thereby fostering healthy and competitive rivalry. With prizes awarded to the winners, the

¹¹ Wawancara dengan ketua Yayasan Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu ustaz Dedi Iswandi pada 9 Januari 2025.

students consistently demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm whenever this activity is held. Ustaz Ghozal conveyed:

“As a means of reinforcing understanding, the foundation also organizes knowledge competitions (*cerdas cermat*) and Qur'anic verse-completion contests (*sambung ayat*) that revisit previously taught material as well as test the students' Qur'an memorization.”¹²

Furthermore, the foundation also organizes verse-completion competitions (*sambung ayat*) among students based on the memorization they have mastered, as a means of assessing the quality and level of *mutqin* (precision and fluency) of their Qur'anic memorization. This competition-based evaluation at the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation demonstrates that assessment need not be conducted through monotonous discussion alone. Thanks to the diverse creative ideas of the *musyrif*, the support of "Ummi", and Ustaz Dedi's openness to receiving input, these evaluative activities are able to deliver a greater positive impact both for the *musyrif* and the students themselves.

The mentoring of converts, orphans, and the underprivileged carried out by the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation is implemented in a structured and comprehensive manner. Based on interviews conducted with the foundation's board members and mentors, it was found that the mentoring process encompasses spiritual, emotional, social, and practical dimensions. The mentors referred to as *musyrif* for male students and *musyriyah* for female students reside directly with the students in the dormitory. Their presence from the Fajr prayer through to the evening demonstrates a full and committed involvement in guiding and supervising the students' daily activities.

These findings are reinforced through direct observation conducted by the researcher, which revealed that the mentors participate in all student activities from waking the children for the Fajr prayer and supervising study sessions, to ensuring their cleanliness and discipline. The interactions between mentors and students are warm and familiar, yet maintained within the boundaries of Islamic etiquette. This indicates that the mentoring method applied is not merely supervisory in nature, but rather constitutes an intensive form of character building and the habituation of Islamic values.

Based on documentation obtained, the foundation has compiled a daily activity schedule encompassing times for worship, study, meals, rest, and communal activities such as cooperative work (*gotong royong*) and skills training. Furthermore, the material taught is not limited to religious sciences such as fiqh and tawhid, but also includes the cultivation of adab, the habituation of sunnah practices, and the

¹² Wawancara dengan tenaga pengajar Yayasan Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu ustaz Ahmad Syafrizal, S.Sos. pada 8 Januari 2025.

memorization of the Qur'an and hadiths. Teaching methods are conducted both in a classroom setting and on an individual basis, depending on the abilities and background of each student.

The consistency among the interview data, observations, and documentation is clearly evident in these mentoring practices. For instance, interviews indicated that the mentors also serve as motivators, facilitators, and spiritual guides. This is reflected in the way they offer counsel to the children, accompany them through learning difficulties, and strengthen their resolve particularly for converts who are still in the process of adjusting to their new environment and beliefs.

The foundation employs a personalized approach tailored to the condition of each beneficiary, taking into account their social and psychological backgrounds. Students do not merely study Islamic theory, but are also guided to apply it in their daily lives. This form of mentoring reflects the role of the social mentor as a facilitator, motivator, and guide within the framework of community development theory. Thus, the mentoring method implemented by the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation demonstrates consistency between concept, practice, and field outcomes. This integration of theory and practice renders the guidance process more meaningful, particularly within the context of a Muslim minority community such as that found on Nias Island.

Faith Strengthening Forms at Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation

Strengthening is a process or effort to reinforce something previously weak so that it becomes stronger and more consistent. In the realm of education and guidance, reinforcement functions to shape and sustain positive behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. According to B.F. Skinner's theory, reinforcement is carried out by providing positive responses to desired behaviors so that those behaviors occur more frequently. Reinforcement can take the form of positive reinforcement, such as praise and reward, or negative reinforcement, by removing unpleasant conditions. In the learning process, reinforcement plays an important role in increasing motivation, attention, discipline, and character formation among learners.¹³

In the context of Islamic education, reinforcement is applied not only to outward behavior, but also to spiritual and religious dimensions most importantly, *aqidah*. The strengthening of *aqidah* aims to instill a firm conviction in Islamic teachings so that it is not easily shaken by environmental influences or the changing times. This reinforcement can be carried out through verbal means such as counsel,

¹³ J. E.R. Staddon and D. T. Cerutti, "Operant Conditioning," *Annual Review of Psychology* 54 (2003): 115-44, <https://doi.org/10.1146/ANNUREV.PSYCH.54.101601.145124>.

motivation, and praise, as well as nonverbal means such as exemplary conduct and emotional engagement. When carried out consistently, the guidance process becomes more effective in shaping individuals who are steadfast (*istiqamah*), of good character, and strongly committed to Islamic values.

As for *aqidah* (الْعَقِيدَةُ), etymologically it derives from the Arabic word *al-aqdu* (الْعَقْدُ), meaning a bond or tie; *at-tautsiqu* (التَّوَثُّيقُ), meaning strong trust or conviction; *al-ihkaamu* (الإِحْكَامُ), meaning to firmly establish or affirm; and *ar-rabthu biqunwah* (الرَّبْطُ بِقُوَّةٍ), meaning to bind firmly. Terminologically, *aqidah* refers to a firm and certain belief without the slightest doubt in the heart of the one who holds it. This definition indicates that *aqidah* is not merely knowledge, but a deep conviction embedded in the heart that serves as the foundation for every aspect of a Muslim's life.¹⁴

Islamic *aqidah* refers to a firm and unwavering belief in Allah ﷻ, encompassing all obligations of *tawhid*, obedience to Him, and faith in His angels, His messengers, His revealed books, the Day of Judgment, divine decree both good and bad, and all the principles of religion whose truth has been established. A sound *aqidah* gives rise to righteous conduct, correct worship, and obedience to Allah and His Messenger. It is for this reason that the strengthening of *aqidah* constitutes one of the most important aspects of the Islamic educational process, particularly for individuals who are still in the early stages of learning and familiarizing themselves with Islamic teachings, such as converts..

As Allah ﷻ has stated:¹⁵

أَمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلُّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ
وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

"The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and so have the believers. All of them have believed in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers. (They say,) 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers.' They also say, 'We hear and we obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You is the final destination.'"

¹⁴ Yazid Abdul Qadir Jawas, *Syarah 'Aqidah Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah* (Pustaka Imam Asy-Syafii, 2006), hlm. 27.

¹⁵ Kementerian Agama, *Qur'an Kemenag*.

In the aspect of faith strengthening, the foundation places *tawhid* as the primary foundation of its guidance. Based on interview findings, the material taught covers fundamental concepts such as the introduction to Allah, the purpose of human creation, and an understanding of the pillars of faith (*rukun iman*) and the pillars of Islam (*rukun Islam*). This instruction is delivered gradually, particularly for converts who are still in the early stages of learning about Islam. The approach used is simple and easy to understand, making it accessible to students from a variety of backgrounds.

For the students, the process of faith strengthening at the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation is not carried out solely through a theoretical approach, but also through the habituation of worship in the daily lives of the converts, orphans, and underprivileged. Guidance is not limited to the performance of obligatory acts of worship, but also encompasses encouragement to practice sunnah acts of worship such as *rawatib* prayers, *dhiker* and supplications after prayer, voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, and other forms of devotion. It is hoped that the beneficiaries will grow accustomed to performing these acts of worship independently, without needing to be reminded in the future.

The process of faith strengthening plays a crucial role for vulnerable groups at the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation, particularly for converts. Upon embracing Islam, they require a foundational understanding of Islamic teachings such as *iman*, *tawhid*, the manner of performing prayer, the pillars of faith, and the pillars of Islam which constitute an urgent need in the early stages of their guidance. Ustaz Dedi, in an interview regarding how the foundation explains fundamental concepts of *aqidah* to newly converted Muslims, stated

The Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation places the introduction to *tawhid* as the foremost priority in guiding newly converted Muslims. They are taught about the origins of human creation and the purpose of their existence, including fundamental acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, *zakat*, and various other forms of devotion. Meanwhile, for the regular students, the foundation has drawn up a dedicated schedule for *tawhid* instruction. In delivering *aqidah* material, they also make use of books by well-known scholars, such as *Ushul Tsalatsah*, *Aqidah Ahlus Sunnah*, and others.

However, the delivery of *aqidah* material is not confined solely to formal classroom sessions. Ustaz Ahmad Syafrizal explained that:

“Tawhid instruction is conducted routinely every Monday evening for approximately one hour. In addition, on Friday evenings the students are invited to listen to lectures on the theme of tawhid delivered by well-known scholars in Indonesia. As a means of reinforcing understanding, the

foundation also organizes knowledge competitions (*cerdas cermat*) that revisit the material previously taught..”¹⁶

Ustaz Arief Wijaksono, as one of the *musyrif*, also added:

"We distribute reading books suited to their needs, for instance books on *aqidah wasathiyah*. For those residing at the markaz, there are also evening study sessions, in addition to a regular weekly lecture every Friday evening."¹⁷

The ustaz also provide alternative learning media to prevent students from becoming disengaged through classroom instruction alone. These include distributing books and screening lectures by prominent Indonesian scholars on the topic of tawhid. Through this, students can observe how these scholars convey their da'wah in an engaging and accessible manner. This approach aligns with the concept of multimedia-based learning, which according to Mayer enhances understanding and retention by engaging multiple sensory channels simultaneously.¹⁸ It is hoped that through this method, students will develop greater enthusiasm for learning and arrive at a deeper understanding of tawhid.

Through knowledge competitions (*cerdas cermat*), students are able to revisit and consolidate previously learned material. This activity also enables the foundation to assess the extent of the students' comprehension of *aqidah* and other subjects. Such competition-based evaluation reflects the principle of formative assessment, which according to Black and Wiliam, as cited in Nor, serves not only as a measurement tool but also as a means of enhancing the learning process itself.¹⁹ This is particularly important in determining the most appropriate instructional method both for students who have already grasped the *aqidah* material and for those who still require further guidance.

The effort to strengthen *aqidah* at the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation constitutes a central element in the guidance of converts, orphans, and the underprivileged. Based on interview and observational findings, *aqidah* strengthening is carried out through a balanced combination of theoretical and

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Wawancara dengan tenaga pengajar Yayasan Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Ustaz Arief Wijaksono, S.Pd. pada 8 Januari 2025.

¹⁸ Ruth C Clark and Richard E Mayer, *E-Learning and the Science of Instruction: Proven Guidelines for Consumers and Designers of Multimedia Learning* (John Wiley & Sons, 2023).

¹⁹ Amirudin Mohd Nor et al., "Does Competition-Based Learning Enhance Learning Ability? A Preliminary Study on the Finance Education," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v12-i10/14918>.

practical approaches. The material taught encompasses *tawhid rububiyah*, *ulubiyah*, *asma wa sifat* (divine names and attributes), the pillars of faith, and the dangers of *shirk*, utilizing classical texts of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah such as *Ushul Tsalatsah* and *Aqidah Wasithiyah*. This is consistent with the view of Musdalifah, who asserts that the use of authoritative classical texts in *aqidah* instruction serves to anchor theological understanding within a sound and established scholarly tradition.²⁰

Beyond classroom instruction and *halaqah* sessions, the beneficiaries are also habituated to performing sunnah acts of worship, including *rawatib* prayers, voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, morning and evening *dhiker*, and daily supplications. This habituation approach is grounded in the concept of *ta'wid* (conditioning through repetition), which according to Supendi represents one of the most effective methods in Islamic character education, as it transforms religious values from theoretical knowledge into lived practice embedded in daily life. In this way, *aqidah* values are not merely understood at a cognitive level, but are genuinely internalized and applied in the students' everyday lives.²¹

Challenges Faced by the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation in the Mentoring and Faith Strengthening Process

In practice, the process of faith strengthening is also confronted with a range of challenges. One of the primary obstacles is the limitation of human resources, whereby the number of mentors is disproportionate to the number of students. This condition is not unique to the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation. Ritonga and Widodo²² note that in various Islamic boarding school settings, administrators must carefully manage recruitment, capacity building, and task distribution under conditions of limited budgets, facilities, and varying levels of educator qualifications, in order to maintain the quality of education.²³ This challenge is further compounded by the fact that, as Haidar

²⁰ Musdalifah Siregar, "Pembelajaran Kitab Ta'lim Muta'allim Dalam Membangun Akhlak Santri Di Pondok Pesantren As-Syarifiyah Desa Sidingkat Kecamatan Padang Bolak Kabupaten Padang Lawas Utara" (UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan, 2023).

²¹ P Supendi, Palah, and Aan Hasanah, "Development of Character Education Models in Madrasas Through the Establishment of the Tahajud Prayer," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2020.172-01>.

²² W Widodo, "Manajemen Pondok Pesantren Dalam Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Manusia Terhadap Peningkatan Kemampuan Santri (Studi Pada Pondok Pesantren Darul Qur'an Kota Malang)," *ARZUSIN* 5, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.58578/arzusin.v5i1.4777>.

²³ J Ritonga, "Human Resource Management Strategy to Strengthen the Quality of Islamic Boarding School Education," *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Kesatuan* 13, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.37641/jimkes.v13i3.3273>.

et al. emphasize, an increase in the number of students must be matched by a corresponding increase in both the quantity and quality of educators otherwise, educational performance will inevitably decline.²⁴

The resulting imbalance places a considerable workload on the *musyrif*, requiring them to exercise careful management of both time and energy. Field observations revealed that a single mentor is frequently required to supervise multiple activities simultaneously, ranging from instruction to behavioral guidance. This aligns with the findings of Pamungkas et al. (2025), who highlight that the transformation of educational institutions demands adaptive and well-trained human resources — a condition that remains difficult to fulfill when staffing levels are insufficient.

In carrying out its da'wah and guidance mission, the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation faces both internal and external challenges. Internally, the shortage of educators and mentors (*musyrif/musyriyah*) represents the most pressing concern, as the number of beneficiaries continues to grow while the available personnel remain limited. Widodo describes the management of Islamic boarding schools as inherently complex, noting that all activities and the achievement of institutional objectives are highly dependent on the quality and sufficiency of the human resources responsible for guiding the students.²⁵ Consequently, the *musyrif* at the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation are compelled to shoulder multiple responsibilities simultaneously from religious instruction and Qur'anic memorization supervision to the day-to-day monitoring of students' conduct and well-being.

This condition underscores the importance of a more structured approach to human resource management within the foundation, so that the mentoring and faith strengthening functions can be carried out optimally, even under conditions of limited staffing capacity.

From a financial standpoint, the foundation faces difficulties in meeting the basic needs of all its beneficiaries. Limited funding has prevented the foundation from accommodating a greater number of converts or underprivileged children who are genuinely in need. Busari notes that orphan-care institutions can face serious shortfalls in meeting basic needs when operating under constrained financial conditions, and proposes social waqf as a sustainable financing scheme for the welfare of orphans both within households and institutional settings.²⁶ Skills development programs and

²⁴ M Haidar, M Hasanah, and M Ma'arif, "Educational Challenges to Human Resource Development in Islamic Education Institutions," *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v3i4.309>.

²⁵ W Widodo, "Manajemen Pendidikan Entrepreneur Di Pondok Pesantren: Model, Strategi, Dan Tantangan," *TAUJIH: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.53649/taujih.v7i01.1054>.

²⁶ S Busari, "Emerging Social Waqf Model for the Welfare of Pandemic Orphans," *IJUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies* 6, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijrcs.v6i2.296>.

vocational training have likewise been unable to be conducted optimally due to budget constraints. In this regard, Arief and Sukma²⁷ and Maulana and Ridwan²⁸ highlight that well-planned zakat management encompassing planning, collection, distribution, and oversight is capable of empowering orphans and the underprivileged through education and skills training. However, they also note that low levels of public literacy regarding zakat and waqf, combined with limited awareness of channeling funds through formal institutions, remain persistent obstacles to the optimal utilization of these Islamic philanthropic instruments.

The diverse social backgrounds and personalities of the beneficiaries also present a distinct challenge. The majority of the children come from non-Muslim environments or families with limited understanding of Islam, meaning they arrive without a solid *aqidah* foundation. Some even display difficult temperaments, resistance to guidance, and an unfamiliarity with Islamic etiquette. This is consistent with the findings of Salihin et al.,²⁹ who observe that children from convert families frequently face compounded obstacles including economic hardship, limited parental religious knowledge, and time constraints all of which inhibit the development of a strong religious foundation. Foundations like Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu therefore serve a compensatory role, providing structured religious instruction, simplified curricula, and direct parental or guardian involvement in the educational process.

In the dimension of *aqidah* strengthening, the primary challenge lies in instilling *tawhid* values and gradually distancing the beneficiaries from *shirk*-based beliefs. Several newly converted Muslims arrive with virtually no prior knowledge of Islamic fundamentals, necessitating that instruction begin entirely from scratch. Saragi and Qorni,³⁰ and Misbah et al.³¹ affirm that routine religious guidance classes, home visits, and dedicated mentoring sessions for converts are effective in strengthening *aqidah* and worship practices, as well as in preventing reversion to previous beliefs. Furthermore, Saragi and Qorni

²⁷ S Arief and M Sukma, "Pengelolaan Dana Zakat Dalam Pemberdayaan Anak Yatim Program Sanggar Genius Tinjauan Fiqh Zakat: Yayasan Yatim Mandiri Cabang Sragen," *El-Mal: Jurnal Kajian Ekonomi & Bisnis Islam* 6, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.47467/elmal.v6i3.7104>.

²⁸ M Maulana and M Ridwan, "Strategi Rumah Yatim Ar-Rahman Kota Medan Dalam Pengoptimalisasian Dana Zakat, Infaq Dan Shadaqah," *ManBiz: Journal of Management and Business* 3, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.47467/manbiz.v3i1.2046>.

²⁹ S Salihin, M Umar, and M Masbur, "Implikasi Pola Asuh Anak Dalam Keluarga Mualaf Terhadap Praktek Ibadah Di Yayasan Mualaf Center," *Tadabbur: Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 5, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.22373/tadabbur.v5i1.344>.

³⁰ E Saragi and W Qorni, "Bimbingan Penyuluhan Agama Terhadap Muallaf Perempuan," *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v4i2.486>.

³¹ T Misbah et al., "Application of the Structural Guidance Model for Mualaf Banda Aceh in Strengthening Education Islamic Values," *Multidisciplinary Science Journal*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.31893/multiscience.2023047>.

emphasize that because converts are often at the very beginning of their Islamic learning journey, faith reinforcement must be carried out gradually and repeatedly through a gentle approach grounded in the Qur'an, hadith, prophetic narratives, and a deep internalization of *tawhid*. This process demands extraordinary patience and emotional resilience from the *musyrif*.

Despite these challenges, the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation continues to respond through a range of strategies intensifying routine evaluations, strengthening the role of the *musyrif/musyrifah*, fostering open communication with the surrounding community, and maintaining sincerity as the driving spirit of every program. The ustaz and administrators also consistently cultivate a family-like atmosphere of warmth and compassion. This relational approach finds strong support in the literature: Cucu et al demonstrate that mentoring which emphasizes *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct), adab, and empathy shapes a spiritually and socially balanced personality, while also facilitating the acceptance of converts within their new community.³² Similarly, Firdaus and Suwendi find that Islamic character education grounded in warmth and compassion contributes significantly to social harmony, even within multicultural settings.³³

The research findings demonstrate a clear coherence among the interview, observational, and documentary data. The mentoring and *aqidah* strengthening programs at the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation are implemented in a systematic, adaptive, and character-oriented manner. Misbah et al. describe a structurally collaborative model in which the guidance of converts involves multiple stakeholders including government bodies, *Baitul Mal*, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and convert associations thereby reinforcing both Islamic value education and socioeconomic support. While the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation operates primarily as an independent institution, its holistic approach mirrors this collaborative spirit, combining *tawhid* instruction, character formation, social support, and the sustained role of the *musyrif* a model that research consistently identifies as effective for converts and underprivileged children alike.³⁴ Despite operating under various limitations, the foundation demonstrates a strong and unwavering commitment to its mission, and its guidance model

³² C Cucu, R Waldan, and J Abdullah, "Conveying Islamic Teachings to Converts Through Problem Solving: A Study on the Efforts to Revitalize Female Converts," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.15575/idajhs.v18i2.40855>.

³³ S Firdaus and S Suwendi, "Fostering Social Harmony: The Impact of Islamic Character Education in Multicultural Societies," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 17, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v17i1.6579>.

³⁴ A Wibowo and D Darodjat, "Dampak Pendidikan Islam Non-Formal Terhadap Pembentukan Karakter Keagamaan Anak Dan Remaja," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Agama Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan* 22, no. 2 (2025), [https://doi.org/10.25299/ajaip.2025.vol22\(2\).23527](https://doi.org/10.25299/ajaip.2025.vol22(2).23527).

holds significant potential as a reference for the development of similar programs in regions characterized by Muslim-minority demographics and limited access to Islamic educational resources.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation has developed a holistic, structured, and adaptive model of mentoring and faith strengthening for converts, orphans, and the underprivileged on Nias Island a Muslim-minority region in Indonesia. The mentoring process encompasses spiritual, emotional, social, and practical dimensions, carried out through the continuous presence of *musyrif/musyrifah* who reside alongside the beneficiaries, embodying the principle of *uswab hasanah* in every aspect of daily life. Faith strengthening is implemented through a balanced integration of theoretical instruction grounded in authoritative classical texts such as *Ushul Tsalatsah* and *Aqidah Wasithiyyah* and practical habituation of worship, including *rawatib* prayers, voluntary fasting, and morning and evening *dhiker*.

The findings reveal that despite the absence of a formally written curriculum, the foundation applies a consistent and purposeful educational framework that prioritizes *tawhid* as its foundational pillar. Diverse pedagogical approaches including *halaqah*, multimedia-based learning, and competition-based evaluation contribute to an engaging and effective learning environment. At the same time, the foundation faces significant challenges, most notably the shortage of qualified mentoring personnel relative to the growing number of beneficiaries, limited financial resources, and the complexities inherent in guiding individuals from non-Muslim backgrounds with little prior Islamic knowledge.

These challenges notwithstanding, the foundation's commitment to continuous evaluation, relational warmth, and community engagement reflects a resilient institutional response to its operating constraints. The coherence observed across interview, observational, and documentary data affirms the internal validity of this study's findings. Theoretically, this model contributes to the literature on Islamic social education by demonstrating that faith-based mentoring in minority contexts can be effective when grounded in consistent character formation, scholarly tradition, and a compassionate mentoring relationship.

This study has several limitations, including its focus on a single institution and the use of a qualitative approach that limits generalizability. Future research is recommended to examine comparative models of Islamic mentoring across multiple minority-Muslim regions in Indonesia, as well as to explore the

long-term impact of *aqidah* strengthening programs on the spiritual resilience and social integration of converts and underprivileged youth. It is also hoped that the findings of this study serve as practical input for the Mutiara Cahaya Qolbu Foundation in strengthening its human resource capacity, optimizing *zakat* and *waqf*-based funding mechanisms, and developing a more formally documented curriculum to sustain and scale its impactful work.

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