

## Challenges and Strategies in Developing *Fiqh al-Ibadah* Education for Elderly Fishermen Communities

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the challenges in the religious education of *fiqh al-ibadah* for elderly fishermen in Sei Sakat Village and to formulate appropriate strategies to address them. A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, while data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the challenges are categorized into internal and external factors. Internal factors include memory decline, age-related health conditions, and long-standing religious habits. External factors consist of limited religious facilities, minimal involvement of educators, and the demanding nature of fishing work. Strategies implemented to address these challenges include the use of direct and interactive learning methods, delivering content in a contextual and culturally appropriate manner, improving the quality of religious facilities, scheduling sessions flexibly, and involving families and religious figures actively in the educational process. These strategies highlight the importance of an inclusive and adaptive approach to developing sustainable religious education for the elderly fishing community.

**Keywords:** Elderly Education, Fiqh al-Ibadah, Fishermen Community, Religious Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious education is one of the core pillars in the development of personal character, moral awareness, and spiritual integrity in Muslim communities. It plays a critical role in fostering understanding, appreciation, and implementation of Islamic teachings in all aspects of life, particularly in acts of worship. Among the most essential areas of religious education is *fiqh al-ibadah*, the branch of Islamic jurisprudence that governs the rules and practices related to worship, such as prayer, fasting, zakat (almsgiving), and pilgrimage (Azzam & Hawwas, 2018). Mastery of this knowledge enables individuals not only to fulfill their religious obligations properly but also to internalize the spiritual values embedded in those acts.

However, the process of understanding and practicing *fiqh al-ibadah* is not spontaneous. It requires continuous and well-guided religious development through educational initiatives that are relevant, accessible, and contextual. Religious development, in this sense, can be understood as a sustained educational intervention aimed at shaping a person's religious understanding and behavior in accordance with Islamic values (Hamdan, 2023). It is a process that should ideally begin early in life and continue into old age, adapting to the specific needs and capacities of each life stage.

In reality, many individuals, especially those living in marginalized or underdeveloped communities, face structural and socio-economic barriers that limit their access to quality religious education (Husna & Khumayroh, 2023). Among these underserved populations are elderly fishermen, who often spend their productive years focused on physically demanding labor at sea and may have had limited access to formal or non-formal education, including religious instruction. As they age and enter retirement or reduce their work activity, the opportunity to engage in religious learning becomes more pressing, particularly for the purpose of enhancing their preparation for the later stages of life and afterlife (Muammar, 2019). Yet, due to accumulated educational gaps and age-related challenges such as memory decline and physical limitations, their participation in religious learning becomes increasingly difficult.

This issue is especially apparent in coastal and remote areas such as Sei Sakat Village in Labuhan Batu Regency, where fishing is the primary livelihood. In such communities, elderly individuals who once worked as fishermen tend to live with limited support infrastructure, minimal access to religious scholars or institutions, and a lack of programs specifically tailored to their condition (Gafuri, Arbani, & Susanti, 2022). The urgency to provide religious education, particularly in *fiqh al-ibadah*, for these elderly individuals is thus driven by two main factors: their need for religious guidance at a critical stage of life, and the limited availability of suitable educational interventions (Mulasi, 2021).

The demographic context also reinforces this need. Indonesia is experiencing a significant demographic transition marked by a steady increase in the proportion of elderly citizens. According to Law No. 13 of 1998 concerning the Welfare of the Elderly, individuals aged 60 years and above are classified as elderly (Republik Indonesia, 1998). Data from the Coordinating Ministry for People's Welfare in 2010 indicated that there were approximately 18.1 million elderly people in Indonesia, making up around 9.6% of the total population. More recent projections by the World Health Organization (WHO) suggest that by 2025, Indonesia will be among the countries with the fastest-growing elderly populations in the world (Andrianto, Saputra, Fata, & Syamsurizal, 2023). This aging population trend underscores the need for inclusive policies and programs in various sectors, including education, health, and religious affairs.

In terms of religious development, elderly individuals have unique needs that must be considered when designing educational programs. Physically, they may be limited in mobility

or energy, requiring shorter, more focused learning sessions with practical, easy-to-understand content. Cognitively, they may experience memory decline or slower information processing, necessitating repetitive and engaging methods. Emotionally and socially, elderly individuals often seek spiritual fulfillment, a sense of community, and reassurance of religious correctness in their practices (Kamaliyah et al., 2025). Therefore, religious education for the elderly should not follow the same models used for younger learners but must instead adopt tailored strategies that respond to their specific characteristics and realities.

Several studies in Indonesia have explored religious education for the elderly. Research conducted at the Gau Mabaji Elderly Center in Gowa found that elderly participants often struggled to perform worship properly due to deteriorating physical health (Ali & Akmal, 2024). Another study in the Sabai Nan Aluih Nursing Home in Sicincin revealed that many elderly residents had received little formal religious education during their youth, resulting in weak understanding of core Islamic teachings. These studies highlight the general challenges faced by elderly populations, particularly in institutional or urban settings (Andrianto, Saputra, Fata, & Syamsurizal, 2022).

However, there remains a significant gap in the literature when it comes to religious education among elderly individuals in rural or coastal environments, particularly those who have spent most of their lives in informal or labor-intensive professions like fishing. In such contexts, the challenges are even more acute, as the combination of low literacy, limited access to education, economic hardship, and physical fatigue makes it difficult to sustain effective learning environments. Moreover, the cultural and occupational background of elderly fishermen often shapes their worldview and learning preferences, necessitating contextually grounded approaches to religious education.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using a case study approach. The qualitative method is intended to explore and understand the meanings, values, and lived experiences of research participants within their natural contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A case study approach is particularly suitable for conducting an in-depth and holistic analysis of complex phenomena, especially in the context of religious development through *fiqh al-ibadah* education among elderly fishermen. This approach not only aims to identify what is happening on the ground but also seeks to understand the underlying reasons and mechanisms behind the processes involved, including the obstacles and strategies in religious instruction.

The research was conducted in Sei Sakat Village, located in Panai Hilir Subdistrict, Labuhan Batu Regency. This location was deliberately selected due to its unique characteristics: a community largely dependent on fishing and a significant population of elderly individuals. Its geographic isolation and limited access to formal religious education make it an ideal setting for investigating the challenges of religious development. The primary data sources in this study were two key groups: (1) religious instructors or facilitators responsible for delivering *fiqh al-ibadah* content, and (2) elderly learners who regularly participated in these educational sessions. These informants were purposively selected based on their direct engagement and lived experiences in the religious education process.

To ensure the collection of rich and comprehensive data, the researcher utilized multiple data collection methods: observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted to directly witness the instructional process, including the interactions between instructors and elderly participants, as well as the manner in which *fiqh al-ibadah* content was conveyed and practiced. The researcher adopted a moderately participatory role, being present during sessions without actively leading or influencing them. Semi-structured interviews were

carried out using open-ended questions to allow informants to express their views freely and in depth. In addition, relevant documents were examined, including schedules, instructional materials, attendance logs, and reports from the religious programs.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, the study employed methodological triangulation by comparing and cross-validating data obtained from different collection techniques to ensure consistency and credibility. Additionally, the researcher conducted member checks, in which summarized findings or interview transcripts were shared with participants to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of interpretations. This practice helped minimize researcher bias and ensured that the results faithfully represented the participants' perspectives. The researcher also maintained an audit trail by systematically documenting the entire research process, including field notes, reflective memos, and procedural records, to reinforce the study's transparency and rigor (Sugiyono, 2016).

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three interconnected phases: (1) data reduction, where raw data are condensed, organized, and coded into meaningful categories; (2) data display, which involves presenting the data in the form of tables, matrices, or narrative summaries to facilitate interpretation; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher identifies patterns, draws analytical insights, and verifies findings through iterative reflection and comparison. (Miless & Huberman, 2003).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Challenges in the Religious Development of *Fiqh Al-Ibadah* Education Among Elderly Fishermen

The religious education of *fiqh al-ibadah* among elderly fishermen in Sei Sakat Village presents a set of complex challenges that can be broadly categorized into internal and external factors. These challenges shape the way elderly participants engage with learning processes and influence the overall effectiveness of religious development efforts in the community.

#### *Internal Factors*

The implementation of *fiqh al-ibadah* education for elderly fishermen in Sei Sakat Village faces a range of challenges that originate from internal factors. These factors are closely related to the natural aging process, which often brings about various limitations in physical strength, cognitive ability, and psychosocial well-being. The primary internal challenges identified in this study include the decline in memory capacity, health issues commonly associated with advanced age, and long-standing traditional religious practices that are difficult to change.

One of the key internal obstacles is the decline in memory and comprehension of *fiqh* material. Elderly individuals often experience cognitive decline, which affects their ability to retain new information and understand both conceptual and practical religious teachings. For example, mastering the correct procedures of prayer and purification (*thaharah*) requires not only theoretical knowledge but also memorization and repetition. Many elderly participants struggle to follow the flow of the lessons, especially when the material includes unfamiliar Arabic terms or complex ritual details. However, this limitation does not imply a lack of motivation. On the contrary, many elderly fishermen show great enthusiasm for participating in religious learning activities, even if they require more time and repetition to fully grasp the content.

In addition to cognitive limitations, age and health issues significantly affect participation. Most of the participants in the religious training program are over 60 years old,

and many suffer from common age-related ailments such as joint pain, hypertension, vision and hearing impairments, and overall physical fatigue. These conditions make it difficult for them to perform the physical components of prayer correctly, such as bowing (*ruku'*), prostration (*sujud*), or sitting during the *tashahhud*. In many cases, the elderly must pray while seated due to these physical limitations. These challenges require instructors not only to teach the rules of worship but also to adapt them to the physical capabilities of the learners, ensuring that religious obligations can still be fulfilled with dignity and correctness.

Another major challenge comes from long-established habits and religious traditions that have been passed down informally through generations. Many elderly fishermen in the village continue to perform religious rituals in ways inherited from their parents or local leaders. Unfortunately, these practices are not always in line with proper *fiqh* teachings based on the Qur'an and Hadith. As a result, incorrect or incomplete prayer movements and recitations are often observed, such as inadequate pauses during prayer, improper bowing techniques, or mispronounced Qur'anic verses. These inconsistencies are not due to a lack of sincerity but rather stem from decades of unchallenged routine practices and the assumption that ancestral methods are automatically correct.

Compounding this is the low level of formal religious education among the participants. Most have only completed elementary school, and some have never attended school at all. This educational gap limits their ability to read Arabic texts, follow written religious materials, or understand explanations given in formal language. Consequently, religious instruction for this group must rely heavily on oral transmission, practical demonstrations, and localized language to ensure accessibility and understanding.

Overall, the internal factors influencing the religious education of *fiqh al-ibadah* among elderly fishermen are multifaceted and interrelated. While these issues pose significant challenges, they also highlight the importance of designing learning strategies that are inclusive, patient-centered, and sensitive to the lived realities of aging learners. The effectiveness of religious instruction in this context depends not only on content delivery but also on the empathy, adaptability, and commitment of the educators involved. With the right approach, even these internal limitations can be transformed into opportunities for meaningful spiritual growth in the later stages of life.

### **External Factors**

In addition to internal limitations, the implementation of *fiqh al-ibadah* education for elderly fishermen in Sei Sakat Village is significantly affected by a number of external factors. These factors include environmental, social, and institutional challenges that hinder both the consistency and quality of religious instruction. The three primary external challenges identified are the limited availability of religious facilities, the demanding nature of fishing work, and the minimal involvement of educators in targeted religious outreach.

One of the major external constraints is the lack of adequate infrastructure and learning facilities for religious development. Based on observations and interviews with religious educators and program participants, it was found that educational activities often take place in modest venues such as a local prayer room (*musholla*) or individual homes. The *musholla* itself is small, lacks proper ventilation and cooling systems (such as air conditioning), and is equipped with an unreliable sound system, which frequently malfunctions during sessions. Despite these limitations, the elderly participants remain eager and committed to attending the sessions. Nevertheless, logistical challenges such as long travel distances and adverse weather conditions further exacerbate the difficulty of regular participation, especially given the physical limitations of the elderly.



Moreover, there is a notable scarcity of religious reading materials and teaching resources. Texts such as *fiqh* books, learning modules, and translated Qur'anic materials are not readily available, making it difficult for both instructors and learners to engage in effective self-study or follow-up reading. The geographic conditions of Sei Sakat Village, which is located in a coastal area prone to tidal flooding, also contribute to infrastructure damage. Periodic seawater inundation affects not only residential areas but also the musholla, damaging religious books and hindering scheduled learning activities. As a result, the religious education process is often disrupted, and the physical environment does not support consistent or comfortable learning experiences.

A second key factor is the demanding work schedule of the fishermen, which significantly influences the ability of elderly individuals to participate in structured religious education. Most of the elderly men in the community continue to engage in fishing activities as a primary means of livelihood. Their work schedules are irregular and exhausting, often beginning at dawn or even in the late afternoon and ending the following morning, depending on sea conditions and fish availability. This unpredictable schedule makes it difficult to commit to regular learning sessions. After long hours at sea, many elderly fishermen are too physically exhausted to attend religious classes or engage in study. Even though they are aware of the importance of religious learning, their professional responsibilities understandably take precedence, as fishing remains their primary economic activity. This reality reflects a tension between religious aspirations and economic necessity, which requires educators and program designers to adopt flexible and context-sensitive approaches if they are to effectively reach this demographic.

The third external challenge is the limited involvement of qualified religious educators. Interviews with local residents and program participants revealed that structured religious education programs specifically designed for the elderly are rare in Sei Sakat Village. This initiative is among the first of its kind in the area. There is a notable absence of regular religious classes, *fiqh* instruction, or spiritual counseling tailored to the needs of the elderly. Sessions that are conducted tend to follow generalized formats that do not take into account the participants' age, educational background, or physical condition. While the presence of religious figures such as ustadz and community teachers can play a critical role in strengthening religious understanding, their availability and engagement remain minimal. There are few trained educators who focus on or are willing to adapt their teaching for the elderly demographic, leading to significant gaps in religious knowledge and practice among the community.

In sum, these external challenges, including infrastructural limitations, occupational demands, and insufficient educational personnel, underscore the urgent need for a more inclusive, accessible, and community-based model of religious instruction. Addressing these factors is crucial if religious education in the form of *fiqh al-ibadah* is to be truly effective and sustainable for elderly populations in fishing communities like Sei Sakat Village.

### **Strategies to Address the Challenges in *Fiqh Al-Ibadah* Education for Elderly Fishermen**

From the previous explanation, it is evident that the religious education of elderly fishermen in Sei Sakat Village, Labuhan Batu Regency faces several challenges. These challenges stem from both internal and external factors. Based on field observations, interviews, and literature reviews, several strategies can be adopted to overcome the issues and enhance the effectiveness of *fiqh al-ibadah* education for elderly fishing communities in Sei Sakat. The strategies related to internal factors are outlined below.

### ***Internal Factors***

The religious education of elderly fishermen in Sei Sakat Village encounters several internal obstacles that significantly hinder the effectiveness of *fiqh al-ibadah* learning. These internal issues primarily stem from the biological effects of aging, the persistence of inherited religious practices, and a lack of formal exposure to structured religious instruction. In response, specific and adaptive strategies are essential to enhance participation and improve religious comprehension among this demographic.

One key internal challenge is memory decline. As noted by (Dexter & Ossmy, 2023), aging is often associated with cognitive slowing, particularly in areas related to short-term memory and the ability to process new information. This was evident in observations and interviews with elderly participants who often struggled to remember prayer sequences or the correct procedures for ablution. To address this issue, educators should employ practical teaching methods, particularly demonstration-based learning. Demonstration, or direct modeling by instructors, allows learners to engage in experiential learning, which is more effective for older adults than abstract theoretical instruction (Parulian, Meyniar, & Abdul, 2023). The visual and repetitive nature of this method helps reinforce retention and builds learner confidence.

Moreover, incorporating the question-and-answer method into sessions has shown to be effective in fostering interactive learning and sustaining attention among elderly learners. According to (Ghita, 2019), this method promotes active engagement, enhances understanding, and enables learners to clarify uncertainties in real time. It also fosters a two-way communication channel that empowers elderly students to become participants rather than passive recipients of information.

In addition to teaching methods, visual aids such as diagrams, infographics, or short educational videos can significantly aid comprehension. Studies have shown that visual memory often remains more intact than verbal memory in elderly individuals (Samata, 2025), which makes visual media an appropriate complement to oral instruction. Breaking down lessons into smaller, manageable units also contributes to better focus and long-term retention. This microlearning approach aligns with recommendations for elderly education, where simplicity, clarity, and repetition are crucial (World Health Organization, 2015).

Another major internal factor is the physical limitation associated with age. Many elderly participants suffer from joint stiffness, fatigue, and chronic illnesses that restrict their ability to perform acts of worship such as bowing or prostrating. To ensure inclusivity, educators should adjust *fiqh* instructions to accommodate such conditions. For instance, teaching alternative methods of performing salah (prayer) while sitting or lying down helps the elderly continue their religious obligations without physical strain. This aligns with the Islamic legal maxim that "hardship brings ease" (*al-mashaqqah tajlibu al-taysir*), emphasizing that worship must be practiced within one's capacity (Azza & Nasution, 2024).

Furthermore, the inclusion of light physical exercises before educational sessions can improve circulation, reduce fatigue, and enhance psychological well-being. A study by (Aliyah, Zakiyah, & Darajat, 2025) found that elderly participants who engaged in gentle exercise before educational programs reported better focus and reduced physical discomfort during learning. This also had the added benefit of reducing depressive symptoms and improving mood, thus making them more receptive to instruction.

Finally, deep-rooted traditional practices often present a barrier to adopting new religious understandings. Many elderly fishermen continue to perform rituals as they were taught by their

parents or village elders. These practices, while culturally significant, sometimes diverge from established *fiqh* guidelines. Changing such habits requires not only education but also cultural sensitivity. As argued by (Saerozi et al., 2024), effective religious instruction in Indonesia must engage with local wisdom and community values to ensure acceptance and relevance. In this context, integrating local analogies and using regional dialects can help bridge the gap between tradition and correct practice.

Educators should take a non-judgmental approach, acknowledging the sincerity behind existing practices while gently guiding learners toward more accurate religious observance. Storytelling, group discussions, and shared reflections are effective methods to encourage critical thinking and re-evaluation of inherited practices. When delivered with empathy and respect, these methods can inspire meaningful spiritual transformation without alienating learners from their cultural identity.

In conclusion, internal challenges in *fiqh al-ibadah* education among elderly fishermen are multifaceted and require a thoughtful, contextual response. By applying practical, interactive, and culturally grounded strategies, religious educators can create inclusive learning environments that empower elderly learners to deepen their faith and practice their religion with renewed confidence and clarity.

### **External Factors**

One of the most pressing external challenges in the implementation of *fiqh al-ibadah* education for elderly fishermen in Sei Sakat Village is the lack of adequate infrastructure. To address this, it is essential to improve religious facilities and make them more accessible and elderly-friendly. As Besri & Ali Hisyam (2024) emphasized, adequate infrastructure plays a critical role in supporting the success of educational programs. Renovating existing prayer spaces, such as the village musholla, to include better lighting, sound systems, ventilation, and comfortable seating (e.g., chairs for those unable to stand for long periods) can significantly enhance both the comfort and participation of elderly learners. Such adjustments foster a more inclusive environment and demonstrate a commitment to accommodating the needs of all community members.

Another key strategy involves the development and distribution of simple, visually accessible learning materials. *fiqh al-ibadah* guidebooks designed specifically for elderly learners should feature large fonts, clear language, and relevant illustrations to aid comprehension, particularly for those with visual impairments or limited formal education. These resources also support independent learning and reinforce lessons delivered during in-person sessions. Providing such materials ensures that religious education is not confined to physical gatherings but continues as a part of daily life.

Moreover, the success of infrastructure-related improvements depends heavily on collaborative support from religious institutions, village authorities, and the broader community. Cross-sector partnerships can ensure the sustainability of religious education programs by transforming prayer facilities into multifunctional centers for both worship and learning. This community-based approach helps cultivate a shared sense of responsibility and belonging among stakeholders, fostering a stronger commitment to the spiritual development of elderly members.

Another major external factor is the demanding nature of the fishermen's profession. Elderly fishermen often work long and irregular hours, depending on tides, weather conditions, and seasonal changes. As such, religious education programs must be designed with flexibility in mind. One effective strategy is to schedule sessions during non-peak hours—such as after



the dawn (Subuh) prayer or before sunset (Maghrib)—when most fishermen are not at sea. These windows of opportunity are less likely to conflict with their occupational responsibilities and thus enable more consistent participation.

Additionally, the educational format should adapt to their lifestyle. Rather than relying solely on formal classroom settings, programs can take the form of short, informal study circles (halaqah), mobile sessions conducted in homes, or relaxed discussions held at accessible community locations. These flexible arrangements make it easier for elderly fishermen to integrate religious learning into their daily lives without feeling overwhelmed or burdened by rigid schedules. They also help normalize religious education as part of everyday social interaction rather than an isolated activity.

A third external issue lies in the limited availability of qualified religious educators. The infrequent presence of teachers, preachers, or facilitators has contributed to the underdevelopment of structured religious education programs for the elderly. To address this, religious organizations and local authorities must prioritize the periodic deployment of qualified instructors to serve these remote communities. Structured cooperation between Islamic educational institutions, local mosques, and village administrations can facilitate the rotation of educators and ensure that learning opportunities are provided on a consistent basis.

Equally important is the involvement of family members in supporting the religious education of elderly relatives. Family-based support, such as helping with daily prayers, reading simplified religious texts, or accompanying them to educational gatherings, can enhance learning outcomes and provide emotional encouragement. According to Affandi, Wahidin, & Sarifudin (2024), family participation in religious education promotes both spiritual well-being and social inclusion among elderly individuals. The combined effort of educators and family caregivers creates a holistic and nurturing environment where elderly learners feel valued, respected, and motivated to continue their religious growth.

## CONCLUSION

The religious education of *fiqh al-ibadah* among elderly fishermen in Sei Sakat Village is challenged by both internal and external factors. Internally, the decline in memory and physical health due to aging, along with deeply rooted traditional practices, makes it difficult for elderly participants to absorb and apply correct religious teachings. Many continue practicing inherited rituals that do not always align with proper *fiqh* principles. Externally, the lack of adequate religious facilities, irregular and demanding fishing schedules, and minimal involvement of qualified religious educators further hinder consistent and effective religious development for this group.

To address these challenges, various adaptive and context-sensitive strategies have been implemented. Internally, the use of demonstration-based learning, simplified materials, visual aids, and culturally relevant approaches has proven effective in improving comprehension and participation. Externally, improving religious infrastructure, offering flexible scheduling, promoting informal and mobile learning models, and increasing family and community involvement have helped support sustainable religious education. These efforts highlight the importance of creating inclusive, empathetic, and community-rooted models of *fiqh al-ibadah* education tailored to the unique needs of elderly fishing communities.

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