



An Integration of Education and Economic Empowerment in Da'wah Strategies: A Case Study of Mualaf in the Dayak Meratus Tribe

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the da'wah model implemented within the Dayak Meratus tribe in South Kalimantan, focusing on the provision of scholarships and economic empowerment. Da'wah in this community plays a significant role in enhancing religious understanding and improving the quality of life. The research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and direct observation as data collection methods. The research was conducted in several areas inhabited by the Dayak Meratus tribe, with subjects comprising mualaf, religious leaders, and policymakers involved in economic empowerment programs. The findings indicate that the provision of scholarships for education and collaboration with multiple stakeholders has had a positive impact on the increase in the number of mualaf and the socio-economic welfare of the community. The family-based guidance approach and the frequency of meetings have proven effective in maintaining the commitment of converts to Islam. Furthermore, economic empowerment has made a significant contribution to strengthening their integration into the Muslim community. The discussion highlights that the success of da'wah is heavily influenced by the combination of educational support, economic empowerment, and sustainable social approaches. The conclusion of this study is that a holistic da'wah strategy, combining education and economic empowerment, is highly effective in increasing the number of converts and improving their quality of life. Recommendations for future research include expanding the scope of the study area and involving more variables that influence the success of da'wah within indigenous communities.

Keywords: dayak meratus tribe, da'wah strategies, economic empowerment, education, mualaf.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis model dakwah yang diterapkan di suku Dayak Meratus, Kalimantan Selatan, dengan fokus pada pemberian beasiswa dan pemberdayaan ekonomi. Dakwah di komunitas ini memiliki peran penting dalam meningkatkan pemahaman agama dan kualitas hidup masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan wawancara mendalam dan observasi langsung sebagai metode pengumpulan data. Lokasi penelitian berada di beberapa wilayah yang dihuni oleh masyarakat Dayak Meratus, dengan subjek yang terdiri dari mualaf, tokoh agama, dan pemangku kebijakan yang terlibat dalam pemberdayaan ekonomi umat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemberian beasiswa untuk pendidikan dan kerjasama dengan banyak stakeholder telah memberikan dampak positif terhadap peningkatan jumlah mualaf dan kesejahteraan sosial-ekonomi masyarakat. Pembinaan yang berbasis pada pendekatan keluarga dan intensitas pertemuan terbukti efektif dalam menjaga komitmen mualaf terhadap Islam. Selain itu, pemberdayaan ekonomi memberikan kontribusi besar dalam memperkuat integrasi mereka ke dalam masyarakat Islam. Diskusi ini mengemukakan bahwa kesuksesan dakwah sangat dipengaruhi oleh kombinasi antara dukungan pendidikan, pemberdayaan ekonomi, dan pendekatan sosial yang berkelanjutan. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa strategi dakwah yang holistik, yang menggabungkan pendidikan dan pemberdayaan ekonomi, sangat efektif dalam meningkatkan jumlah mualaf dan kualitas hidup mereka. Rekomendasi untuk penelitian selanjutnya adalah memperluas cakupan wilayah dan melibatkan lebih banyak variabel yang mempengaruhi keberhasilan dakwah dalam komunitas adat.

Kata kunci: mualaf, pendidikan, pemberdayaan ekonomi, strategi dakwah, suku dayak meratus.

INTRODUCTION

The increase in the number of *mualaf* (convert to Islam) from the Dayak Meratus tribe in South Kalimantan serves as a striking reflection of the success of Islamic missionary efforts among an ethnic group that has long been marginalized. These converts, who previously adhered to the Kaharingan religion or other indigenous faiths (Sakinah & Surtikanti, 2024; Widen, 2023), have gradually embraced Islam through a method of da'wah tailored to their specific conditions. One important aspect of this success lies in the multidimensional approach employed, which includes educational support such as scholarships for the youth and economic empowerment through collaborations with various companies, including those in the agricultural sector. This combination of spiritual and material development has proven crucial in fostering a sense of attachment to Islam while simultaneously addressing the socio-economic needs of the community. Theoretically, this success can be explicated through Structural Functionalism Theory (Parsons, 2013). This theory posits that *da'wah* has successfully functioned as an agent of social transformation by remedying the

dysfunctions (such as poverty and isolation) previously existing within the social system of the Dayak Meratus community. By providing educational and economic functions, *da'wah* creates a new social order that is more stable and integrated.

Research on Islamic missionary strategies among indigenous communities indicates that the success of religious conversion and its sustainability often depend on the integration of education, culture, and economic empowerment within religious teachings (Hafiz et al., 2024). Studies such as those by (Baderun & Rani, 2021) on the Dayak Meratus converts (*mualaf*) emphasize the importance of a *da'wah* approach adapted to the socio-cultural context of indigenous peoples, with a focus on education and economic sustainability. Similarly, research by (Jamalie, 2017) on marginalized Dayak tribes in South Kalimantan highlights the need for a *da'wah* strategy that integrates cultural engagement and economic empowerment. However, these studies tend to focus more on the individual aspects of *da'wah*, while this research offers a more holistic perspective by examining both the spiritual and economic dimensions of *da'wah* activities, particularly their tangible impact on the Dayak Meratus tribe. It is a holistic perspective that reinforces the Structural Functionalist framework, which demands a comprehensive analysis of the social, economic, and spiritual impacts on the societal system as a whole.

The model of *da'wah* implemented in the Dayak Meratus tribe, such as providing scholarships to the youth, represents a positive influence in improving human resource quality. Scholarships, as a *da'wah* strategy, open opportunities for community members to explore higher education (Sinta & Isbah, 2019), which in turn facilitates their ability to overcome life's challenges (Suyana et al., 2024). Psychologically, this strategy aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Calicchio, 2023). Scholarships directly fulfill an individual's Safety needs (the capacity for a more stable future) and Esteem needs (gaining competence, status, and respect). Once these fundamental psychological needs are met, individuals become more receptive to pursuing their pinnacle need, 'Self-Actualization', which in this context encompasses spiritual fulfillment and faith. This aligns with the theory presented by Jamalie (2017) in "Da'wah Patterns among Isolated Communities in South Kalimantan," which asserts that *da'wah* activities should address the socio-economic aspects of isolated communities.

Providing scholarships not only offers spiritual enlightenment but also social-economic benefits, reflecting the need for a social transformation dimension in da'wah within multicultural societies. The isolated Dayak Meratus tribe greatly benefits from this strategy as it aids their adaptation to modern economic challenges while strengthening their social bonds within the context of da'wah.

Furthermore, the economic empowerment of the community through cooperation with stakeholders is a highly relevant approach in the context of modern da'wah. This recalls the broader da'wah principles advocated by Fikri and Wiradaningrat (2020), who assert that da'wah should not be confined to religious teachings but must also encompass the socio-economic aspects of the community, such as the empowerment of the people. This approach represents an application of Maslow's Theory at its most foundational level (Calicchio, 2023). Through the integration of *da'wah* (Islamic missionary work) into the economic sector, such as agricultural enterprises, this program directly addresses the fulfillment of 'Physiological needs' (income for sustenance) and 'Safety needs' (economic stability). From a functionalist perspective, this also executes a crucial 'adaptive function,' assisting the Dayak Meratus community in adapting to modern economic challenges, consequently enhancing the resilience of their social structure. By integrating da'wah into the economic sector, such as agricultural enterprises, the Dayak Meratus tribe gains skills and knowledge that can enhance their living standards. This research also supports the idea proposed by Ma'mun (2025) which emphasizes the importance of utilizing local wisdom and language to strengthen cultural bonds while optimizing da'wah. This cooperation creates a space for the community to grow independently, while da'wah continues alongside their economic and social development.

The significant increase in the number of *mualaf* among the Dayak Meratus tribe serves as an indicator of the success of the da'wah efforts that have been implemented. Research by Fadil et al. (2024) on the mentoring of *mualaf* within the Dayak community in Central Kalimantan reveals that religious mentoring for *mualaf* requires persistence and an appropriate approach, both in terms of religious and social education. In this context, the mentoring of Dayak Meratus *mualaf* can serve as a good model, given the family-based approach and the intensity of in-depth meetings with *mualaf*, which allows them to better understand the teachings of Islam in their

entirety and remain steadfast in their new faith. Within the framework of Structural Functionalism, this intensive mentoring process fulfills the 'Pattern Maintenance' function. It is here that new values and norms (Islamic teachings) are internalized to establish a new social stability. Furthermore, the familial approach also satisfies Maslow's need for 'Love and Belonging', which emotionally binds the *mualaf* (converts) to their new community. However, a challenge still faced is the limited distribution due to the scarcity of human resources to reach *mualaf* scattered in remote areas.

One interesting finding is the success of the convert mentoring model conducted by various parties, as suggested by Ayub (1996) in his strategy for converting and mentoring new Muslims, which involves continuous education and outreach. The mentoring in this model not only consists of religious teaching but also practical skills training, such as fiqh, ethics, and entrepreneurship. Such mentoring not only helps *mualaf* understand religious teachings but also develops their capabilities in daily life (Nurasia & Aisyah, 2023; Sinta & Isbah, 2019). This reaffirms the central argument: a functional (and thus successful) *da'wah* model is one that does not separate spirituality (including *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence] and ethics) from the fulfillment of basic human needs (such as entrepreneurship and life skills). This is essential for maintaining social stability, given that challenges such as economic difficulties and geographic remoteness often pose significant obstacles in isolated communities (Wahyudin, 2023). Therefore, the success of this model depends greatly on the community's involvement in creating an inclusive and sustainable learning environment.

Previous research consistently indicates that the success of *da'wah* within indigenous or marginalized communities is highly dependent on its ability to respond to socio-economic needs. These studies highlight a paradigm shift in *da'wah*, moving from a purely theological-normative stance to a more applied and transformative approach. Jamalie (2017), in his research on *da'wah* patterns among isolated communities in South Kalimantan, specifically underscores the importance of strategies that integrate economic empowerment and cultural engagement. This argument is reinforced by Fikri and Wiradaningrat (2020), who assert that modern *da'wah* must not be confined to ritualistic teachings alone but must actively encompass community empowerment to address socio-economic problems. Similarly, Baderun and Rani (2021), focusing specifically on Dayak Meratus

converts, conclude that the sustainability of da'wah is largely determined by an approach that is adaptive to the socio-cultural context and focuses on economic sustainability.

Aligning with the economic dimension, education has also been identified as a crucial pillar in contemporary da'wah strategies. Research by Sinta and Isbah (2019) explicitly examines scholarships as an effective da'wah strategy, which not only opens access to higher education but also serves as a medium for character development. The function of education as a tool for social transformation is supported by Suyana et al. (2024), who found that education facilitates an individual's ability to overcome various life challenges. In a broader context, Hafiz et al. (2024) posit that the success of religious conversion and its sustainability often depend on how well da'wah institutions can integrate educational and economic empowerment programs into the religious teachings they convey.

Furthermore, research has also focused on implementation methods and post-conversion sustainability, namely the mentoring process for *mualaf* (new converts). A study by Fadil et al. (2024) regarding the mentoring of *mualaf* in the Dayak community of Central Kalimantan reveals that this process demands persistence and an appropriate approach, in terms of both religious and social education. Geographical challenges and limited human resources, as noted by Wahyudin (2023), often pose primary obstacles. Therefore, a holistic mentoring model becomes essential. Research by Nurasia and St. Aisyah (2023), as well as the historical insights from Ayub (1996), emphasizes that successful convert mentoring must include practical skills such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), ethics, and even entrepreneurship. This aims to ensure that *mualaf* not only understand their new teachings but also develop the capacity to become socially and economically self-reliant in their daily lives.

Based on the description above, this research aims to address two main research questions: First, how do the two approaches—educational support (scholarships) and economic empowerment (initiating cooperation with agricultural companies)—contribute to the increase in the number of *mualaf* in the Dayak Meratus tribe? Second, what role does the integration of Islamic teachings with local cultural practices play in maintaining the long-term commitment of Dayak Meratus converts to Islam? These questions are crucial for understanding how da'wah strategies can be effectively adapted

and implemented within indigenous groups while preserving their cultural identity.

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with the goal of exploring and understanding the da'wah model implemented within the Dayak Meratus tribe, particularly in efforts to increase the number of converts through scholarships and economic empowerment. This research design was selected to gain a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon occurring in the community. Through this approach, it is hoped that factors influencing the success of da'wah, both in terms of education and economy, will be uncovered.

The research was conducted in several areas inhabited by the Dayak Meratus people in South Kalimantan. The research location was chosen based on the high prevalence of Islamic da'wah activities and significant success in increasing the number of converts. The research subjects included various parties involved in da'wah within this community, including converts, religious leaders, and policymakers who support economic empowerment through cooperation with the agricultural sector. The selection of these subjects aims to understand the perspectives of various parties regarding the implementation and impact of the da'wah strategies employed.

This study also involves a review of the literature related to Islamic da'wah, economic empowerment, and education among indigenous communities. Primary data sources were obtained through in-depth interviews with converts who have undergone religious conversion, as well as religious leaders and relevant officials. Additionally, direct observation of the convert mentoring process and economic empowerment activities was conducted to gather more objective and comprehensive data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The da'wah model implemented within the Dayak Meratus tribe, as explored in this study, is *da'wah bil-bal*—a practical form of proselytization exemplified through initiatives such as the provision of scholarships for indigenous Dayak Meratus youth to pursue higher education. This approach reflects a highly strategic and sustainable method of community development. By prioritizing education, the da'wah efforts yield not only short-term benefits but also contribute to building a better future for the younger generation of the Dayak Meratus people. This model fosters the

enhancement of human resources within the community. This *da'wah bil-hal* approach is confirmed by *Ustadz* AR involved in the program, who stated:

"Our *da'wah* method here is *da'wah bil-hal* (proselytization through practical action); we cannot rely solely on sermons. The community here, particularly the Dayak Meratus tribe, is a historically marginalized group. They require tangible action. We perceive that the key to change lies with the younger generation. Therefore, our primary priority is providing scholarships. We facilitate their children's education, from the *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic Senior High School) level through to undergraduate studies in the city. This constitutes a long-term investment in their human capital." (Interview) with *Ustadz* AR: July 5, 2025

This practitioner's statement underscores that education, as one of the fundamental pillars of *da'wah*, serves to reduce limitations in access to broader knowledge and skills (Hafiz et al., 2024), ultimately improving the quality of life and overall well-being of the community (Arifin, 2018).

Figure 1. Visiting the Head of the Papagaran Hall, Hantakan District, in the Context of an Invitation to Convert to Islam



The provision of scholarships beginning at the senior high school level (*Sekolah Menengah Atas* or *Madrasah Aliyah*) and continuing through to tertiary education reflects a serious commitment to expanding opportunities for success beyond the local context (Dalla & Kewuel, 2023; Pramesta, 2023). This effort emphasizes not only academic achievement but also a transformative shift in the worldview of the Dayak Meratus tribe. The

profound impact of this educational access on the community's perspective was articulated by a Dayak Meratus traditional leader Mr. JM:

"We formerly perceived ourselves as being marginalized here. For our children, pursuing higher education was previously inconceivable; even completing senior high school was considered a significant achievement. The majority entered the agricultural workforce immediately after their schooling. However, since the inception of this scholarship program, our perspective has transformed. Our children now possess aspirations; they are able to see the outside world, and their horizons have significantly broadened." (Interview) with Mr. JM: July 7, 2025

This testimony highlights that higher education equips scholarship recipients with broader perspectives (Wea & Adiwidjaja, 2018; Widiawati et al., 2024) and greater potential to effect change within their own communities (Asih & Juntak, 2023). Thus, this model of da'wah extends beyond spiritual dimensions to encompass socio-economic development, fostering a more prosperous and self-reliant society.

An economic empowerment-based model of da'wah is also particularly relevant in the context of communities that heavily rely on the agricultural sector (Zakiuddin, 2024). Collaborations with agricultural companies have the potential to create new employment opportunities and enhance the community's economic capacities (Sakinah & Surtikanti, 2024), directly impacting their livelihoods. A representative from one of the partner agricultural companies, Mr. BGM, explained their role in this integrated model:

"As a corporation operating within this region, we maintain a community empowerment program focused on enhancing economic capacity, in alignment with our core business in the agricultural sector. We have established a partnership with the local *da'wah* institution to administer this initiative. We provide training, high-quality seeds, and market access. The objective is explicit: to enable the Dayak Meratus community here to secure a more stable and sustainable income." (Interview) with Mr. BGM: July 6, 2025

Furthermore, such economic empowerment initiatives demonstrate that da'wah need not be confined solely to religious instruction but can also encompass efforts to improve quality of life through economic development (Masyhur, 2022; Yuliasih, 2022). This integrated approach, which a local

traditional leader noted as crucial—"For us, what is essential is that our lives are improved and our economy is assisted."—fosters a sustainable and mutually reinforcing cycle between education and the economy, thereby enabling the emergence of an independent and prosperous Muslim community (Sucipto, 2020).

Beyond Quantity: The Importance of Quality in Conversion Efforts

The findings of this research indicate a significant increase in the number of converts from Dayak Meratus tribe, signaling the positive impact of da'wah activities. This conversion trend suggests a successful internalization of Islamic values among a community with distinct traditions and belief systems. Importantly, the rise in conversions reflects success not only in quantitative terms but also in the quality of engagement with Islamic teachings (Arafat et al., 2024).

Figure 2. Guiding *Mualaf* to Recite the Shahadah



Source: <https://banjarmasin.tribunnews.com>

However, this quantitative growth must be accompanied by sustained and comprehensive post-conversion guidance to ensure that new converts not only change their religious affiliation but also deeply understand and embody Islamic principles (Sadiani et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2021). Successful da'wah should be measured not solely by the number of converts but by the extent to which they practice the teachings of Islam in their daily lives. Accordingly, the da'wah model must be supported by structured programs for *mualaf* development, emphasizing religious literacy through regular study sessions (Rahma et al., 2025; Syariati et al., 2024), spiritual mentoring (Indriyani & Noviani, 2022; Tahir et al., 2020), economic empowerment (Faisol et al., 2022), the cultivation of religious character

(Widodo et al., 2021), and the integration of Islamic values into the local socio-cultural context.

The structured development of *mualaf* within the Dayak Meratus tribe—recognized as one of the exemplary models—warrants further attention. Its success may serve as a reference for implementing da'wah programs in other regions, particularly within indigenous communities with unique cultural and social characteristics (Arafat et al., 2024). A holistic program encompassing spiritual, social, and economic dimensions ensures that converts can adapt to their new religious identity without forfeiting their cultural heritage. To sustain and scale this success, the active involvement of local leaders and government stakeholders is essential (Syuhudi, 2016), fostering a sense of ownership and accountability for the ongoing transformation within the community. Consequently, this study opens avenues for future research on the applicability of da'wah models that integrate education, economic empowerment, and convert development in other settings, with due regard for cultural diversity and local traditions.

The Integration of Education and Economic Empowerment as a Da'wah Strategy

The first key finding of this study is the da'wah model based on educational scholarships for the Dayak Meratus youth, which illustrates a holistic and human-capital-oriented approach. In this context, da'wah transcends the realm of religious preaching to incorporate sustained educational empowerment. This aligns with findings by Baderun and Rani (2021), who assert that da'wah success among marginalized groups, including the Dayak community, is significantly influenced by approaches that integrate education with religious values. The research also notes that providing educational access to converts enhances their comprehension of Islamic teachings, thereby contributing to improved socio-economic outcomes.

Figure 3. Quranic Learning “Tilawati Method” for *Mualaf* to the Dayak Meratus Tribe in Patikalain Village



Nonetheless, challenges persist, particularly the need for more personalized and intensive support for *mualaf* in remote areas. As highlighted by Sadiani et al. (2023), organized and continuous mentoring is crucial for maximizing the potential of new converts, though logistical barriers such as distance and limited funding pose significant challenges. This analytical challenge is strongly echoed in the primary data gathered from *da'wah* practitioners in the field. *Ustadz* ZMD described the dilemma between quantitative success and qualitative challenges:

"It is indeed true that, *alhamdulillah*, the number of *mualaf* has significantly increased. However, we consistently emphasize to our team that our task is not merely 'to Islamize,' but rather to provide sustained guidance and mentorship. Quantitative growth is a bonus; the primary objective is the quality of their faith. Our most significant challenge lies precisely therein: post-conversion development. Our converts are dispersed across remote hamlets, while our human resources—specifically the *ustadz*—are extremely limited. This presents a substantial collective task for us: to ensure they comprehend Islam *kaffah* (holistically), rather than merely possessing a new religious status." (Interview) with *Ustadz* ZMD: July 5, 2025

This field report confirms the findings of Tahir et al. (2020) regarding the critical need to deploy more religious instructors and expand intensive *da'wah* programs to address these logistical and human resource gaps. The

second major finding pertains to economic empowerment initiatives facilitated through partnerships with agricultural enterprises. These efforts exemplify a form of social da'wah that emphasizes improving the material well-being of marginalized Muslim communities (Faisol et al., 2022). Jamalie (2017) argues that da'wah strategies focusing on economic empowerment are more effective than those limited to religious rituals. *Da'wah bil-hal*, which incorporates economic initiatives, serves as a practical mechanism for alleviating structural poverty, as discussed in Akhyar's research (2014). According to Akhyar, da'wah that is integrated with social and economic development efforts yields more profound improvements in the quality of life.

Yet, a key challenge in implementing economic empowerment initiatives lies in the necessity for a more systematic and coordinated approach across institutions. Jamalie (2017) emphasizes that da'wah models involving multiple stakeholders in economic empowerment are more likely to succeed when there is effective coordination among communities, governmental bodies, and religious institutions. This necessity for synergy was explicitly stated by the corporate stakeholder, Mr. RMS involved in the economic empowerment program:

"We have observed its positive impact on their income enhancement. However, we acknowledge that the challenge lies in coordination. This program would be significantly more successful if there were a more systematic synergy between us (the private sector), the *da'wah* institutions, and the local government. At present, these programs often operate in isolation." (Interview) with Mr. RMS: July 6, 2025

This observation is also supported by the findings of the present study, which underscore the effectiveness of corporate partnerships but also point to the need for greater continuity and active involvement of da'wah institutions in delivering economic training. Moreover, the research demonstrates that economic empowerment can function as a tool for community strengthening and as a mechanism for ensuring the sustainability of da'wah in remote regions.

In sum, the findings of this study substantiate key concepts in multicultural da'wah and community empowerment. However, the success of such models ultimately hinges on the degree to which the approaches are

adapted to local socio-economic and cultural conditions, and on the strength of collaboration among the various actors involved in da'wah initiatives.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the success of *da'wah* among the Dayak Meratus tribe is primarily driven by a holistic *da'wah bil-hal* (practical proselytization) model that integrates educational advancement and economic empowerment. The provision of scholarships for higher education has proven effective in developing community human capital, fostering a positive reception of Islamic teachings. Concurrently, economic empowerment initiatives, facilitated through collaborations with agricultural corporations, directly improve community welfare, which significantly correlates with the increase in *mualaf* (converts). These findings affirm that a functional *da'wah* strategy in marginalized communities is one that simultaneously addresses both spiritual needs and tangible socio-economic improvement, leading to a more comprehensive enhancement of the community's quality of life.

While this research provides a clear framework for this successful model, its limitations must be acknowledged, primarily its narrow geographical scope, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the impact of external variables, such as socio-political dynamics and government support, was not deeply analyzed. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the geographical focus and incorporate these external factors. Subsequent studies should also explore the utility of technology and social media for outreach in remote areas and prioritize the development of systematic, structured mentoring programs for *mualaf*. This focus on post-conversion mentoring is crucial to ensure that the quantitative growth in converts is matched by a qualitative internalization and effective practice of Islamic principles in daily life.

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