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Low Teenager Participation in Religious Activities: Analysis of Inhibiting Factors and Implications for Development

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Abstract

The transformation of information landscapes and digital culture has significantly influenced youth participation in religious activities in Leuhan Village, Johan Pahlawan District. This study aims to analyse the forms of youth involvement in religious programs (such as majelis taklim, sermons, Maulid celebrations, and Dalail Khairat), identify internal and external inhibiting factors, and formulate participatory and contextual strategies for religious development. A qualitative approach was employed through interviews and observations, with data analysed using Miles & Huberman's model (data reduction, presentation, and verification) to ensure consistency with field evidence. The findings indicate that youth involvement remains low, sporadic, and limited to technical roles, thereby failing to strengthen religious knowledge and internalise values. Inhibiting factors include weak personal motivation, lack of family support, peer influence, dominance of social media, and religious program designs that are less participatory and not youth-friendly. This study recommends more innovative and participatory development strategies, such as reformulating activities to be more interactive, involving youth in strategic roles, strengthening religious peer networks, and fostering synergy between families, mosques, and communities. This approach is expected to increase interest, sense of belonging, and commitment to religious values among youth, enabling them to remain steadfast in facing the challenges of the digital era.

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Introduction

The shift towards the information era has a significant impact on the development of adolescents' attitudes, values, and behaviours. Advances in digital technology and global information disclosure have affected how adolescents interact, think, and make decisions. This condition requires them to have high adaptability, self-control, and a strong foundation of faith to avoid getting caught up in deviant behaviour. Adolescence, the transition period between childhood and adulthood, is often marked by emotional and social turmoil. Adolescence is a crucial transition period from childhood to adulthood. The many changes and demands of development in adolescence cause various crises and problems such as monophobia, narcissism, anxiety, frustration and depression (Wahyu Dian Cantika & All Habsy, 2024).

In Islamic thought, adolescence is an important phase for forming a generation grounded in faith and morality. The Prophet PBUH emphasised Allah's admiration for young people who consistently protect themselves from immoral acts. As he said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَيُعْجَبُ مِنَ الشَّابِّ لَيْسَتْ لَهُ صَبُوءَةٌ {رواه احمد}

Meaning: *Indeed, Allah, the Exalted in Might and Majestic, is amazed by a young person who does not have an inclination towards worldly desires/youthful foolishness.* (H.R. Ahmad) (Ibn Hanbal, n.d.)

This hadith shows that spiritually strong teenagers have exceptional value in the sight of Allah. Therefore, religious coaching is the primary foundation for shaping the character of teenagers who are resilient in facing the challenges of the times.

This hadith confirms that adolescents who have spiritual strength and steadfastness of faith occupy a noble position in the sight of Allah, because they can take care of themselves and remain obedient in the midst of the turmoil of youth, full of temptation and change. This awareness is a reminder that adolescence is a phase of identity formation, as well as an important period for laying the foundation of faith, worship habits, and good morals so that environmental influences do not easily shift the direction of life. Therefore, character formation and religious development should be placed as the primary foundation in the education and parenting processes, in the family, school, and community, so that adolescents receive directed guidance and consistent role models (Kurniawan, 2021).

However, the phenomenon in the field shows a decrease in adolescents' interest in religious activities such as recitation, dhikr, and boarding school activities. This condition indicates a gap between the ideals of Islamic teachings, which emphasise the spiritual development of adolescents, and the social reality, which shows a weakening of adolescents' involvement in religious activities. Several previous studies have highlighted more problems of adolescents in participating in religious activities; for example, Syahputra et al. (2025) found that the challenge for adolescents to be actively involved in religious activities is the character of labile, familiarity with social media, which is sometimes misused, adaptation to a new environment, and economic factors. Next, Herwandi et al. (2022) explained that the practice of congregational prayer among teenagers remains very limited, and some teenagers abandon the five-times prayer, so their religious practice tends to be very limited. Nirwana (2020) explains that the friendship environment greatly influences adolescents' religious motivation: they tend to be active when in a religious group and, conversely, indifferent when with non-religious friends. Furthermore, Fauzan (2019) added that religious guidance for adolescents is not running because of low interest, with obstacles such as laziness, lack of friends, lack of motivation, embarrassment, busyness, inappropriate schedules, lack of information, and uninteresting activities.

This condition shows that the study of adolescent religious development cannot stop at mapping the problems and factors that hinder participation in religious activities. From the local context of Leuhan Village, West Aceh, it is interesting to study because it has an active pesantren, yet teenagers' participation in religious activities is low. The students who participated in pesantren activities mostly came from outside the village, while local teenagers seemed less involved. This condition reveals a unique phenomenon that has not been widely researched, and this is where the novelty of this research lies. Research is needed to examine more deeply the role of religious

institutions, as well as the forms of family and environmental support in strengthening adolescents' religious commitment amid the challenges of the digital era.

In addition, there is still limited research examining the practical strategies of adolescent spiritual development in a specific local context, opening up important space for studies oriented towards the development of applicable, context-specific coaching programs. Thus, this study is directed to analyse the form, strategy, and factors that support and inhibit the religious development of adolescents in Leuhan Village, Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh, as well as its implications for strengthening their character and faith resilience in the face of the dynamics of social change

Based on this situation, this study focuses on analysing the problems of adolescents in religious activities in Leuhan Village, Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency, to identify 1) factors that inhibit adolescent participation in religious activities, 2) examine more deeply the role of religious institutions, and 3) forms of family and environmental support in strengthening adolescents' religious commitments. With this approach, the research is expected to make a scientific and practical contribution to the development of youth development strategies based on religious values in the modern era.

Methods

This research was conducted using a qualitative research approach, namely a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people or observed behaviours (Rahmadi, 2011). In this case, the author will examine in depth the problems teenagers face in participating in religious activities in Leuhan Village.

The data used in this study consisted of primary data and secondary data that complemented each other. Primary data are obtained directly from the field through the collection of information relevant to the research's focus and problem. In contrast, secondary data is obtained from literature studies in the form of books, documentation, archives, and other written sources that support the analysis. The research subject was determined using a purposive sampling technique, which selects informants based on their suitability to the research objectives. The informants in this study include the Head of Leuhan Village, the Imam of the Leuhan Village Mosque, the Chairman of the Leuhan Village Youth, Leuhan Village community leaders, and ten teenagers from Leuhan Village, all of whom are considered able to provide rich and relevant information on the research theme.

Data collection was carried out through interviews and observations that complemented each other. Interviews are used as a means of direct or indirect communication between researchers and informants to dig up information in depth according to the focus of the research. At the same time, observation involves recording and interpreting the behaviour and activities of the subjects in a natural context.

Data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman model (Miles et al., 2014), which comprises three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. At the data reduction stage, the researcher selects, focuses, and simplifies the data from interviews and observations according to the research objectives; At the data presentation stage, the information that has been reduced is arranged in the form of narrative descriptions or other displays that facilitate the interpretation of patterns and relationships between categories; Meanwhile, at the stage of drawing conclusions and verification, the researcher formulates the main findings that answer the focus of the research and re-examines the consistency of the findings with the data that has been collected.

Findings

Problems of Adolescents in Participating in Religious Activities in Leuhan Village

The results of the study show that the involvement of Desa Leuhan teenagers in various religious activities is still at a relatively low level, both in terms of quantity and quality of participation. Participation here refers to adolescents' involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities. In contrast, activities are seen in the form of their real involvement in every religious program held in the Desa.

For more details, the author will describe it in the following points:

1. Adolescent Involvement in Majelis Taklim Activities

In the majelis taklim activities, which play an important role in increasing teenagers' knowledge and understanding of religion, only a handful are active and regularly participate in recitation. Based on an interview with the Imam of the Mosque, which states:

The number of teenagers who consistently attend is only two or three at each meeting, so it does not reflect the collective participation of village youth. The causative factors that emerge include the influence of promiscuity, adolescents' tendency to spend more time outside the religious environment, and parents' limited attention to children's religious education, which have implications for adolescents' weak internal motivation to participate in the majelis taklim.

The above confession of the Imam of the Mosque is in line with the confession of a community leader who said that "I am one of the only two teenagers who actively participate in the majelis taklim; besides that, I do not know why they do not follow the majelis taklim". Furthermore, the Youth Chairman of Leuhan Village said that "Leuhan Village Youth are not involved in the majelis taklim event, to my knowledge, teenagers in Leuhan Village are greatly affected by promiscuity and the lack of parental attention to the importance of religious knowledge for teenagers".

Based on the description above, it can be seen that very few teenagers in Leuhan Village are involved in religious activities, especially the majelis taklim. In this case, family support and social control play a significant role in shaping adolescents' religious habits.

2. Adolescent Involvement in Religious Lecture Activities

Furthermore, regarding adolescents' involvement in religious lecture activities, the pattern is similar, with their presence and active participation still minimal. Religious lectures, as one of the Islamic media that involve the wider community, have not been able to fully attract teenagers' interest, both in terms of preparation and the implementation of activities. Teens are often placed in only simple technical roles, such as helping buy supplies, so they feel underappreciated and incapable of taking on greater responsibilities. In addition, the burden of schoolwork and the lack of peers who participate both reduce adolescents' motivation to attend, underscoring the influence of psychological factors and peer group dynamics on adolescents' participation in religious activities. This is because the youth leader of Leuhan Village said that "Teenagers are less involved in religious lecture activities, both in preparation, implementation and after implementation.

One of the teenagers from Leuhan Village said that:

I was less involved in the lecture because there were many parents and young people in the event, and our involvement as teenagers seemed to get less attention from the youth because they considered us as children, so in such activities, we were only told to buy this and that by people older than us.

Another teenager also added that "he was less involved in this lecture because there was much schoolwork to be completed, besides that, also because there were very few friends involved in this activity, so that it made me lazy to participate in this religious lecture event, at least for a short time, listening to the lecture delivered."

The results of the above interview give an idea that the design of religious activities that tend to be top-down and do not provide space for adolescents to play an active role is one of the main factors of their low involvement. The pattern of non-participatory involvement makes adolescents feel like a mere complement, not an important part of the activity process. As a result, they lose their sense of belonging to the existing religious program.

3. Adolescent Involvement in the Activities of the Birthday of the Great Prophet Muhammad SAW.

In contrast to the previous two activities, adolescents' participation in the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday showed a slightly more positive pattern, though it was still not optimal. At the preparation stage, adolescent involvement is relatively low. It is generally carried out by only a small number of adolescents who are accustomed to being active in the village environment. However, at the time of the event, teenagers tend to be more active, especially in technical tasks such as parking management, food delivery, and guest order maintenance. This phenomenon shows that adolescents are more interested in practical roles that provide space for movement and direct social interaction, rather than involvement in ritual activities or religious studies. Thus, Maulid becomes an event where teenagers appear physically present but are not fully involved in strengthening their knowledge and religious appreciation.

The above, as conveyed by a teenager in Leuhan Village, is that "Teenagers are less involved in religious activities. During the preparation, teenagers are less involved. However, during the implementation of the maulid, teenagers are actively involved, especially in helping the order of the guests, some arrange vehicle parking, bring food and drinks to the invitees and so on."

The above confession is also in line with the confession of another teenager who said that "at the Maulid event I was involved a lot, I did many things such as helping to arrange the parking of guest vehicles, delivering drinking water and so on. One of the other teenagers also said the same thing, that "in the maulid activities, we as youth have a lot of participation for the success of the maulid event. We do what we can, such as arranging parking, regulating traffic in front of the mosque, delivering drinking water, and so on.

4. Involvement of Adolescents in Dalail Khairat Activities.

As for the Dalail Khairat activity, which is the tradition of reciting prayers with important spiritual and cultural values, adolescent participation is also relatively low. Only a few teenagers attend regularly, while most choose not to participate or attend only occasionally. According to the Youth Leader, "One factor is the assumption that Dalail Khairat activities are less attractive to teenagers and more similar to parents, so they feel less emotionally close to the tradition. In addition, the relatively monotonous pattern of activities and the lack of involvement of adolescents in meaningful roles make them not motivated to participate sustainably."

The findings of this study confirm that adolescents' low participation in religious activities is due to the lack of innovation in the design of existing programs. Therefore, adolescents need a more interactive, varied, and tailored form of religious activity that aligns with their developmental

characteristics, fostering interest, belonging, and active involvement in the spiritual development process.

In general, the results of this study illustrate that the participation of Leuhan Village youth in religious activities is still dominated by sporadic, technical, and in-depth involvement in strengthening religious knowledge, appreciation, and commitment. Low participation is influenced by a combination of structural, cultural, and personal factors, including undirected coaching practices, limited meaningful participation space, the influence of the social environment, and weak family support for religious habituation and activities. These findings also affirm the importance of reconstructing the adolescent religious development model at the village level, through a more participatory, adolescent-friendly, and integrated approach between families, religious institutions, and communities.

Discussion

Overview of Youth Participation

The development of a person's religious life goes hand in hand with his physical and mental growth, especially in adolescence, which is known as a vulnerable, conflict-ridden, and unique phase (Yuhani'ah, 2022). Adolescence is a transitional period marked by identity searches, so adolescents tend to experience emotional turmoil and rapid changes in attitudes. Immature psychological conditions make adolescents easily influenced by the environment, peers, and popular cultural currents. This instability makes it difficult for them to *istiqamah* in practising religious values, even though they have a good understanding. Adolescent problems are problems related to the need to adjust to the environment in which they live and develop (Azzuhriyyah & Soleh, 2023).

The involvement of Leuhan Village youth in religious activities shows a suboptimal pattern, both in terms of quantity and quality. Their participation tends to be sporadic and limited to technical roles, such as helping with logistics, without touching on substantive aspects in the form of strengthening knowledge and appreciation of religious values. This phenomenon is clearly seen in the low attendance of teenagers in the *taklim* assembly and the lack of involvement in religious lectures. Their activities only seem to be more active at significant ritual moments, such as the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday. However, this involvement does not continue in the continuous coaching program. This condition indicates a gap between the ideals of adolescent spiritual development expected by society and the social realities faced in the field.

From the perspective of Islamic religious education, adolescents' active participation in religious activities is an important indicator of the formation of religious character and faith resilience. When their involvement is only technical and does not touch the cognitive or affective dimensions, then the process of internalising religious values becomes weak. Adolescence is a very vulnerable and sensitive time, both physically and psychologically. Teenagers face challenges in their new circumstances; adolescence is a time of adjustment. The religious spirit in adolescents grows along with their development; the unstable spirit of adolescence results in a religious spirit that does not settle in (Lubis et al., 2023).

Inhibiting Factors: Internal–External and Peer Pressure

The low participation of adolescents in religious activities in Leuhan Village results from a complex interaction between internal and external factors. Internally, weak family support and low personal motivation are the main obstacles (A. Hasibuan & Harahap, 2021). The family, as the first

institution in the formation of religious character, should play an active role in instilling religious values. When parents pay less attention to spiritual education, adolescents tend to seek alternative interactions outside of the religious environment, which is often oriented towards entertainment and promiscuity. These findings are in line with research by Qolbiyyah (2017), which confirms that the lack of motivation and family support makes it difficult for religious guidance to run effectively. Practical obstacles such as laziness, no companions, embarrassment, busyness, inappropriate schedules, lack of information, and less interesting activities also worsen this situation (Fauzan, 2019).

On the external side, the influence of the social environment and popular culture further strengthens the decline in adolescents' interest in religious activities. External factors such as peer influence, social media dominance, and popular culture further reinforce their declining interest. This is, as explained by Nirwana (2020), that the friendship environment greatly influences adolescents' religious motivation: they tend to be active when in a religious group and, conversely, indifferent when friends with non-religious friends. The dominance of digital entertainment and social media also creates significant distractions, shifting adolescents' attention away from activities that require concentration, such as recitation or majelis taklim.

Furthermore, adolescents' involvement in religious activities remains suboptimal, both in quantity and quality. Their participation is generally inconsistent and limited to technical roles, so it does not address deeper aspects such as strengthening understanding and appreciation of religious values. This is evident from their low attendance at the majelis taklim and the lack of involvement in the lecture event. New youth activities are more prominently seen at significant ritual moments, such as the Prophet's Birthday celebration, but this involvement does not continue into a sustained coaching program.

These findings underscore the need for a more innovative, participatory and strategic approach that includes revitalising family roles, strengthening character education in schools, improving digital literacy, and cross-sectoral collaboration (Nurwana & Nursalim, 2025). A more innovative, youth-friendly approach is needed in the design of religious activities. Interactive, varied programs that encourage active participation can be a solution to increase youth interest and engagement.

The Role of Religious Institutions, Program Design and Engagement Patterns.

Mosques, Majelis taklim, and recitation groups are indeed the centres of religious activities in the community. However, the communication pattern and program design, which are still oriented towards adult worshippers, make adolescents less actively involved. When the study's theme is not aligned with adolescents' psychosocial needs, they feel less relevant and end up avoiding religious activities.

The top-down design of religious activities positions adolescents solely as technical implementers, not as active participants in planning and decision-making. This pattern leads to a loss of a sense of belonging to religious programs, resulting in low and unsustainable participation. From a developmental psychology perspective, adolescents are in the identity search phase and need space for self-actualisation, social recognition, and leadership opportunities to grow intrinsically motivated. When activities offer only superficial roles, such as buying supplies, adolescents feel underappreciated and lack an emotional attachment to the program.

This condition is in line with research findings that show that non-participatory patterns of involvement hinder the formation of strong religious identities. Therefore, the design of religious activities must be reconstructed to be more interactive, varied, and adolescent-friendly by

integrating a participatory approach from the planning stage to evaluation. Strategies that can be applied by religious institutions (Mosque Youth, Village Apparatus in the Religious Sector) include (Esti Asterina, 2025):

1. Internal-personal strategy

A personal approach involves greeting adolescents and talking directly with them to build closeness and understand the reasons for their lack of activity, such as shyness or a lack of friends. After establishing a relationship, the administrators provide a simple explanation of the benefits of religious activities so that they understand the importance of not just being invited. Furthermore, a discussion was held with the teenagers as a safe space to share interests, obstacles, and activity ideas, and a minor role was agreed upon to help them get used to being involved.

2. External-institutional strategy

The administrators of mosques or other appropriate institutions need to get closer to the youth, understand their needs, and adjust the program to be more youth-friendly. Activities should be varied, schedules should not clash with school hours, and the division of tasks should be clear. The organisational structure of mosque youth must also be strengthened so that their involvement is more directed and sustainable, not just a momentary invitation

3. Control and evaluation

In ensure the strategy runs stably, set gradual targets; for example, first focus on increasing attendance at one or two routine activities. Each activity closes with a brief evaluation: what the teenager likes, which parts are boring, and who has not been reached. The results of the evaluation were used to improve the theme, delivery method, duration, and division of roles in the next activity.

This approach not only increases adolescent participation but also builds a sense of belonging to religious programs, strengthens religious identity, and makes activities a space for self-actualisation that is relevant to the dynamics of the digital era. Thus, a participatory pattern of involvement is a prerequisite for creating a sustainable and adaptive religious coaching ecosystem to the psychosocial needs of adolescents.

Family Support and Social Ecosystem

The family plays an important role as the "first madrasah" in shaping adolescents' worship habits and religious character. The duty of parents is not only to give direction, but also to instil religious values through example, intense communication, and active involvement in religious activities. Parents are required to provide supervision and guidance, especially as a child enters adolescence, because in this phase is marked in significant changes. Adolescents tend to seek freedom and escape from control, including from parents, so a wise approach is needed to maintain religious values (Rosita, 2021). More in-depth, H. Hasibuan (2017) explains that the role of the family in increasing the religious activities of adolescents is to provide an example and education to children, instruct them and encourage children to participate in various religious activities, control children's activities and evaluate these activities so that they can be applied in society. Parents should also provide them with positive activities, an understanding and introduction to religion from childhood, and broad insights about religion.

On the other hand, a social ecosystem that supports adolescents' religious diversity through religious peer communities and community-based programs has an important role in forming strong religious identities. Programs such as creative recitation for adolescents, Islamic

competitions, sports with religious nuances, and social activities grounded in Islamic values can serve as means of self-actualisation while strengthening a sense of belonging to religious values.

Synergy between participatory religious institutions, family examples, and an inclusive social environment is a prerequisite for building sustainable religious commitments. When these three elements work in harmony, adolescents not only have a good understanding of religion but also the intrinsic motivation to practice it in daily life.

Practical Implications

The religious development of adolescents in Leuhan Village requires a more innovative, participatory approach in order to address the challenges of the digital era and the psychosocial characteristics of the younger generation. The approaches in question include the following:

1. The Majelis taklim program needs to be reformulated as a project-based, collaborative initiative, for example, through da'wah content production classes that combine religious studies with digital media skills. This format not only strengthens religious understanding but also fosters a sense of belonging, as teenagers' work can be published on mosque or community channels.
2. Youth engagement should be elevated from a mere technical task to a strategic role within a core committee, encompassing planning, curating materials, facilitating discussions, and moderating activities. Thus, they gain a space for self-actualisation and leadership that encourages intrinsic motivation.
3. Strengthening religious peer networks, such as mosque youth forums, is important to create a consistent support ecosystem. Through this network, adolescents' interests and talents (Tilawah, design, sports) can be integrated with local da'wah agendas, so that participation is not only ritual, but also creative and social.
4. Synergy between families, mosques, and communities must be realised through joint worship routines, mentoring, and an integrated calendar of activities. This pattern ensures that emotional, social, and spiritual support is channelled sustainably, while reducing the negative influence of promiscuity and popular culture.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the level of participation by teenagers in Leuhan Village in religious activities remains low, both in quantity and quality. Their involvement tends to be sporadic and limited to technical roles, so it does not address strengthening knowledge and appreciation of religious values. This low participation is influenced by internal factors, such as weak personal motivation and a lack of family support, as well as external factors, such as peer influence, social media dominance, and popular culture. In addition, the top-down, less youth-friendly design of religious programs also worsens this condition.

To answer these challenges, a more innovative and participatory coaching strategy is needed. Reformulating religious activities to make them more interactive, involving adolescents in strategic roles, strengthening religious peer networks, and synergy between families, mosques, and communities are important steps to increase adolescents' interest and commitment to religion. This approach is expected to create a sustainable coaching ecosystem, be adaptive to the dynamics of the digital era, and support the formation of a strong religious identity.

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