# TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGIOUS LEARNING FOR THE DEAF AND SENSORY DISABLED IN THE REALIZATION OF INCLUSIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

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**Abstract**
This research examines the transformation of religious learning for deaf people through the Deaf Recitation Movement initiated by PPA Darul Qur'an. This research aims to analyse four main aspects: the religious learning methods and curriculum applied, the challenges faced in the learning process, the social impact of this learning approach, and social reflection and comparison of inclusive education contexts in other countries. This research emphasises the importance of empowerment programs to provide equal access to religious education for people with disabilities, especially deaf people. The research results show that the Deaf Recitation Movement program has impacted inclusive social change. Even though it is faced with challenges, this program can increase independence and religiousness for people with disabilities

**Keywords: Religious Transformation, Disability Empowerment, Sign Language**

## INTRODUCTION

Community life is inseparable from each individual's differences. Everyone has the same rights and opportunities to live a prosperous and just life. This is a form of effort to humanize humans. However, the reality is that there are still many people with disabilities, especially people with sensory disabilities, deaf and mute, who experience various forms of stigma and social discrimination. They are considered 'incapable' of everything and often get imperfect labels, even from their closest family. As a result of this labelling, people with disabilities often experience less fortunate fates, such as being ostracized, neglected, limited access, and loss of inheritance rights with the assumption that "people with disabilities will not be able to manage it" (Rappler, 2016). Suppose this continues to take root as a cultural stereotype. In that case, it will cause crucial problems to arise, and people with disabilities will have difficulty in gaining access, especially in terms of religious education. Of course, social support is needed to increase the self-confidence of people with disabilities so that they do not feel alienated from their surroundings.

Efforts that must be made to improve welfare and justice for people with disabilities are empowerment. The empowerment program will provide skills to people with disabilities, especially deaf people, in terms of religious learning to fulfil religious needs as creatures of God Almighty who are often overlooked by society (Muammar, Fakhrul Rijal and Tasnim Idris, 2024).

In Yogyakarta, PPPA Darul Qur'an is an institution that provides empowerment programs for deaf people through the Tuli Mengaji Movement. The approach that can be used in this case is the Empowerment Theory by Julian Rappaport (1987) which emphasizes the importance of increasing individual capacity, redistributing power, and creating a just and equal social system. In addition, the empowerment of people with disabilities in the religious realm is also in line with Nancy Fraser's (2009), idea of social inclusion, which emphasizes the principles of redistribution and recognition as a path to social justice.

Previous research related to disability empowerment has ignored religious learning in fulfilling the religiosity of people with disabilities. Previous research in approaching this problem is, First, empowerment of people with disabilities in the field of social entrepreneurship, where the measure of success is that people with disabilities can get the opportunity to develop and work to earn income so that there is economic turnover (Siti Bunga Nurjanah, Novinda Serikandi, and Nida Handayani 2022). Second,

learning to pray for people with sensory disabilities who are blind through a multisensory approach, using auditory (hearing), kinesthetic (movement), and tactile (touch) modalities. Third, empowerment through life skills training by maximizing adequate facilities and infrastructure (Ramadhaningrum, 2024).

This study aims to identify the transformation of religious learning by PPPA Darul Qur'an for deaf people with disabilities through the deaf movement reading Qur'an. The study focused on analyzing these factors through three key aspects to achieve this goal: The first aspect examines how the religious learning method is carried out by PPPA Darul Qur'an, the curriculum used in practice. The second aspect is to observe the challenges faced and the solutions implemented. The third aspect analyzes the impact of learning on the social lives of people with disabilities. These three aspects provide a holistic view of efforts to improve religious knowledge for people with disabilities. (Muammar, Fakhrul Rijal and Tasnim Idris, 2024)

This study starts from the argument that empowerment of disabilities seeks equal rights, access and opportunities in religious learning that were previously difficult to access. In contrast, religious education can be a moral and ethical foundation and create a more inclusive social life. Inclusivity in education is a fundamental principle of human rights that must be upheld. All individuals have the right to receive relevant and quality education, including religious education, which is an important part of developing their religious identity. When disabilities get appropriate accessibility in religious education, it helps them better understand religious values and teachings and strengthens their religious identity.

The novelty aspect of this research focuses on empowerment theory as an analytical tool to observe and analyze problems in the field. The empowerment theory developed by Rappaport uses an approach that focuses on redistributing power in marginalized communities to obtain rights and equality and eliminate social injustice to create inclusive social change, in this case, people with disabilities.

**METHODS**

This research was conducted in Yogyakarta, using a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meaning and social symptoms in depth in a specific real context, namely the practice of religious learning for the Deaf by PPPA Daarul Qur'an Yogyakarta. Qualitative research is considered relevant because it allows researchers to directly enter the object

and explore through grand tour questions to capture the social dynamics and subjectivity of the actors involved (Sugiyono, 2018). This study used data collection techniques such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and supporting documentation. In this method, researchers and informants face each other directly (face to face) to obtain information verbally and data that can more clearly explain research problems.

Interviews were conducted with the Head of PPPA Daarul Qur'an Yogyakarta, a religious teacher who teaches a religious learning class for the deaf, and *Sahabat Difabel*, who acts as companion and communication facilitator. The informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the program and their diverse perspectives on the learning process and its social impact. The researcher used a short guide developed and adjusted to field conditions in each interview. The researcher used a recording device from a cellphone to assist the data processing process. In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted observations by directly observing the learning process and social interactions at the activity location. This is in line with Nasution's view (2003), that observation is the basis of all science because it can understand the context of data in the entire social situation. Thus, researchers can use an inductive approach without being influenced by previous concepts or views in making discoveries.

In data processing, researchers use thematic data analysis techniques. Data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation are analyzed qualitatively by data reduction, data presentation, and drawing interpretive conclusions. The findings are analyzed by referring to the theoretical framework of empowerment (Rappaport) and social inclusion (Nancy Fraser) to critically reveal the changes in power relations, social recognition, and social structure in religious learning for deaf people with disabilities.

In this study, we used a single case study because the focus of the study was explicitly directed at the practice of religious learning by PPPA Daarul Qur'an Yogyakarta through the Deaf Recitation Movement program as a unique entity that represents a form of inclusive religious education transformation. For the analysis technique, the approach used was longitudinal thematic analysis (time series) by looking at the transformation of participants' learning experiences over time-based on the category of their duration of involvement. These patterns of change were then interpreted through triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and documents and linked to empowerment theory (Rappaport, 1987) and social justice (Fraser, 2009).

In the data collection process, researchers faced challenges in establishing direct communication with students who were deaf, mainly because of the researchers' limitations in understanding and using sign language. In addition, most of the program participants are in the adult age range (35 years and above) and have worked, so meeting time is minimal, and conducting in-depth interviews for a long time is not always possible. To bridge these obstacles, researchers chose to explore data through communication facilitators, namely Sahabat Difabel, who accompany the learning process intensively and have a deep understanding of the dynamics of students. These facilitators understand sign language and have been liaisons between students and program organizers. Within the participant-as-interpreter framework (Emerson et al., 1995), this facilitator's position is important as a provider of contextual and reflective information representative of the participants' learning experiences.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results**

**Religious Learning by PPPA Darul Qur'an Through the Deaf Reciting the Qur'an Movement**

The holy book of the Qur'an, which currently exists, especially in Indonesia, can be accessed by individuals who can see, read, and hear it. Meanwhile, for People with Deaf and Speech Sensory Disabilities (PDSRW), there are still many obstacles to learning to read the Qur'an. The obstacle experienced is capturing the actual sound or voice of the Qur'an reading in the pronunciation of the sound. PDSRW relies on communication skills through hand sign language and body gestures when interacting. This foundation then moved PPA Darul Qur'an to carry out the process of learning the Religion of reading the Qur'an through the sign method to eradicate the Qur'an's illiteracy for PDSRW.

The learning guidelines used by PPA Darul Qur'an refer to the Signed Al-Qur'an Mushaf, which was successfully compiled from 2020 to 2024 by the Ministry of Religion together with deaf friends, the Ministry of Education and Culture and Research and Technology, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Academics, and Practitioners so that its feasibility has been tested. Literacy media in reading the Qur'an for PDSRW has two approaches: 1) Non-Verbal using non-verbal communication through gestures from body expressions that can support understanding the signs conveyed, sign language uses hand movements and facial expressions that help in translating emotions or messages

conveyed; 2) Verbal, through: reading speech with lip movement reading techniques, oral and written understanding the verses of the Qur'an.

In the nonverbal approach, the principle is that the gestures used in reading the Qur'an are the Arabic alphabet, which is the standard for hijaiyah letter gestures. In the verbal approach, the principle emphasizes pronunciation in delivering messages and speech reading. It should be noted that the face is directed, the voice is directed, totality/multisensory, and demonstration.

## Sign Language Approach to Reading the Qur'an

The signal approach for reading the Al-Qur'an, especially those applied to PDSRW, is Kitabah and recitations. Kitabah is a sign system based on writing, indicating the letters, vowels, and punctuation marks in the Mushaf of Al-Qur'an. This indicates that a pause is needed between letters. In contrast, in this method, the law of reciting tajwid is not applied, which is related to how to pronounce the law of reading, such as ikhfa', idhar, idzghom, iqlab, and others. However, it only indicates writing so that the law of recitation becomes a theoretical study.

Tilawah is spelling out letters and their meanings and punctuation marks through finger and hand movement signs by following the laws of recitation and tajwid to apply the laws of tajwid, which makes it possible to sign them.



**Picture 1. Al-Quran Signs With Kitabah Method**

Source: quran.kemenag.go.id/

**Picture 1. Juz Amma Sign Language**

Source: quran.kemenag.go.id/

In addition to the provisions on reading methods, PPA Darul Qur'an also teaches the application of manners in reading the Qur'an, namely:

a) Purification

b) Reading Isti'adzah

c) Reading Basmalah

d) Tartil

e) Using the right hand

f) Resting when sleepy

g) Sincere

h) The wrist area in front of the reader, below both eyes, above its navel, no more than the right and left sides of his body

Thus, religious learning developed by PPPA Darul Qur'an through the Tuli Mengaji Movement is an important milestone in opening equal spiritual access for PDSRW. Using the Kitabah and Tilawah methods based on sign language and strengthening the etiquette in reading the Qur'an, this program emphasizes the technical aspects of learning and instils complete religious values. The integration of non-verbal and verbal approaches makes this learning adaptive to the specific needs of the Deaf community. The presence of the Signed Al-Qur'an Mushaf as the main media marks progress in inclusive religious literacy and is concrete evidence that spiritual rights can be guaranteed through learning innovations based on diversity. This project also shows that inclusion is not just rhetoric but is manifested in real terms through practices that empower, free from access barriers,

and affirm the dignity of each individual as a religious person.

**Challenges Faced In Learning**

During the learning process, various conditions, both predictable and unpredictable, are often confronted. This is a challenge for PPA Darul Qur'an, where this challenge becomes a process that appears and has the potential to hinder the path to success..

a) Background of PDSRW

Regarding educational background, most of these PDSRW are bachelor's degree graduates who already have jobs. The average age of them is around 30-35 years. This is undoubtedly a challenge, even though this deaf movement to recite the Koran was initially initiated by friends with disabilities. This is because different activities and busyness affect the routine schedule of reciting the Koran. However, the motivation to learn is still very high. Hence, PPA Darul Qur'an initiated a routine schedule for reciting the Koran at least once a month, every weekend during the month. Even now, the number of PDSRW who have joined is 70 people.

b) Communication Barriers

Communication is an important instrument in conveying information to others. Many problems occur due to misunderstandings in communication. This is also a challenge for PPA Darul Qur'an, especially for teachers who have not mastered sign language and will have difficulty communicating with PDSRW. In response to this, PPA Darul Qur'an designed a TOT (Training Of Trainer) program that can be followed by teachers and learners who can already recite the Qur'an to be trained to become teachers for fellow people with disabilities. So, problems in communication can be minimized by increasing the number of teachers who come from people with disabilities themselves so that they can realize the mission of PPA Darul Qur'an, one of which is: "increasing the number of teachers of the Sign Qur'an".

c) Social Stigma

Social stigma is a label the general public gives to a person or group that is considered different. In this case, the limitations of people with disabilities in carrying out activities, especially worship, become a stigma that cannot be avoided. In general, Islamic society recites the Koran by reciting the Qur'an that is read, and the teacher will listen to the reading that is recited. However, with the limitations that people with disabilities have, they seem to lose access to their rights to worship, so the transformation of learning for people with disabilities is allowed to use sign language. The use of sign

language is, of course, the same as reciting the Koran without changing its pronunciation and meaning. Seeing the social challenges faced by deaf people with disabilities in religious learning, Erving Goffman (1963) stigma theory becomes very relevant. Goffman explains that stigma is a negative social label attached to individuals who are considered different from the dominant norm so that they experience social rejection or symbolic discrimination. In this context, deaf people are often considered incapable of reading the Qur'an correctly because they cannot pronounce it verbally, even though their ability to use sign language to read the Qur'an is equally valid and meaningful. This stigma creates exclusion in worship spaces and religious education, reinforcing the societal construct that religious expression must be uniform in sound and speech.

Furthermore, the stigma not only has an external impact but can also influence self-identity formation. Corrigan and Watson (2002) stated that public stigma can give rise to self-stigma, namely when individuals absorb negative views of society and feel unworthy or inferior. Through the Deaf Recitation Movement program, PPA Darul Qur'an not only provides access to religious learning but also becomes a means of deconstructing stigma. When people with disabilities become teachers and can read the Qur'an independently, they reaffirm their spiritual rights and break the dominance of verbal worship norms. Thus, this learning is also a struggle to restore the dignity of the religiosity of people with disabilities in the Muslim community.

In the context of the struggle towards a just and equal society, the concept of social justice, according to Nancy Fraser (2009) , is an important analytical tool for assessing efforts to include religious education for people with disabilities, especially deaf people. Fraser emphasizes the importance of two dimensions of justice: redistribution and recognition. Redistribution refers to equitable access to resources and institutions, while recognition emphasizes the elimination of cultural subordination of historically marginalized groups. In this context, the challenges in religious learning for PDSRW are technical and reflect broader structural inequalities. When the majority of program participants are adults who have worked and are busy, this shows the failure of the previous education system in providing inclusive access to religious learning from an early age. This situation indicates a form of maldistribution—unequal access to education that should be a fundamental right of all citizens  (Yusuf & Nugroho, 2020).

urthermore, communication barriers between teachers who have not mastered sign language and students indicate misrecognition, ignoring the typical communication methods of the deaf community as a form of legitimacy of self-expression. When the

religious education system only relies on verbal and speech methods, deaf individuals are systematically excluded from the meaningful learning process. This aligns with Fraser's (2000) argument that recognition of the cultural identity of marginalized groups is the key to social justice. PPA Darul Qur'an's efforts to implement Training of Trainers (ToT) so that deaf individuals can become teachers of the Sign Qur'an for others is a strategic form of the struggle for recognition justice. This program resolves communication barriers and strengthens the social position of people with disabilities as active subjects in religious education. As Ismail and Permana (2021), show, empowering the disabled community in teaching roles is a concrete step towards creating a participatory and culturally inclusive system.

Another challenge is the social stigma that has historically been attached to people with disabilities as a group considered unable to carry out worship perfectly. In Fraser's view (2009) , this stigma is a form of symbolic domination that hinders full recognition of the dignity and spiritual capacity of people with disabilities. Society often understands worship, especially reading the Qur'an, as an activity that must be done verbally and audibly. As a result, the practice of reciting the Koran through signs—which does not change the meaning of the words or the spirit of religion at all—is seen as less valid. This is where a recognition-based social inclusion approach is important because learning transformations such as the Tuli Mengaji Movement are not merely pedagogical innovations but corrective actions for historical exclusion. Research by Ramadhani (2022) reinforces that recognizing the diversity of ways of worship, including through sign language, is integral to realizing substantial social justice in religious spaces.

**The Impact of Religious Learning on the Social Life of People with Disabilitie**

The priority orientation of religious learning is to realize *insan kamil*, humans with positive traits that lead to good deeds such as personality, morals, and religion. This is also one of the spirits brought by PPA Darul Qur'an. They realize that every human being who is born has the right to receive religious education. Through the transformation of religious learning, it is hoped that people with disabilities can carry out worship like the general public, with an approach that suits their needs.

Previously, people with disabilities had limitations in worship, but after receiving lessons from PPA Darul Qur'an, they improved their routines of reciting the Quran and praying. They felt more religious and closer to God Almighty. One of the disabled friends who participated in this program said it was the first time he learned to read the Quran

systematically                         after                         participating:

*"I used nothing to understand the hijaiyah letters using sign language. However, after learning here that all praise is due to Allah, I can slowly read short letters using signs. The teacher is patient, teaching using hand movements that I understand. I am enthusiastic to continue learning,"* he said.

Learning support and motivation from teachers make them more confident even though they only started learning as adults. In addition, people with disabilities who have mastered all the sign readings can recite the Koran and pray independently. Some have started to help their new community members. One of the Koran teachers stated that this learning process also had an emotional impact on him as a teacher:  *""My deaf friends are incredibly enthusiastic. Even though they started from zero, they are diligent. They were pleased when they were first able to read just one verse. I was also touched. So reciting the Koran is not about the voice, but about the heart and meaning,"* he explained.

The PPA Darul Qur'an Movement in Yogyakarta also motivated various regions to spread the spirit of the Deaf Mengaji Movement, one of which is the PPA Darul Qur'an East Java which is currently preparing to create the same program. The Head of PPPA Darul Qur'an said that this success was the starting point for the birth of program development initiatives in various regions: *"Alhamdulillah, from this one in Jogja, now friends in East Java are also preparing to start the Deaf Mengaji Movement. We continue to encourage this spirit to spread further,"* he said. This indicates a domino effect from the transformation of inclusive religious learning, which not only increases the religiosity of individuals with disabilities but also encourages replication of the movement in various regions.

**Discussion**

The transformation of religious learning through the Tuli Mengaji Movement by PPPA Darul Qur'an can be read as a concrete form of empowerment for groups of people with disabilities, especially deaf-mute disabilities. In the framework of Rappaport's empowerment theory (1987) , empowerment is a process that allows individuals, groups, or communities to gain control over their lives through capacity building, access to resources, and participation in decision-making. In the individual aspect (personal empowerment), the learning process of the Qur'an using the sign method allows people with disabilities to acquire new abilities previously considered difficult to reach. They are able to read the holy verses of the Qur'an using the Kitabah and Tilawah methods and

understand the spiritual values contained therein. This shows an increase in cognitive and affective capacity that is rooted in inclusive learning experiences (Zimmerman, 1995).

Furthermore, the impact of this learning also touches on aspects of social empowerment. People with disabilities are not only the objects of program beneficiaries but also begin to transform into driving subjects in their communities. Some of them are even trained to become teachers, who then help expand the reach of learning for other groups. This process represents a redistribution of social roles in the community, where previously marginalized individuals now appear as actors of change. In this case, religious learning has become a medium for strengthening social solidarity, increasing self-confidence, and building wider social networks (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). This also shows that empowerment is about improving technical skills, creating equal social conditions, and respecting diversity.

It should be emphasized that political empowerment has begun to appear from the presence of state involvement and formal institutions in supporting the accessibility of religious education for people with disabilities. The preparation of the Signed Al-Quran Mushaf by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion and the deaf community from 2020 to 2024 shows that the state has begun to accommodate the spiritual rights of disabled groups through regulations and affirmative policies. This strengthens the argument that political empowerment occurs when marginalized communities can negotiate their rights in the public policy arena (Narayan, 2002). This state involvement also reflects the recognition of religious rights as part of human rights, as has been emphasized in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Indonesia ratified through Law No. 19 of 2011.

However, it must be acknowledged that this empowerment process is not free from challenges. The communication gap between teachers and participants, the limited mastery of sign language by teachers, and the social stigma that still sticks to the disability community are structural barriers that need to be continuously overcome. In many studies, social stigma is a form of symbolic power that marginalizes individuals from social and religious participation spaces (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). Therefore, political and social empowerment is not enough just by providing access; it also requires a paradigm shift in society to accept worship practices carried out in different ways that are still legally valid in substance. In this context, religious learning for people with disabilities becomes a social practice that humanizes and transforms society's perspective on diversity.

Finally, Deaf Recitation Movement can be read as a local community-based initiative and a transformative social practice that opens up new spaces in inclusive religious education. The empowerment project carried out by PPPA Darul Qur'an has shown that spirituality should not be an exclusive domain that can only be accessed by normative majority groups. Instead, with an approach based on recognition, redistribution, and participation (Fraser, 2003), people with disabilities can now build a transcendent relationship with God autonomously, with dignity, and equally. Thus, sign-based religious learning is not only a matter of teaching techniques but also part of a social movement that fights for spiritual rights as a key element in building an inclusive society.

## CONCLUSION

The transformation of religious learning that has been done by PPA Darul Qur'an through Deaf Recitation Movement creates a religious space that is more just and equal to people with deaf disabilities. Deaf Recitation Movement Program teaches how to read the Qur'an by signing and affirming the diversity of religious identity groups that have been marginalized in conventional worship spaces. *Kitabah* and *Tilawah* methods use sign language, a pedagogic innovation form that allows the student to access religious teaching without sound medium or verbal utterance. However, the implementation is still challenging.

The challenges faced during the learning process are different PDSRW backgrounds, communication barriers between students and disabled students, and social stigma received by people with disabilities related to limitations in how to pray. The stigma Goffman (1963) stated emerges from social construction, which reduces people to deaf only as an ableism. However, the impact of religious learning on disabled people is significant. They are more religious and can pray independently and confidently. It raises motivation in other areas to make the same movement to create empowerment and transformative social practices that open up new spaces in inclusive religious education.

Based on theory, this research contributes to Khazanah education sociology and disabilities, especially in representing empowerment and social inclusion in religious realms. Approaching is used to strengthen the argument that religious education is not dominant and exclusive, only belonging to majority groups, but as everyone's rights, including vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. Referring to empowerment theories (Rappaport) and social justice (Fraser), this study highlights the importance of

redistribution access, identity recognition, and active participation of disability groups in the wider social system.

On the methodologist side, a single case study using the thematic longitude approach allows a deep search through religious experiences that are experienced by learners temporally.The research not only catches what happens on the surface but delves deeper into the social transformation process and spirituality, which occurs gradually and contextually.

The presence of informants from student backgrounds with different time spans— who just joined and who have already joined the programs for years—is an important element in creating complex change narration. However, this research has limitations, mainly regarding limited observation ranges in a program location and the relatively small number of informants. Besides, time limitations for collecting data make some social dynamics more subtle and not caught yet, such as intersectionality between disabilities, gender, and economic status.The suggestion for the subsequent research is to expand the scope of the study by using multiple-study case approaches in some cities or areas that adopt the same program. International comparative research opens a new horizon for understanding inclusive religious education practice in different policies and cultures. However, on the other hand, the ethnographic approach based on long-term participation catches the symbolic dimension and emotional aspects of the experience of learning religion, which the method used in this research has not yet touched.

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