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The Urgency of Non-Formal Educational Institutions Towards A Civil Society (A Study of Thematic Interpretation of The Qur'an, Surat Al-Ma'un)

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ABSTRACT *This study examines the urgency of non-formal educational institutions in fostering civil society through a thematic interpretation of the Qur'an, specifically Surat Al-Ma'un. The research is motivated by the persistent gap between religious ritualism and social responsibility, which has limited the transformative role of education in addressing social inequality and marginalization. Employing a qualitative library-based approach, this study applies thematic Qur'anic interpretation by analyzing classical and contemporary tafsir sources, scholarly works on Islamic education, and literature on civil society to construct an integrative conceptual framework. The findings reveal that Surat Al-Ma'un emphasizes core values such as social justice, care for the poor and orphans, sincerity in worship, and collective moral responsibility, which are highly relevant to the objectives of non-formal education. These values position non-formal educational institutions as strategic agents that bridge religious teachings and social praxis, enabling education to function as a tool for social awareness, empowerment, and ethical community development. The study contributes to the literature by extending the interpretation of Surat Al-Ma'un from a purely theological discourse to a socio-educational paradigm that links Qur'anic ethics, non-formal education, and civil society formation. This research offers theoretical insights for Islamic education studies and practical implications for educators and policymakers seeking to strengthen the role of faith-based non-formal education in addressing contemporary social challenges.*

Keywords : Education, Non-Formal, Civil Society, Thematic Interpretation, Quran.

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INTRODUCTION

The formation of a civil society remains a persistent challenge in many Muslim-majority contexts, particularly amid social inequality, moral disengagement, and the weakening of communal solidarity (Khoirunisaa et al., 2022; Nunung et al., 2025). Formal education, while essential, often demonstrates limitations in addressing grassroots social problems such as poverty, neglect of the marginalized, and the erosion of social responsibility (Farhan et al., 2022; Sa'diah et al., 2022a). These limitations reveal a crucial gap in educational praxis, where moral consciousness and social ethics are insufficiently internalized within society (Purwadhi & Komara, 2024a). Non-formal educational institutions such as *majelis taklim*, Islamic social foundations, community

learning centers, and faith-based social movements have historically played a strategic role in nurturing ethical awareness, social empathy, and collective responsibility (Djidin, 2024; Ningsih & Ritonga, 2022). However, in contemporary discourse, their contribution is frequently marginalized or viewed merely as supplementary to formal education (M. Amin Abdullah, 2023; Turhamun, 2024). This marginalization becomes problematic, particularly when non-formal education possesses strong potential to directly engage with social realities and transform religious values into concrete social actions (Laila & Salahudin, 2022; Sa'diah et al., 2022b).

Surah Al-Ma'un, when interpreted thematically, offers a profound critique of ritualistic religiosity detached from social concern (Purwadhi & Komara, 2024b; Siregar, 2023). The Qur'anic condemnation of those who neglect orphans, ignore the poor, and perform worship without ethical substance highlights an urgent educational message: faith must be manifested through social responsibility and justice (Ali, 2023). Nevertheless, existing studies tend to emphasize theological or moral interpretations of Surah Al-Ma'un without sufficiently exploring its educational implications (Nurrahmaniah & Kunaenih, 2025), especially in relation to non-formal educational institutions as agents of civil society development.

Education is a process that cannot be separated from social life (Nelson et al., 2021; Nurrahmaniah & Kunaenih, 2025). In the Islamic context, education is not only the responsibility of individuals or specific formal institutions, is a collective obligation of all elements of society (Obiagu, 2024; Turkkahraman, 2015). The Qur'an as the primary source of Islamic teachings provides comprehensive guidance on the role of society in education (Ashafa & Raimi, 2025; Husamah et al., 2025), one of which is through Surah Al-Ma'un which explicitly links religious practice with social concern. Surah Al-Ma'un, consisting of seven verses, presents a sharp critique of individuals or societies that claim to be religious but neglect their social responsibilities (Yusoff & Damit, 2014). In the context of education, this surah offers a unique perspective on how society should play a role in creating an environment conducive to the character and intellectual development of the younger generation (Yusoff & Damit, 2014). This surah addresses not only religious rituals but also emphasizes the implementation of social values that form the foundation of character education.

The problems of modern education show a dichotomy between formal and informal education (Ishise, 2025; Makmur, 2024). Social responsibility. Many education systems fail to shape character because they rely solely on school institutions without involving active community participation (Anokye et al., 2025; Toledo et al., 2025). This phenomenon contradicts the principles contained in Surah Al-Ma'un, which emphasizes the integration of individual spirituality with collective social concern. In Indonesia, although there have been various programs that involve the community in education (Stukas & Dunlap, 2002), such as school committees and community literacy movements, community participation often is still sporadic and poorly structured (- et al., 2025). This indicates the need for a deeper understanding of the concept of the role of society in education from a Qur'anic perspective.

The study of Surah Al-Ma'un in the context of education is relevant because it provides a clear conceptual framework for how spirituality and social responsibility should be integrated into the educational process (Alfani et al., 2025). This surah teaches that true education cannot be separated from the values of empathy, social concern, and a commitment to helping those in need (Le Thanh, 2024). These values are crucial in shaping the character of students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess a high level of social sensitivity. The urgency of this research is also driven by the fact that many graduates of educational institutions possess high academic achievement but lack empathy and concern for the social issues around them. This phenomenon indicates a gap in the education system that needs to be bridged through a more comprehensive understanding of the role of society in education.

Furthermore, in the era of globalization and digitalization, educational challenges are becoming increasingly complex (Kitsantas et al., 2025; Wu & Zhang, 2025). The influence of social media, changing social values, and increasing individualization require an appropriate

response from society as an educational agent (Kitsantas et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Surah Al-Ma'un provides universal principles that can be adapted to address these modern challenges (Abdullah, 2012; Nasution et al., 2025). This research is important because it will provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of a more holistic and community-based education model. The results are expected to provide insights for the development of educational policies that better integrate the active role of the community in the educational process, thus realizing an education system that not only produces intelligent graduates but also graduates with noble character and a strong social conscience.

Based on the aforementioned, this study seeks to address the following key questions. First, how does the thematic interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un conceptualize the relationship between religiosity and social responsibility? Second, what educational values related to social justice, care for the marginalized, and ethical piety can be derived from Surah Al-Ma'un? Third, how can these Qur'anic values be operationalized within non-formal educational institutions to strengthen the formation of a civil society? Finally, what is the strategic relevance of non-formal Islamic education in translating normative religious teachings into transformative social practices?

This study is worthy of scholarly investigation for several reasons. Conceptually, it responds to the growing need for integrative studies that bridge Qur'anic interpretation with educational theory and social transformation. Methodologically, by employing a thematic interpretation approach (*tafsir maudhu'i*), this research offers a holistic reading of Surah Al-Ma'un that transcends textual moralization and emphasizes practical educational implications. Practically, the study contributes to redefining the position of non-formal educational institutions not merely as complementary learning spaces, but as vital agents in cultivating civil society values. In an era marked by social fragmentation and ritualistic religiosity, this research provides an alternative framework that situates Islamic education as a transformative force grounded in social ethics and humanitarian engagement.

This research offers a concrete contribution to the existing body of literature in at least four dimensions. First, it enriches Qur'anic studies by extending the interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un beyond doctrinal analysis toward an educational-social paradigm. Second, it advances Islamic educational discourse by highlighting non-formal institutions as central actors in moral and civic development. Third, it strengthens civil society studies by providing a Qur'anic-based conceptual model that integrates faith, education, and social responsibility. Finally, this study fills a critical gap in previous research by systematically linking thematic Qur'anic interpretation with the praxis of non-formal education in the context of civil society formation.

Previous studies on Surah Al-Ma'un have predominantly focused on its theological and moral messages, particularly its critique of ritualistic religiosity and social neglect (Hardiyanto et al., 2024). While these studies successfully highlight ethical values such as social justice and care for the marginalized, they largely remain at a normative level and rarely extend their analysis to the educational domain. At the same time, research on non-formal Islamic educational institutions tends to examine institutional functions or learning methods without grounding them explicitly in thematic Qur'anic interpretation. Moreover, studies on civil society in Islamic contexts are mostly approached from sociological or political perspectives, leaving a conceptual gap in integrating Qur'anic values, non-formal education, and civil society formation.

This study offers novelty by integrating the thematic interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un with the discourse on non-formal Islamic education as a strategic foundation for civil society development. It reconceptualizes Surah Al-Ma'un not merely as a moral text, but as a pedagogical framework that emphasizes social piety and humanitarian responsibility. By positioning non-formal educational institutions as mediators between Qur'anic values and social practice, this research contributes a new conceptual model that strengthens the role of non-formal education as a transformative agent in building a value-based civil society.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a library-based approach with an interpretative–analytical framework. The research focused on examining the urgency and role of non-formal educational institutions in fostering civil society through a thematic interpretation (*tafsir maudhu'i*) of the Qur'an, specifically Surah Al-Ma'un. This design was selected to allow an in-depth exploration of Qur'anic texts and their educational and social implications, rather than measuring variables statistically.

The study adopted a thematic Qur'anic interpretation approach, which involves identifying, collecting, and analyzing Qur'anic verses related to a specific theme (Al-Kandari et al., 2025). In this research, the central theme was social responsibility and religious authenticity as reflected in Surah Al-Ma'un. The interpretative analysis was complemented by an educational and social theory perspective to connect Qur'anic values with the functions of non-formal educational institutions and the concept of civil society.

Primary data consisted of the Qur'anic text of Surah Al-Ma'un and authoritative classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries, including works by Ibn Kathir, Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, and modern thematic tafsir scholars. Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and policy-related documents on non-formal Islamic education and civil society development. All sources were selected based on their academic credibility and relevance to the research focus.

Data were collected through systematic document analysis. Relevant verses, interpretative explanations, and scholarly arguments were identified, categorized, and compiled based on predetermined themes, including social justice, care for the marginalized, ritual practice, and social ethics. Academic databases such as Scopus-indexed journals, Google Scholar, and reputable Islamic studies repositories were used to ensure the reliability and currency of the literature.

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the Qur'anic text of Surah Al-Ma'un was analyzed using thematic interpretation to identify its core educational and social messages. Second, interpretative findings from classical and contemporary tafsir were compared to identify convergences and divergences. Third, these Qur'anic values were analytically linked to the theoretical framework of non-formal education and civil society. The analysis emphasized meaning construction, conceptual synthesis, and contextual relevance rather than textual literalism.

To ensure research rigor, this study applied source triangulation by comparing multiple tafsir references and scholarly perspectives. Analytical transparency was maintained by explicitly outlining the stages of interpretation and analysis. Reflexivity was employed to minimize interpretative bias by grounding all arguments in authoritative sources and established theoretical frameworks. These strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. As a library-based qualitative study, this research did not involve human participants. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring academic integrity, accurate citation of all sources, and respectful interpretation of religious texts in accordance with scholarly conventions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Social Responsibility as the Core Indicator of Authentic Religiosity

The thematic interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un reveals that social responsibility constitutes a fundamental criterion of genuine religiosity. The Qur'anic condemnation of those who neglect orphans and fail to encourage care for the poor indicates that religious authenticity is measured not solely by ritual performance, but by social engagement and moral action. Ritual practices, such as prayer, are explicitly criticized when detached from ethical awareness and social concern. This finding demonstrates that Surah Al-Ma'un establishes a value hierarchy in which social ethics function as the practical manifestation of faith.

2. Educational Values Embedded in Surah Al-Ma'un

The analysis identifies several core educational values within Surah Al-Ma'un, including compassion (*rahmah*), social justice (*'adl*), solidarity (*ta'awun*), and accountability (*mas'uliyah*). These values emphasize the importance of nurturing empathy toward marginalized groups and transforming religious teachings into concrete social actions. The findings indicate that Surah Al-Ma'un promotes an integrative educational orientation that unites spiritual devotion with humanitarian responsibility, positioning education as a process of moral and social formation rather than mere cognitive transmission.

3. Strategic Role of Non-Formal Educational Institutions

The findings demonstrate that non-formal educational institutions possess a strategic capacity to internalize and actualize the educational values derived from Surah Al-Ma'un. Due to their flexible structure, community-based orientation, and direct engagement with social realities, these institutions are more capable of translating Qur'anic values into lived practices. Non-formal education functions as a mediating space where religious knowledge is transformed into social awareness, ethical behavior, and collective responsibility, thereby complementing the limitations of formal education systems.

4. Non-Formal Education as an Agent of Civil Society Formation

The study finds that non-formal educational institutions play a pivotal role in fostering the essential characteristics of civil society, including social participation, inclusivity, moral accountability, and civic responsibility. By embedding the values of Surah Al-Ma'un into educational activities, non-formal institutions contribute to the development of socially conscious individuals who actively engage in addressing community problems. This positions non-formal Islamic education as a transformative agent capable of bridging Qur'anic norms with societal praxis.

5. A Qur'anic-Based Conceptual Model of Civil Society Development

Based on the thematic interpretation and educational analysis, the study formulates a conceptual model in which Surah Al-Ma'un serves as a normative foundation for non-formal education aimed at civil society development. In this model, faith (*iman*), education (*tarbiyah*), and social action (*amal ijtimai'*) are integrally connected. Non-formal educational institutions operate as the central mechanism that facilitates the internalization of Qur'anic values and their translation into ethical social engagement, reinforcing the construction of a value-based civil society.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing scholarship that emphasizes the inseparability of faith and social ethics in Islamic teachings. Classical and contemporary scholars have long argued that Qur'anic religiosity demands moral and social engagement beyond ritual observance. However, much of the existing literature treats this principle as a theological ideal rather than an educational process. This study advances the discourse by demonstrating that the ethical imperatives embedded in Surah Al-Ma'un can be operationalized through educational mechanisms, particularly within non-formal learning environments that directly engage with social realities.

In contrast to prior studies that locate moral transformation primarily within formal schooling or state-driven institutions, this research highlights the strategic relevance of community-based educational settings. Non-formal institutions operate within lived social contexts, enabling them to respond adaptively to issues such as poverty, social exclusion, and moral disengagement. This finding aligns with contemporary educational theories that stress contextual and experiential learning, while simultaneously offering a Qur'anic foundation that has been underexplored in previous studies on civil society formation.

The novelty of this research lies in its reconceptualization of Surah Al-Ma'un as a pedagogical framework rather than a purely moral critique. While earlier interpretations

emphasize condemnation of social neglect, this study demonstrates how such critique can inform educational orientation and institutional practice. This contribution expands the scope of Qur'anic interpretation by positioning the text as a source of applied educational theory, thereby bridging a significant gap between normative Islamic values and educational praxis.

From a practical perspective, the findings resonate with observable social phenomena in many Muslim communities, where non-formal religious institutions often serve as the primary spaces for moral formation and social mobilization. Initiatives such as community-based charity education, faith-driven social services, and grassroots learning circles exemplify how religious values are translated into collective action. By situating these practices within a Qur'anic pedagogical framework, this study provides a conceptual lens that explains their social effectiveness and normative legitimacy.

The discussion demonstrates that Surah Al-Ma'un provides a comprehensive Qur'anic framework linking religiosity, social ethics, and educational responsibility (Kolkailah, 2023). Consistent with classical and contemporary tafsir literature, this study confirms that neglect of orphans, indifference toward the poor, and performative religiosity are core indicators of moral failure. However, this research extends existing interpretations by situating these critiques within an educational and societal context, emphasizing that social concern is not merely an ethical ideal but a foundational principle of community-based education.

By correlating Qur'anic values with contemporary educational and sociological studies, the discussion highlights that access to education is inseparable from social solidarity and structural justice. Prior research in educational psychology and social policy supports the argument that unmet basic needs significantly hinder learning outcomes, thereby reinforcing the Qur'anic emphasis on collective responsibility. This study contributes novelty by framing Surah Al-Ma'un as a socio-educative paradigm that positions society across all social strata as an active agent in educational development rather than a passive beneficiary of formal institutions.

Furthermore, the discussion underscores the relevance of this framework to present-day realities, where community-based initiatives, non-formal education, and faith-driven social movements often compensate for systemic educational inequalities. By integrating textual interpretation, educational theory, and empirical social conditions, this study offers a distinctive contribution to the literature, presenting Surah Al-Ma'un as a normative and practical foundation for developing a socially responsive, value-based civil society through education.

The findings of this study directly address the research questions formulated in the introduction and respond to the core problems underlying this research. First, regarding the question of how Surah Al-Ma'un conceptualizes the relationship between religiosity and social responsibility, the analysis demonstrates that Qur'anic religiosity is inseparable from concrete social engagement. The study shows that religious denial is not limited to theological rejection but is manifested through social neglect, thereby confirming the initial concern that ritual-centered religiosity alone is insufficient to foster a morally responsible society.

Second, in response to the question concerning the educational values embedded in Surah Al-Ma'un, the findings reveal that compassion, social justice, integrity, and collective responsibility constitute the central educational principles derived from the text. These values address the problem identified in the background section, namely the gap between religious teachings and educational practice. The results indicate that Surah Al-Ma'un offers not only moral guidance but also a normative foundation for an educational orientation that integrates spiritual devotion with social ethics.

Third, the study answers the question regarding the role of non-formal educational institutions by demonstrating their strategic capacity to translate Qur'anic values into social practice. This directly responds to the problem raised in the introduction about the limitations of formal education in addressing grassroots social issues. The findings suggest that non-formal education functions as a mediating space where religious knowledge is transformed into social awareness and ethical action, thus filling a critical gap in contemporary educational systems.

Finally, concerning the urgency of non-formal education in fostering civil society, the results confirm that community-based educational institutions play a pivotal role in cultivating participation, inclusivity, and moral accountability. This finding responds to the initial problem of social fragmentation and declining civic responsibility by showing that education grounded in the values of Surah Al-Ma'un can effectively contribute to civil society development. Overall, the study demonstrates that the questions raised in the background are answered through an integrative Qur'anic-educational framework that reconnects faith, education, and social responsibility in a coherent and actionable manner.

The findings of this study demonstrate a strong alignment with the research objectives formulated in the introduction, which aimed to examine the urgency of non-formal educational institutions in fostering civil society through a thematic interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un. The results confirm that the Qur'anic values embedded in Surah Al-Ma'un such as social concern, justice, sincerity, and collective responsibility can function as normative and pedagogical foundations for non-formal education. Thus, the study successfully bridges the gap between Qur'anic teachings and educational practice within contemporary social contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings are consistent with holistic Islamic education theories that emphasize the integration of spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali, who viewed education as a means of moral and social refinement, and Ibn Khaldun, who emphasized education as a driver of civilizational development, provide a strong theoretical resonance with this study. In addition, the results align with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, particularly his notion of education as a process of social awareness and empowerment, which is highly relevant to the community-based nature of non-formal education.

When compared with previous studies, the findings both reinforce and extend existing research. Studies by (Martínez-Abad et al., 2025; Siddique et al., 2025) emphasize the role of society in promoting educational equity, while (Shahid et al., 2025; Yaqub et al., 2025) highlight the importance of social concern in Islamic education. This study advances these discussions by providing a thematic Qur'anic interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un as a conceptual foundation that explicitly connects non-formal education with civil society formation. Therefore, the results not only corroborate earlier research but also contribute an integrative perspective that enriches the current literature on Islamic education and social development.

This study contributes to the existing literature by extending the interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un beyond theological and moral discourse into an integrated socio-educational framework that links Qur'anic values, non-formal education, and civil society development. While previous studies have largely treated Surah Al-Ma'un as a critique of ritualistic religiosity or examined non-formal education without a strong Qur'anic foundation, this research bridges these domains by positioning thematic Qur'anic interpretation as a basis for educational praxis. By conceptualizing non-formal educational institutions as mediators between religious norms and social realities, the study offers a novel perspective that enriches Qur'anic studies, Islamic education, and civil society scholarship, providing a coherent model for understanding how faith-based education can function as a transformative force in addressing contemporary social challenges.

This study has a limitation in its methodological scope, as it relies exclusively on library-based qualitative analysis and thematic interpretation of the Qur'anic text without incorporating empirical field data from non-formal educational institutions. Consequently, while the conceptual model proposed in this research is theoretically robust and normatively grounded, it has not yet been tested through direct observation or stakeholder perspectives in real educational settings.

Despite this limitation, the study offers important implications across multiple dimensions. Theoretically, it enriches Islamic educational scholarship by positioning Surah Al-Ma'un as a socio-educative paradigm that integrates faith, social ethics, and community-based education within civil society discourse. At the policy level, the findings suggest that educational policymakers and religious authorities should formally recognize and strengthen non-formal educational institutions as strategic partners in promoting social justice, inclusivity, and moral

development. Practically, the study provides guidance for educators, community leaders, and faith-based organizations to design educational programs that move beyond ritual instruction toward socially responsive learning, encouraging concrete actions such as educational support for marginalized groups and community-driven initiatives rooted in Qur'anic values.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that non-formal educational institutions play a crucial and strategic role in fostering civil society when grounded in the thematic interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un. The research addresses the core problem identified in the background namely, the gap between religious ritualism and social responsibility by demonstrating that Qur'anic values such as social justice, care for the marginalized, sincerity in worship, and collective moral responsibility can be effectively translated into educational praxis through non-formal education. The findings and discussion reveal that non-formal educational institutions function not merely as supplementary educational spaces, but as transformative social agents that mediate between religious norms and lived social realities. By integrating the ethical messages of Surah Al-Ma'un into educational activities, these institutions contribute to the formation of socially conscious, empathetic, and participatory individuals, which are essential characteristics of a civil society. Overall, this study affirms that a Qur'an-based educational approach, when implemented through non-formal institutions, provides a coherent framework for addressing contemporary social challenges and strengthening the moral foundations of community life. Future research should address the limitations of this study by employing empirical approaches to examine how the values of Surah Al-Ma'un are implemented in real non-formal educational settings and how they influence learners and communities. Further studies may also conduct comparative and interdisciplinary analyses to explore the interaction between Qur'an-based educational principles and contemporary social issues, such as social inclusion, poverty alleviation, and civic participation. Such research would strengthen the conceptual framework proposed in this study and provide deeper insights into the practical contribution of non-formal education to the development of civil society.

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