

Majelis Taklim in Medan City, 1950–2023: A Historical Study of Institutional Development and Activity Transformation

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 2026-08-01

Revised 2026-08-25

Accepted 2026-08-26

Keywords:

Islamic History

Islamic Outreach

Non-formal Islamic Education

Religious Study Group.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the historical development of majelis taklim in Medan City during the period from 1950 to 2023, including its emergence, institutional development, transformation of activities, and role in the social and religious life of the community. The study employs a historical research method with a qualitative approach through observation, interviews, and documentation, utilizing both primary and secondary sources that were verified through source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The findings indicate that, during the early period, majelis taklim developed as community-based religious study groups that served to meet the community's religious educational needs and strengthen social solidarity. Subsequently, its institutional structure underwent a process of institutionalization through the establishment of organizational structures, division of responsibilities, work programs, and coordination networks such as the Badan Kontak Majelis Taklim. The activities of majelis taklim also diversified from routine religious study sessions into Quranic learning, Islamic studies, religious preaching, charitable assistance, social activities, family development programs, commemoration of Islamic holidays, and the utilization of digital media. These findings demonstrate that majelis taklim has been able to maintain its educational and religious development functions while simultaneously adapting to social, institutional, and technological changes. The novelty of this study lies in its longitudinal historical reconstruction spanning more than seven decades, integrating sociopolitical, institutional, and activity-transformation dimensions within a single study. This perspective positions majelis taklim as a dynamic social and religious institution that has continuously evolved alongside the social and urban development of Medan City.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious study groups, or majelis taklim, are a type of non-formal Islamic education institution that grows within the community as a place for learning about religion, spiritual development, and social interaction. They do not just serve as a place to teach Islamic knowledge, but also as a space to build solidarity, strengthen social ties, and shape the community's religious-social life. The development of majelis taklim shows how this institution can adapt to changing community needs and social dynamics over time [1, 2]. Over time, majelis taklim has also helped shape people's religious awareness through educational, social, and community-oriented activities.

The city of Medan has become an interesting area to study in terms of the development of study groups because it has a society that is diverse in ethnicity, social life, and religion. Since the post-independence period, various study groups have developed in mosques, prayer rooms, homes, and community areas. Initially, these activities were simple and informal, but they gradually evolved into more organized groups with management, membership, activity schedules, and more structured religious programs. Medan's dynamic social conditions have also created space for study groups to grow as part of urban religious life [3, 4].

The development of majelis taklim institutions in Medan is becoming more visible through the formation of organizational networks like the Majelis Taklim Contact Body (BKMT). This organization plays an important role in coordinating and strengthening various majelis taklim institutions. This change shows that majelis taklim no longer functions only as a study group, but has evolved into a socio-religious institution that plays a role in education, preaching, community development, and social activities. Strengthening these institutions also broadens cooperation networks between different majelis taklim and improves their capacity to respond to community needs.

Along with societal changes, majelis taklim activities have also transformed. What once focused more on religious studies and learning has expanded into social activities, charity, community empowerment, Islamic holiday celebrations, family activities, and various forms of social services. These changes show that majelis taklim have an increasingly broad role in meeting both the religious and social needs of the people in Medan. These activities also show that the presence of majelis taklim is closely tied to a community's changing social life.

Entering the digital era, the transformation of religious study groups has become more evident through the use of communication technology and social media. WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and various digital platforms are used to spread information, deliver religious materials, coordinate congregations, and expand the reach of activities. This development shows changes in interaction and participation patterns among congregants while also demonstrating the study groups' ability to adapt to technological advancements and changes in people's lifestyles [5, 6]. Thus, the journey of religious study groups in Medan City shows both the continuity of religious functions and changes in the form of institutions and activities according to the demands of the times.

Previous research on majelis taklim has mostly examined this institution through the lens of religious education, empowerment, and community social life. Darajat et al. show that

majelis taklim not only functions as a non-formal educational institution but is also beginning to play a role in empowering women in social and economic fields [7]. Next, Rahmadi et al. found that religious study groups contribute to religious guidance, economic empowerment, social participation, and even political empowerment in the community [8]. Meanwhile, Pangestu specifically studied the history of BKMT in Medan City during the 1996–2018 period and showed that the establishment of BKMT was an effort to coordinate the religious study groups in Medan City, with programs developing in the areas of preaching, social, education, and economy [9].

Even so, previous research still leaves a research gap, particularly the lack of a historical reconstruction that looks at the development of majelis taklim in Medan City as a whole from 1950–2023. The study by Arfana et al. does provide an important contribution regarding the history of BKMT, but its scope is limited to the period 1996–2018 and focuses on a single organizational institution [10]. Meanwhile, other studies focus more on the function and role of majelis taklim in specific locations, rather than the historical process regarding their emergence, institutionalization, changes in activities, and ability to adapt to social changes. Even recent studies have begun discussing the digital transformation of majelis taklim, such as Hamdan et al., who emphasize the need to reformulate the curriculum through social media, LMS, and digital learning resources. However, those studies have not yet connected digital transformation with the historical trajectory of majelis taklim institutions in a longitudinal way [11].

Based on this gap, this research's novelty lies in reconstructing the development of majelis taklim in Medan City over more than seven decades, from 1950 to 2023, by integrating three main aspects: the socio-political background of its emergence, institutional development, and the transformation of activities. This study examines majelis taklim not only as an educational and preaching institution but also as a socio-religious institution that undergoes change and continuity alongside the dynamics of Medan City society. Thus, this research complements previous studies that were thematic or limited to certain periods by providing a longitudinal historical perspective on how majelis taklim evolved from community-based study groups into institutions with educational, preaching, social, empowerment, and digital adaptation functions. This approach is expected to contribute to the historiography of non-formal Islamic education while broadening understanding of changes in religious institutions in urban communities.

2. ⁴ METHOD

This study uses a historical method with a qualitative approach. This method was chosen because the research aims to reconstruct the development of study groups amid social, political, religious, educational, and technological changes in Medan City from 1950 to 2023. Historical research aims not only to arrange a sequence of events, but also to explain the relationships among facts, context, change, and continuity in an institution's journey. In the tradition of Indonesian historical methodology, the research process includes collecting sources, source criticism, interpretation, and writing history or historiography [12]. A multidimensional approach is also needed to understand the development of study groups

not only from an institutional perspective but also from social, political, educational, and cultural perspectives.

The first stage is heuristic, which involves searching, collecting, and selecting sources related to the development of majelis taklim in Medan City. Research sources consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include documents and archives from the Majelis Taklim Contact Body (BKMT) of Medan City and North Sumatra Province, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, local government, majelis taklim administrators, activity reports, meeting minutes, organizational decrees, photo documentation, and oral historical sources. Secondary sources include history books, scientific journals, theses, dissertations, newspapers, and academic publications relevant to the history of Islamic education, da'wah, religious organizations, and the development of Muslim communities in Medan City. The selection of sources is based on their relevance to the period 1950–2023, direct connection to the development of majelis taklim, clarity of origin, and the ability of the sources to provide information about institutional changes and activities. Specifically, the study also uses 2019 documents to understand the contemporary institutional context because Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 29 of 2019 officially regulates Majelis Taklim and emphasizes its strategic role in enhancing understanding, appreciation, and practice of Islamic teachings [13].

In addition to documents, the research used oral history through in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants. Informants included religious figures, BKMT administrators, majelis taklim administrators, academics, and community members with knowledge of, or direct experience with, majelis taklim development. Informant criteria included direct involvement in the organization, experience attending or managing majelis taklim activities, and the ability to provide information about institutional changes and activities during specific periods. The interviews aimed to obtain information not always available in written archives, especially on the history of the establishment, key figures, leadership patterns, congregation experiences, changes in activities, and organizational transformation processes. Interview data was recorded with the informant's consent, transcribed, and then compared with written sources. Oral history is used critically because the informant's memory of past events can be influenced by the passage of time and the process of reconstructing memories [14]. Therefore, testimony is not treated as a single fact, but is verified by comparing it with other documents and testimonies.

The second stage is source criticism, or verification, which ensures a source's authenticity and credibility. External criticism is used to check the authenticity of documents through the origin of the archives, year of publication, the identity of the creator, the publishing institution, document numbers or codes, as well as the physical condition if the source is an original document. Meanwhile, internal criticism involves evaluating the source's content based on the consistency of the information, the context in which the document was created, the interests of the author or institution, and its compatibility with other sources. For example, if an organizational document mentions the year of establishment or changes in the management of a religious study group, researchers compare that information with decrees, activity reports, documentation, news coverage, and statements from informants. This way, researchers can analyze differences between sources

rather than accepting them as fact right away. External and internal criticism are important parts of historical research because they let researchers distinguish authentic sources from questionable ones and assess the credibility of the information they contain [15].

The third stage is interpretation, which is the process of analyzing verified facts to find connections, patterns, meanings, changes, and historical continuity. In this study, interpretation is done by grouping facts based on three main focuses: (1) the social and political background of the emergence of Islamic study groups in Medan City; (2) the institutional development of these study groups; and (3) the transformation of study group activities from 1950 to 2023. The analysis also considers societal changes in Medan, the development of Islamic education, the dynamics of religious organizations, government policies, changing needs of congregation members, and advances in communication technology. A multidimensional approach is used so that changes in study groups are not seen solely as a religious phenomenon, but as part of the social dynamics of urban communities. This framework aligns with Kartodirdjo's thinking about the importance of using social sciences to enrich historical analysis and with the thematic history approach developed in Indonesian historical methodology [16].

The final stage is historiography, which is the compiling of facts and interpretations into a systematic, chronological, critical, and analytical historical narrative. The historiography of this study is arranged based on the development of majelis taklim from the early period around 1950 to 2023, taking into account changes and continuity in its institutional structure and activities. The narrative not only explains when an event happened, but also outlines the underlying factors, the actors involved, the forms of institutional change, and its impact on the socio-religious life of the people in Medan City. In this way, the historiography of this research is aimed at producing a historical reconstruction that shows the journey of majelis taklim from community-based study groups to socio-religious institutions with educational, preaching, social, empowerment functions, and digital adaptation. Historiography is understood as an important stage because the facts that have been collected and verified only gain the form of historical knowledge after being arranged into an argumentative and accountable narrative [17].

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3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Social and Political Background of the Emergence of Majelis Taklim in Medan City

The findings indicate that the emergence of majelis taklim in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 was closely linked to the evolving social and religious needs of the urban community. *Majelis taklim* emerged as a form of non-formal Islamic education that gave community members opportunities to acquire religious knowledge outside formal educational institutions. Religious study sessions, the delivery of Islamic teachings, religious discussions, and religious development activities became the principal forms of activity, while simultaneously strengthening social relationships among community members. Thus, the emergence of *majelis taklim* was driven not only by the need for religious learning but

also by the community's need for spaces for social interaction and the development of communal solidarity.

From a social perspective, the development of *majelis taklim* demonstrates the community's response to the increasingly complex conditions of urban life. Population mobility, social diversity, and changing patterns of social relationships encouraged the establishment of community spaces capable of maintaining social ties while addressing spiritual needs. *Majelis taklim* subsequently developed in various community settings, including residential communities, women's groups, families, and specific social communities. The activities conducted were not limited to religious study sessions but also included social activities such as charitable assistance, mutual cooperation, commemoration of Islamic holidays, and other community-based activities. This condition demonstrates that *majelis taklim* functions not only as a religious institution but also as a space for developing and maintaining social solidarity.

From a political perspective, the observational findings indicate that the development of *majelis taklim* cannot be separated from the dynamics of community life and changes in opportunities for social participation in Medan City. *Majelis taklim* became one of the community spaces that enabled people to communicate, express their views, develop social networks, and respond to various issues emerging within their surrounding environment. Although its primary functions remained focused on religious education and religious development, *majelis taklim* indirectly had a sociopolitical dimension because it was part of the civil society networks that developed in urban life. Changes in political conditions across historical periods also influenced organizational management patterns, forms of activity, and the extent of community involvement in *majelis taklim* activities.

Thus, the observational findings confirm that *majelis taklim* emerged in Medan City through the interaction of the need for religious education, changes in urban social conditions, and political dynamics across different historical periods. *Majelis taklim* did not merely develop as a place to transmit Islamic teachings; it evolved into a social institution that strengthened social relationships, fostered solidarity, and provided opportunities for community participation. This development provides an important foundation for understanding the transformation of *majelis taklim* in Medan City from 1950 to 2023, particularly in terms of institutional development, forms of activity, and its role in the community's social and religious life. The observational findings also align with the interview findings presented below.

Table 1 shows that *majelis taklim* emerged in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 in response to the community's need for religious education, as well as for social interaction, solidarity, social activities, and community participation. Its development reflects *majelis taklim*'s capacity to adapt to social changes and the dynamics of urban life. Consequently, *majelis taklim* has functioned not only as a non-formal Islamic educational institution but also as a social and religious institution that strengthens community relationships, solidarity, and participation.

Table 1. Interview Findings on the Social and Political Background of the Emergence of *Majelis Taklim* in Medan City, 1950–2023

Informant	Interview Findings
Religious Leader	<i>"Majelis taklim emerged because the community needed an accessible place to learn about religion. Not everyone was able to participate in formal religious education, so religious study sessions became a means of acquiring religious knowledge while also strengthening the religious life of the community."</i>
Representative of the Communication Forum of Majelis Taklim	<i>"Majelis taklim is not merely a place to listen to religious lectures. Religious study activities subsequently gave rise to social activities such as charitable assistance, helping people in need, and other religious activities. Thus, majelis taklim also became a place for building togetherness and solidarity."</i>
Administrator of Majelis Taklim	<i>"Initially, our activities consisted only of regular religious study sessions. However, as the needs of the community increased, the activities expanded to include religious discussions, commemoration of Islamic holidays, charitable assistance, and social activities. The development of majelis taklim has indeed followed the needs of the community."</i>
Academic	<i>"Historically, majelis taklim developed because of the community's need for flexible religious education. Over time, majelis taklim also became a social space where community members could communicate, develop networks, and participate in various issues affecting their surroundings."</i>
Community Member	<i>"I initially joined majelis taklim to learn about religion, but over time I became closer to other community members. Whenever there are social activities or neighbors who need assistance, we usually help one another. Thus, majelis taklim has strengthened relationships among community members."</i>

3.1.2. The Development of Majelis Taklim Institutions in Medan City

Observational findings indicate that *majelis taklim* in Medan City transformed from simple, informal, community-based religious study groups into increasingly structured religious institutions from 1950 to 2023. In the early period, majelis taklim activities were generally conducted in residents' homes, mosques, small prayer rooms, or residential communities, with organizational structures that had not yet been formally established. The primary activities centered on regular religious study sessions and religious scholars delivering religious teachings. As community needs increased, these groups gradually developed into organizations with formal management structures, divisions of responsibilities, activity schedules, and more systematic administrative mechanisms.

This institutional development is reflected in the increasingly clear division of roles among the chairperson, secretary, treasurer, activity coordinators, male and female religious teachers, and members. Administrators were responsible not only for organizing religious study sessions but also for managing various social and religious activities, including commemorating Islamic holidays, providing charitable assistance for orphans, running social programs, conducting family development activities, and organizing religious programs for women and the wider community. This condition demonstrates that *majelis taklim* experienced institutional strengthening through the expansion of its functions and work programs. In its subsequent development, organizations such as the *Badan Kontak Majelis Taklim* also helped strengthen networks among majelis taklim and promote coordination of activities at broader levels.

The observational findings also reveal changes in institutional management and communication patterns. Whereas information was previously communicated directly

through meetings or house-to-house announcements, developments in communication technology have enabled administrators to use mobile phones, social media, and messaging applications to disseminate religious study schedules, provide information about activities, and coordinate among members. Furthermore, some religious activities have begun using digital media to deliver religious materials and maintain communication when face-to-face meetings are limited. These changes show majelis taklim's capacity to adapt to technological developments while maintaining its primary functions as an institution for religious education and development.

Thus, the institutional development of *majelis taklim* in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 shows a shift from informal religious study groups to more organized, adaptive, and broadly networked social and religious institutions. This transformation is characterized not only by the establishment of organizational structures and work programs but also by diversified activities and the use of digital technology. This development demonstrates that the sustainability of *majelis taklim* has been strongly influenced by its capacity to adapt its institutional structures and activities to changing community needs across different historical periods. The observational findings also align with the interview findings presented below.

Table 2. Interview Findings on the Institutional Development of *Majelis Taklim* in Medan City

Informant	Verbatim Interview Findings
Religious Leader	<i>"In the past, majelis taklim was still very simple, usually consisting only of religious study sessions held in residents' homes, mosques, or small prayer rooms. There were also only a few administrators, and the activities focused primarily on religious study sessions. However, as the community grew and its needs became more diverse, organizational structures and clearer divisions of responsibilities began to be established."</i>
Representative of the Communication Forum of Majelis Taklim	<i>"Today, majelis taklim is more organized. There is a chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and several divisions responsible for different activities. The Badan Kontak Majelis Taklim also helps connect one majelis taklim with another, allowing activities to be coordinated rather than being conducted independently."</i>
Administrator of Majelis Taklim	<i>"In the past, our activities consisted only of regular religious study sessions. Now, there are many other activities, such as charitable assistance, commemoration of Islamic holidays, social activities, and member development programs. Communication has also shifted to WhatsApp, making it easier to distribute information about religious study schedules and other activities to members."</i>
Academic	<i>"The institutional development of majelis taklim demonstrates a process of institutionalization. Informal religious study groups have developed into organizations with management structures, work programs, divisions of responsibilities, and social networks. The ability to adapt to digital technology has also become an important component of this institutional transformation."</i>
Community Member	<i>"The activities of majelis taklim are now more organized than they were in the past. There are clear schedules for religious study sessions and social activities, and information is usually communicated through WhatsApp groups. As members, we can therefore find out about activities more easily and participate in them."</i>

The findings show that the institutional structure of majelis taklim in Medan City transformed from simple, informal religious study groups into more structured social and religious organizations characterized by clear divisions of responsibility, work programs,

and institutional networks. This development was also marked by a growing diversity of activities and the use of digital technology for communication and activity management. Consequently, *majelis taklim* has demonstrated an ability to adapt to changing community needs while maintaining its fundamental role in religious education, religious development, and community engagement.

3.1.3. The Development of Religious Study Group Activities in Medan City

The observational findings indicate that *majelis taklim* activities in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 developed significantly in both form and scope. In the early period, *majelis taklim* activities centered mainly on regular religious study sessions and religious teachings delivered by male and female religious teachers. As community needs developed, these activities became increasingly diverse and were no longer limited to religious lectures. *Majelis taklim* began to organize Quranic learning, Islamic studies, religious discussions, and activities aimed at developing religious understanding and its practical application in everyday life.

In addition to religious educational activities, the observational findings demonstrate that *majelis taklim* also developed as a forum for community-based social activities. Various activities, including assistance for orphans, fundraising for community members in need, visits to sick members, mutual cooperation, and other social activities, became integral components of *majelis taklim* activities. These activities demonstrate social concern among members while simultaneously strengthening relationships and solidarity within the community. Thus, *majelis taklim* activities were not solely oriented toward increasing religious knowledge but also toward applying Islamic values in social life.

The development of activities was also reflected in the organization of programs related to family life and the commemoration of Islamic holidays. *Majelis taklim* participated in activities such as the commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the commemoration of the Isra and Mikraj, the Islamic New Year, Ramadan activities, communal breaking of the fast, and family and women's development programs. These activities provided opportunities to strengthen social relationships among members while simultaneously instilling religious values within families and the broader community. Members' involvement in various activities also demonstrates that *majelis taklim* has become an important space for social participation within the community of Medan City.

The observational findings further indicate that *majelis taklim* activities have adapted to changing times. Communication about religious study schedules and social activities increasingly uses digital media, such as WhatsApp and social media platforms. Under certain circumstances, digital media have also been used to disseminate information and religious materials to members. This development shows *majelis taklim*'s ability to adapt to technological advances without abandoning face-to-face activities as the primary form of interaction among members.

Thus, the development of *majelis taklim* activities in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 shows a shift from simple religious study activities to more diverse religious and social programs. *Majelis taklim* functions not only as a space for religious learning and development but also as a forum for solidarity, social relationships, social concern, and

community participation. This diversity of activities shows that majelis taklim has responded to changing community needs while maintaining its religious function within the social life of Medan City. The observational findings also align with the interview findings presented below.

Table 3. Interview Findings on the Development of *Majelis Taklim* Activities in Medan City

Informant	Verbatim Interview Findings
Religious Leader	<i>"In the past, majelis taklim activities primarily consisted of religious study sessions and religious lectures. Today, the activities have become increasingly diverse, including Quranic learning, Islamic studies, the commemoration of Islamic holidays, and social activities. Thus, community members not only acquire religious knowledge but also learn how to apply it in their daily lives."</i>
Representative of the Communication Forum of Majelis Taklim	<i>"The activities of majelis taklim are no longer limited to religious study sessions. Many majelis taklim now provide assistance to orphans, collect donations for community members in need, organize Ramadan activities, and conduct other social programs. Activities such as these strengthen relationships among members."</i>
Administrator of Majelis Taklim	<i>"We try to organize activities according to the needs of our members. In addition to regular religious study sessions, we conduct Quranic reading classes, family studies, commemorations of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and the Isra and Mikraj, charitable assistance, and other joint activities. Information about activities is also easier to communicate through WhatsApp groups."</i>
Academic	<i>"The development of majelis taklim activities demonstrates an expansion of its function from a religious educational institution into a social space for the community. The diversification of activities indicates that majelis taklim is capable of responding to religious, social, and family needs while simultaneously providing a space for community participation and the development of social solidarity."</i>
Community Member	<i>"I participate in majelis taklim not only to attend religious study sessions. There are also charitable activities, communal breaking of the fast, commemorations of Islamic holidays, and social activities. Through these activities, we become closer to other members and are better able to help one another when someone is in need."</i>

The findings show that *majelis taklim* activities in Medan City shifted from regular religious study sessions to more diverse religious, social, and community-based activities. This development includes Quranic learning, Islamic studies, charitable assistance, Ramadan activities, the commemoration of Islamic holidays, family development programs, and the utilization of digital media. This diversity of activities has strengthened the function of *majelis taklim* as a space for religious education, social relationships, solidarity, social concern, and community participation.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Social and Political Background of the Emergence of Majelis Taklim in Medan City

Research shows that the emergence of *majelis taklim* in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 stemmed from people's need for religious education that is easily accessible, flexible, and close to everyday life. This finding aligns with Kosasih & Agung, who explain that

majelis taklim developed as a religious community independently formed by urban Muslims and later transformed into a non-formal educational institution that helps improve the congregation's religious knowledge [18]. In Medan City, interview findings with religious leaders indicate that majelis taklim emerged because people needed an easily accessible place to learn about religion, supporting this view. This suggests that majelis taklim emerged not merely through top-down institutional formation, but from the community's real need for religious learning outside formal education.

These findings are also relevant to the character of Medan City as an urban community with mobility, social diversity, and relatively dynamic changes in interaction patterns. Agustina et al. show that religious study groups play an important role in shaping religious identity while also strengthening social cohesion in urban communities [3]. The research found that participating in religious study groups is linked to strengthening religious identity, learning from peers, community involvement, and social cohesion. This aligns with research in Medan City, which shows that people join these study groups not just to gain religious knowledge, but also to meet, interact, help each other, and maintain social connections. Thus, spiritual and social needs in the emergence of these study groups are interconnected.

From a social capital perspective, this research is further supported by Chiu, who found that women's study groups in Medan City form and develop through trust, loyalty, and social relationships among members [19]. Religious study groups can even influence social relationships in the community, extending into the economic sphere. These findings align with the results of interviews in this study, especially the statements from BKMT officials and community members that majelis taklim serves as a place to build togetherness, provide charity, help those in need, and strengthen relationships among members. In this way, the emergence of majelis taklim can be understood as a process of creating a social space that enables trust, solidarity, and social networks to form within the community.

This social function also shows that religious study groups developed as a response to people's life problems. Nugraha explains that in the context of urban society, these study groups can be understood as the community's response to the social conditions around them [20]. Their existence is tied not only to religious preaching and education, but also to the social dynamics of the Muslim community. This view aligns with research findings in Medan City, which show that majelis taklim activities have evolved from simple study gatherings into charity events, community service, Islamic holiday celebrations, and other social activities. This expansion of functions indicates that people do not strictly separate religious needs from social needs; instead, both come together in majelis taklim activities.

In the context of religious social movements, Sadigh et al. found that urban communities use majelis taklim as a form of religious social movement that arises from collective awareness and community agreement [21]. Organizing activities and the presence of religious figures are important elements in building this movement. This finding aligns with research in Medan City, especially from academics who say that majelis taklim serves as a space for communication, network building, and community participation. Therefore, the socio-political dimension in this study does not mean that majelis taklim functions as a practical political organization, but rather shows that it occupies a space where the

community can build communication, shared awareness, and participation in responding to environmental issues.

Those socio-political dimensions also have a historical basis. Imran et al. pointed out that majelis taklim, which became deeply rooted in society during certain periods, even drew political attention in the context of community development and recruitment [22]. From that perspective, research findings on the development of majelis taklim in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 show that this institution does not exist outside the dynamics of society and politics, but always interacts with changes in the surrounding social context. Changes in social conditions then affect the form of activities, communication patterns, and the level of congregational participation. However, *majelis taklim's* main function remains religious education and guidance.

The local context of Medan City further reinforces these results. Ivaldi et al.'s research on the Darusshofa Islamic Study Group in Medan shows that the study group helps expand understanding of Islamic education, shape character, and strengthen community ties. Their activities include reciting dhikr, salawat, celebrating the Prophet's birthday, performing qasidah, and delivering religious knowledge [23]. Recent research on the Darusshofa Islamic Study Group also shows that religious institutions in Medan face high population mobility, socio-cultural diversity, and developments in digital technology. This indicates that the findings align with the development of contemporary Islamic study groups in Medan, particularly their ability to maintain religious functions while adapting to changes in the social environment.

Thus, the research findings can be understood through three interrelated main factors: the need for religious education, the need to build social solidarity, and the dynamics of community participation in urban life. The literature shows that majelis taklim has the characteristics of informal Islamic education and serves as a space for shaping identity, social cohesion, social capital, and socio-religious movements. Field findings in Medan City support previous research results by showing that from 1950 to 2023, majelis taklim has evolved according to community needs and changes in the social context. Therefore, the emergence of majelis taklim in Medan City can be understood as a historical-social process that brings together spiritual needs with the community's need to build solidarity, communication, and participation in urban life.

Based on that discussion, this study offers a new historical perspective by examining the development of majelis taklim in Medan over a long period, from 1950 to 2023. Unlike previous studies that usually focus on majelis taklim from the angles of Islamic education, community empowerment, social capital, religious identity, or preaching activities in a specific context, this research examines the emergence and development of majelis taklim longitudinally, taking into account changes in social context, institutional structure, activities, and the socio-political dynamics of Medan society. This approach allows the study to explain not just the functions of majelis taklim, but also why they exist, in what socio-political context, and how these institutions have evolved.

The next novelty lies in connecting the dimensions of religious education, social solidarity, institutionalization, and community participation within a single historical analysis framework. The research findings show that majelis taklim emerged not solely

because of the need for religious learning, but as a process shaped by changes in the social structure of urban communities. From simple study groups, majelis taklim developed into socio-religious institutions with management, activity programs, inter-institutional networks, and the ability to adapt to technological developments and changes in community interaction patterns. Thus, this study broadens the understanding of majelis taklim as dynamic socio-religious institutions, not merely as places for delivering lectures or religious lessons.

In addition, this study provides an empirical contribution to the study of Islamic social history in the city of Medan. The period from 1950 to 2023 shows that the continuity of majelis taklim is related to its ability to respond to changes over time, from shifts in societal lifestyle and the development of religious organizations to socio-political dynamics and the digitalization of communication. Therefore, this research not only contributes academically but also shows that the existence of majelis taklim can serve as an important indicator for observing changes in the socio-religious life of urban Muslims.

Thus, the main novelty of this study lies in the historical reconstruction of the development of majelis taklim in Medan City from 1950 to 2023, integrating social-political background, institutional development, and activity transformation into a single study. This research shows that majelis taklim continues to transform according to community needs while maintaining its fundamental functions as a space for Islamic education, social gathering, social solidarity, and community participation. This perspective also distinguishes this study from previous studies, which mostly focused on the functions or activities of majelis taklim in specific periods and social contexts.

3.1.2. The Development of Majelis Taklim Institutions in Medan City

The research results show that religious study groups (majelis taklim) in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 have transformed from simple, informal gatherings into socio-religious institutions with organizational structures, task divisions, work programs, and broader institutional networks. This finding aligns with Audretsch et al., which shows that majelis taklim in Medan developed from informal meetings into more structured institutions, with functions not only related to religious education but also to empowerment and social-humanitarian activities [24]. The study also found that activities evolved through the use of technology, social media, and collaboration with religious organizations and the government. These findings align closely with this research's observations, especially regarding the transformation of majelis taklim from simple home-based, mosque, and prayer room gatherings into organizations with structured management and more systematic operational mechanisms.

This change process can be understood as the institutionalization of the study group. In the early stages, the study group largely depended on religious leaders or community figures who initiated the activities. However, as the number of congregants and activity needs increased, a clearer division of roles became necessary between the leader, secretary, treasurer, activity coordinators, teachers, and members. Interviews with religious leaders, who noted that the study group was once simple but later began forming management and task divisions, show that the institutionalization process occurred gradually in response to

the growing needs of the congregants. This finding is also supported by Gaglio et al.'s research in the Majelis Taklim of Masjid At-Tawwabin in Medan City, which shows that organized management, relevant religious materials, and participatory learning methods are key elements in the sustainability of community-based religious education institutions [25].

Strengthening majelis taklim institutions is also linked to building inter-institutional networks. In Medan City, the existence of BKMT shows that majelis taklim no longer operates individually but can connect within an organizational network that allows coordination, guidance, and experience sharing. Research by Xia et al. indicates that BKMT Medan functions as a center for religious development by preparing educational programs, guiding sub-district-level administrators, and collaborating with members and partner organizations [26]. These findings reinforce research results that the presence of BKMT contributes to strengthening the institutional structure of majelis taklim, especially in expanding coordination and increasing organizational capacity. Thus, majelis taklim develop not only at the local group level but also through the formation of wider institutional networks.

Institutional development is also evident in the organization's increasingly broad functions. Majelis taklim is not only responsible for conducting religious study sessions, but has also started managing social activities, family guidance, donations, fundraising, and community empowerment. Research by Vărzaru & Bocean on community empowerment-based majelis taklim in Medan City shows that institutional strengthening is carried out through administrative guidance, strengthening BKM management, determining preaching materials, fundraising, managing facilities and infrastructure, and consolidating administrators and the congregation [27]. The findings show that strengthening institutions does not just mean creating an organizational structure, but also improving the institution's ability to manage resources and carry out social functions. This aligns with the results of this study, where the more organized the religious study groups are, the more varied the programs and responsibilities of the administrators become.

The expansion of these functions is also related to the *majelis taklim's* position as a community-based non-formal educational institution. Research by Li et al. on Majelis Taklim Nurul Umami in Pulo Brayan Kota, West Medan, shows that *the majelis taklim serves as a means for religious learning*, spiritual development, strengthening faith and piety, and broadening the community's knowledge [28]. The study also recommends strengthening institutional support and continuously developing programs. These findings reinforce research showing that developing the organizational structure of religious study groups should be understood as part of the process of maintaining the institution's sustainability in meeting community needs. The broader the congregational needs, the greater the demands on the organization's capacity to manage activities in an organized way.

Another important finding was institutional adaptation to the development of digital technology. Observations showed that communication patterns that were previously done face-to-face have started to shift with the use of mobile phones, WhatsApp, and social media. This change does not mean face-to-face interaction is abandoned; rather, technology supports sharing study schedules, coordinating activities, spreading information, and expanding the reach of religious outreach. This finding aligns with Bennett & McWhorter's

research on *Majelis Taklim* Nurur Rahmah, which shows that Instagram is used to share short lectures, Quranic verses and hadiths, event information, and activity documentation [29]. Using social media increases congregation participation, expands the reach of preaching, and strengthens interaction between the organizers and followers, both online and offline.

This digital adaptation also shows how religious study groups are changing how they maintain their presence in urban communities. Leso et al., in their research on the Darusshofa Study Group in Medan City, showed that preaching institutions face urban characteristics such as high population mobility, socio-cultural diversity, and increased use of digital technology [30]. This aligns with this study's findings that the sustainability of majelis taklim institutions depends on their ability to adapt to the social environment. In other words, digitalization is not just a technical change in communication, but is part of the institutional strategy to maintain relationships with the congregation and adapt activities to the patterns of contemporary society.

From a sociological perspective, this transformation shows that majelis taklim can maintain its religious identity while adapting its organizational form to societal changes. Akour & Alenezi found that majelis taklim plays a role in shaping religious identity and strengthening social cohesion in urban communities through learning and social interaction [31]. In this research, the development of organizational structures, program activities, BKMT networks, and the use of digital media show that majelis taklim is not a static institution. On the contrary, it is a social-religious institution that continuously adapts to remain relevant to the congregation's needs and changes in the social environment.

Based on these findings, the development of majelis taklim institutions in Medan City from 1950–2023 went through three main processes: institutionalization, network and function expansion, and digital adaptation. Institutionalization is seen in the transformation of informal study groups into organizations with clearer structures and task divisions. Network and function expansion is reflected in BKMT's involvement in social activities, community development, and relationships with religious organizations and the government. Meanwhile, digital adaptation is evident in the use of WhatsApp and social media for communication, coordination, and preaching. These three processes show that the development of majelis taklim institutions responds to changing community needs, not just administrative changes.

This research's novelty lies in reconstructing the development of *majelis taklim* institutions in Medan City from 1950 to 2023, so institutional change can be seen as a long-term process, not just the organization's state at a single point in time. Previous studies mostly discussed the educational, empowerment, preaching, or digitalization functions of majelis taklim in certain contexts, while this study connects changes in institutional structure, functional expansion, network formation, and technology adaptation into a single historical development flow.

The main contribution of this study is showing that the transformation of majelis taklim is not just a shift from religious study groups to a formal organization, but a process of strengthening the community's social-religious capacity. Changes in management structure allow activities to be run more systematically; the BKMT network expands

coordination; program diversification strengthens social functions; while the use of digital technology improves the institution's ability to maintain communication with its members. In this way, the study positions majelis taklim as an adaptive social-religious institution that upholds Islamic education while responding to social, institutional, and technological changes in Medan City from 1950 to 2023.

3.1.3. The Development of Majelis Taklim Activities in Medan City

Research results show that majelis taklim activities in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 have shifted from study sessions initially centered on religious lectures to increasingly diverse religious and social activities. These changes are reflected in Quran learning, Islamic studies, religious discussions, family development, Ramadan activities, Islamic holiday celebrations, and various social activities. These findings align with research by Burström et al., who studied the development of majelis taklim in Medan City and found that majelis taklim evolved from informal gatherings into more structured institutions [32]. These developments not only expand the functions of religious education but also include social and humanitarian activities, the use of technology and social media, and programs tailored to the needs of specific community groups. In this way, the variety of activities in this study shows that majelis taklim is an institution that adapts to society's changing needs.

The expansion of these activities shows a shift in majelis taklim's orientation from merely transferring religious knowledge to practicing Islamic values in social life. Interviews with religious figures indicate that activities that used to be mainly study circles and lectures have now expanded to include Qur'an learning, Islamic studies, celebrating Islamic holidays, and social activities. This shows that learning in majelis taklim is flexible and based on the congregation's needs. Bygstad et al. describe majlis taklim as an informal learning space that can improve understanding of the Qur'an and provide a religious learning environment closer to community life [33]. With this kind of character, the study group can connect religious knowledge with the congregation's practical experiences and daily needs.

The development of these religious activities also shows that majelis taklim plays a role in building religious identity and social cohesion. In urban communities with high mobility and diverse social backgrounds, study sessions become meeting spaces that allow participants to interact, strengthen social bonds, and maintain their religious identity. This finding aligns with research by Hanelt et al., which shows that majelis taklim contributes to religious identity formation and strengthens social cohesion through motivation to learn, social interaction, and community involvement [34]. Thus, the study group's activities not only increase religious knowledge but also create a social space where participants can interact and build a sense of togetherness.

These social functions are becoming more evident through activities such as donating to orphans, raising aid funds, visiting sick members, cooperating with the community, and helping those in need. These activities show that the religious values learned through study groups do not stop at understanding but translate into social action. This finding aligns with Nadkarni & Prügl, who noted that study groups in Medan have developed into centers for social and humanitarian activities, in addition to their role in religious education [35]. Thus,

social activities in the study group can be understood as an integral part of developing institutional functions, not just an extra activity.¹⁹

This development is also related to the role of majelis taklim as a space for community empowerment, especially for women. Marion and Fixson show that majelis taklim can serve as a religious non-formal education institution and a means of community empowerment [36]. This is based on the congregation's needs, especially women's, for religious knowledge, non-religious knowledge, and productive skills that can support family well-being. Research findings in Medan show a similar pattern through family development activities, women's activities, charity, and social activities. Therefore, the growth of majelis taklim activities shows a tendency toward a more integrative approach by connecting religious education, family life, and social care.

Nonetheless, diversifying activities does not automatically mean all study groups have become fully optimized institutions for community empowerment. Stern and Valero's research shows that some study groups still operate traditionally, so they need institutional support and capacity building to carry out empowerment functions more effectively [37]. These findings offer a critical perspective on research results in Medan City. This means that as the variety of activities increases, management capacity, program planning, resource management, and mapping of the congregation's needs also need strengthening. So, activity transformation is measured not only by the number of activities, but also by their quality, sustainability, and benefits for the community.

Another important aspect is the rise of digitalization in taklim council activities. Observations and interviews show that WhatsApp and social media are increasingly used to share event information, coordinate with congregants, and support the spread of religious materials. This development shows that taklim council activities no longer rely entirely on face-to-face meetings. These findings align with Omol's research on the Nurur Rahmah Taklim Council, which shows that Instagram is used to share short sermons, Quran and hadith quotes, event information, and activity documentation [38]. Using social media can boost congregation participation, expand the reach of preaching, and strengthen interaction between the organizers and the congregation, both online and offline.

This digitalization not only shows a change in communication tools but also reflects a shift in the activity patterns of religious study groups. Technology makes it possible to share information about activities, religious materials, and event documentation more quickly and widely. Pettersson's research on digital preaching literacy among women's study groups shows that improving digital skills can boost members' ability to create and share preaching content more wisely and creatively [39]. The research also showed a positive impact on knowledge, skills, communication ethics, and the formation of digital preaching communities. These findings reinforce research in Medan City that digitalization can be an adaptation strategy for religious study groups in contemporary society.

Thus, the development of majelis taklim activities in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 can be understood through several forms of transformation, namely educational transformation, social transformation, empowerment transformation, and digital transformation. Educational transformation is seen in the shift from routine religious gatherings to Quran learning, studies, and discussions. Social transformation is seen in the

growth of charity activities, mutual cooperation, and concern for the community. Empowerment transformation is evident through family and women's development programs, while digital transformation is reflected in the use of social media and communication apps to support activities. These four forms show that majelis taklim can maintain its religious functions while expanding its role to meet changing community needs.

Based on the comparison between the research findings and previous studies, it can be confirmed that the development of majelis taklim activities in Medan City is not just about adding new types of activities, but shows a shift in function from a religious teaching institution to a more multidimensional socio-religious institution. This aligns with Namara, who found a connection between institutional development, religious education, community empowerment, and the diversification of majelis taklim activities in Medan City [40]. Thus, this study reinforces previous findings while also providing a historical perspective that these activity changes occurred gradually from 1950 to 2023 in response to social changes, congregational needs, and technological developments.

Based on the overall discussion, the development of majelis taklim activities in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 can be understood through four main forms of transformation, namely: (1) educational transformation, from routine lectures to learning the Qur'an, studies, and discussions; (2) social transformation, from religious activities to charity, mutual cooperation, and social care; (3) community transformation, through family activities, women's gatherings, and Islamic holiday celebrations as spaces for socializing and participation; and (4) digital transformation, through the use of WhatsApp and social media for communication, da'wah, and information dissemination. These four forms of transformation show that majelis taklim is not a static institution, but a socio-religious institution that continuously adjusts its activities to changing community needs.

This research is novel in reconstructing the development of majelis taklim activities in Medan City from a historical perspective between 1950–2023. Unlike previous studies that usually focus on one type of activity, such as religious education, women's empowerment, social activities, or digital preaching, this study examines changes in activities longitudinally. It connects these activities into a single historical transformation process. Thus, this research not only explains the types of activities carried out by majelis taklim but also shows the shift in function from simple religious gatherings to institutions that integrate religious education, social activities, family guidance, community solidarity, and digital communication.

This research also emphasizes that the diversification of majelis taklim activities reflects adaptation to the changing needs of people in Medan City. In this way, majelis taklim activities can be understood as an indicator of changes in the socio-religious life of urban Muslims. The main novelty of this study is showing that the transformation of majelis taklim activities happens gradually and in layers: from religious learning, it evolves into social services and community development, then adapts to digital spaces without losing the face-to-face interaction and congregation solidarity. This historical perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of the sustainability of majelis taklim as an educational and socio-religious institution in Medan City.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that religious study groups in Medan City from 1950 to 2023 have transformed from simple study groups into more structured, adaptive socio-religious institutions with increasingly diverse activities. Their development not only meets religious education needs but also strengthens social ties, solidarity, social care, and community participation, while beginning to use digital technology for communication and religious activities. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of strengthening governance, socio-religious programs, institutional networks, and the digital capabilities of these study groups to remain relevant to community needs. However, this study has limitations due to its broad historical span, limited comparisons between study groups, and limited examination of political, gender, and generational aspects, as well as the impact of digitalization. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine the development of majelis taklim based on a more specific historical periodization, make comparisons between regions, and delve deeper into aspects of gender, youth, community empowerment, socio-political issues, and digital transformation so that a more comprehensive understanding of the development of majelis taklim in urban society can be obtained.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses heartfelt thanks to everyone who has provided support, assistance, and contributions in carrying out this research. Special thanks are given to religious leaders, the administrators of the Majelis Taklim Contact Body, majelis taklim administrators, academics, and community members in Medan City who were willing to provide valuable information, experiences, and insights to complete this study. Thanks are also extended to all those who helped with data collection, provided documentation, and supported the research process through to the preparation of this article. Hopefully, all the help and contributions given will be repaid with goodness and benefit the development of studies on the history of Islamic education and the socio-religious life of the community.

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