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Mapping the Rumah Ngaji Movement in Sarawak: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

Rumah Ngaji is a community-based Qur'anic learning movement that promotes engagement with the Qur'an through the approach of *Baca, Faham dan Amal al-Quran*—reading, understanding and practising the Qur'an. The movement provides flexible learning spaces through homes, mosques, surau, community facilities, educational institutions and other local settings. In Sarawak, Rumah Ngaji has developed through grassroots organisers, volunteer teachers, local learning centres and collaboration with public and Islamic institutions. This preliminary study has two objectives: first, to explore the motivations behind the establishment of and participation in Rumah Ngaji; and second, to map the development of Rumah Ngaji across Sarawak. The study adopts a documentary research approach using academic literature, institutional reports, government publications, newspaper articles and publicly available records. The findings show that community-based Qur'anic learning has a long history in Sarawak, where Qur'anic classes were traditionally conducted by individual teachers in homes, surau and mosques. Rumah Ngaji therefore represents not the beginning of home-based Qur'anic learning, but a contemporary effort to organise and network an established community tradition. Documentary evidence indicates that Rumah Ngaji Sarawak emerged as an identifiable movement around 2015, with 25 centres reported in 2018 and 32 registered centres reported by Majlis Islam Sarawak in 2026 (Utusan Borneo, 2018; Unit Komunikasi Awam Sarawak, 2026). The findings also show increasing institutional collaboration and the emergence of the Darul Hana Quranic Centre as a coordinating institution for Qur'anic development in Sarawak. The study recommends improved statewide coordination, mapping of underserved areas, teacher training and minimum teaching standards, and development of a central database of centres, teachers and learners.

Keywords: Rumah Ngaji; Qur'anic education; community learning; Sarawak; Qur'anic literacy; Darul Hana Quranic Centre

1. Introduction

Qur'anic education is an important component of Muslim religious life. Traditionally, learning the Qur'an begins with the ability to recognise and pronounce Arabic letters before progressing to correct recitation, tajwid, understanding and eventually the practice of Qur'anic teachings. In Malaysia, Qur'anic learning takes place in both formal and non-formal settings. Formal religious schools and institutional programmes operate alongside community-based classes conducted in mosques, surau and private homes. This tradition is particularly evident in Sarawak. Historical research shows that long before the development of contemporary Islamic educational institutions, Qur'anic learning was already being conducted within local communities. Abdul Mutalib (2009) reports that before Brooke rule began in 1841, Qur'anic reading and Jawi were taught in the homes of *Tok Guru*, surau and mosques in Malay villages in Sarawak. Rambli, Harun and Engku Alwi (2020) similarly document the existence of Qur'anic classes conducted from teachers' homes, surau and mosques. Their study of Qur'anic education in Bintulu shows that local teachers historically played an important role in transmitting Qur'anic knowledge before more systematic institutions were established. The contemporary Rumah Ngaji movement can therefore be situated within this longstanding community tradition. Rumah Ngaji promotes Qur'anic engagement through the principle of *Baca, Faham dan Amal*. Learning may take place in homes, mosques, surau, educational institutions and other community spaces. The concept is flexible and relies considerably upon local organisers, teachers, volunteers and community participation. In Sarawak, documentary evidence suggests that Rumah Ngaji developed into an identifiable movement around 2015. Over time, it has become increasingly connected with institutions such as Pustaka Negeri Sarawak, the Islamic Information Centre, Majlis Islam Sarawak (MIS), religious agencies, mosques, community organisations and educational institutions. More recently, the establishment of the Darul Hana Quranic Centre (DHQC) under MIS signals another development in the Qur'anic education landscape. DHQC has been given responsibilities relating to Qur'anic education, training, research, assessment and accreditation.

Despite these developments, the history and geographical development of Rumah Ngaji in Sarawak have received limited academic attention. This preliminary paper therefore examines the motivation behind Rumah Ngaji and traces its development within the wider history of community-based Qur'anic learning in Sarawak.

1.2 Background of the Study

1.2.1 Community-Based Qur'anic Learning in Sarawak

Qur'anic learning in Sarawak has historically depended upon local teachers and community participation. Abdul Mutalib (2009) explains that traditional Malay education in Sarawak was strongly religious in nature. Classes were commonly conducted at the homes of religious teachers, mosques and surau. Similarly, Rambli et al. (2020) describe Qur'anic learning as historically operating through the homes of Qur'an teachers and other community religious spaces. The development of more formal institutions occurred gradually as demand for more systematic education increased. This suggests that the home has long functioned as an important educational space for Qur'anic learning. The traditional system was relatively decentralised. A person with sufficient knowledge of the Qur'an could teach children, family members or neighbours. Learning opportunities therefore often depended upon the presence and willingness of knowledgeable individuals within a particular community. Over time, more organised Islamic educational institutions developed. Nevertheless, home-based and community-based teaching continued alongside formal education.

1.2.2 Emergence of Rumah Ngaji

The modern Rumah Ngaji concept continues several characteristics of traditional community Qur'anic education. Classes remain accessible, small-scale and flexible. A dedicated school building is not necessary, and learning may take place in private homes, mosques, surau and other community facilities. However, Rumah Ngaji introduces an important additional characteristic: networking. Previously, many community Qur'an teachers may have operated independently within their own localities. Rumah Ngaji provides a shared identity through which individual community learning spaces can become part of a broader movement. Its emphasis on *Baca, Faham dan Amal* also broadens the idea of Qur'anic literacy from recitation alone towards understanding and practice. Thus, Rumah Ngaji can be interpreted as a contemporary organisation and revitalisation of an established community-learning tradition rather than an entirely new method of Qur'anic education.

1.3 Problem Statement

Community-based Qur'anic learning has existed in Sarawak for generations, but its development has not been systematically documented. Historical literature describes Qur'anic classes being conducted by individual teachers in homes, mosques and surau. In more recent years, initiatives such as Rumah Ngaji have connected similar community learning activities through an identifiable network. However, publicly available information concerning Rumah Ngaji in Sarawak remains fragmented. For example, 25 Rumah Ngaji were reported in Sarawak in 2018, while MIS reported 32 registered centres in March 2026 (Utusan Borneo, 2018; Unit Komunikasi Awam Sarawak, 2026). The available evidence, however, does not provide a complete historical record showing when each centre was established, whether it remains active or how the geographical distribution has changed over time. There is also limited information concerning the motivations of organisers, teachers and participants. A further concern relates to geographical access. A community-driven model allows Qur'an classes to emerge where motivated organisers and teachers are available. However, without statewide coordination, some areas may have several learning opportunities while other communities remain underserved. Historical research has already identified shortages of Qur'an teachers in some parts of Sarawak, particularly interior communities (Rambli et al., 2020). Teaching quality is another important consideration. Flexibility is one of the strengths of community-based Qur'anic learning, but different teachers and centres may use different approaches. There is therefore a need to consider appropriate training and minimum teaching standards while preserving the grassroots character of Rumah Ngaji. Finally, there is presently no publicly available comprehensive database combining information concerning centres, teachers and learners. A preliminary mapping study is therefore necessary to establish a baseline for further research.

1.4 Research Objectives

With that in mind, this paper has two objectives:

1. To explore the motivations behind the establishment of and participation in Rumah Ngaji in Sarawak.
2. To map the historical, geographical and institutional development of Rumah Ngaji across Sarawak.

1.5 Research Questions

Consequently, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. What motivations underpin the establishment of and participation in Rumah Ngaji in Sarawak?
2. How has Rumah Ngaji developed historically, geographically and institutionally across Sarawak?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Qur'anic Literacy and Lifelong Learning

Qur'anic education should not necessarily end during childhood. Adults may return to Qur'anic learning for many reasons, including improving recitation, correcting *tajwid*, increasing religious knowledge and strengthening their relationship with the Qur'an. Wan A. Halim, Abdul Manaf and Abd Ghani (2024) found that adult Qur'anic learners may continue to experience difficulties in correctly pronouncing Qur'anic letters. Their findings demonstrate the continuing importance of effective teaching for adult learners. Daud et al. (2026) similarly conceptualise Qur'anic literacy as lifelong learning and highlight the importance of motivation, teacher leadership and supportive learning environments. These studies provide support for community programmes such as Rumah Ngaji, which allow learners of different ages to continue Qur'anic education outside formal school environments.

2.2 From Reading to Understanding and Practice

Rumah Ngaji emphasises the principle of *Baca, Faham dan Amal.* This philosophy means that Qur'anic learning should ideally progress from reading towards understanding and practice. A similar perspective is presented by Rozani et al. (2026), who propose the integration of *tilawah*, *tadabbur* and *amal* in Qur'anic education.

The learning process may therefore be understood as:



Figure 1 Qur'anic Learning Process

This broader approach is important because successful Qur'anic education should not necessarily be evaluated solely according to the ability to recite.

2.3 Community-Based Qur'anic Education

Community learning provides several advantages. Classes can be located close to learners and can make use of existing facilities. Small classes can also create stronger relationships between teachers and learners. Historically, this approach was already common in Sarawak. Abdul Mutalib (2009) documents Qur'anic teaching in Tok Guru's homes, while Rambli et al. (2020) provide similar evidence of teachers conducting Qur'an classes within homes, mosques and surau. The contemporary Rumah Ngaji model therefore represents continuity with this earlier tradition. The main difference is that Rumah Ngaji connects local learning spaces with a broader network and common educational identity.

2.4 Motivation and Community Participation

Participation in Rumah Ngaji is generally voluntary. Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory provides a useful explanation for this motivation. They identify three psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness.

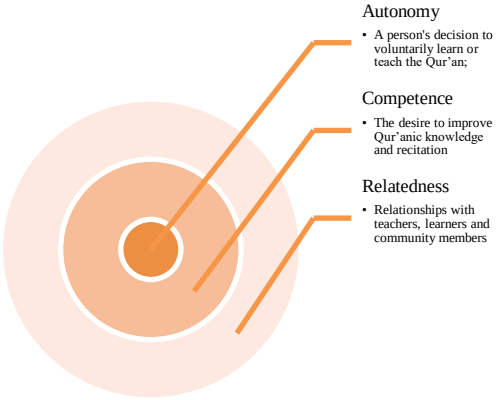

Figure 2 Self-Determination Theory and Motivation to Participate in Rumah Ngaji

Within Rumah Ngaji: autonomy may relate to a person's decision to voluntarily learn or teach the Qur'an; competence may relate to the desire to improve Qur'anic knowledge and recitation; and relatedness may emerge through relationships with teachers, learners and community members. For volunteer teachers and organisers, religious commitment and service to the community may provide additional motivation.

3. Methodology

This preliminary study adopts a documentary research and mapping approach. Documentary analysis is suitable for examining historical and institutional developments when information is distributed across different forms of records (Bowen, 2009). The study utilizes desktop research. Data is collected from academic journal articles; conference papers; government publications; Majlis Islam Sarawak records; Pustaka Negeri Sarawak publications; newspaper reports; institutional announcements; and publicly available Rumah Ngaji records. Qualitative analysis is employed to uncover the historical roots of community Qur'anic learning but focuses particularly upon the development of Rumah Ngaji from approximately 2015 to 2026. Documents were examined for evidence relating to motivation, establishment of centres, number and location of centres, learning spaces, partnerships, teachers, community participation, geographical expansion, and institutional coordination. The information was analysed thematically and organised chronologically. Where possible, information from different sources was compared to improve reliability. This study does not claim to provide a complete census of all Rumah Ngaji because a verified historical database is presently unavailable. The findings should therefore be regarded as preliminary.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Community Qur'anic Learning Predates Rumah Ngaji

The first finding is that community-based Qur'anic learning has deep historical roots in Sarawak. Historical studies show that Qur'an classes were traditionally conducted in the homes of Tok Guru, mosques and surau (Abdul Mutalib, 2009). Rambli et al. (2020) similarly describe Qur'anic teaching through individual teachers and community spaces.

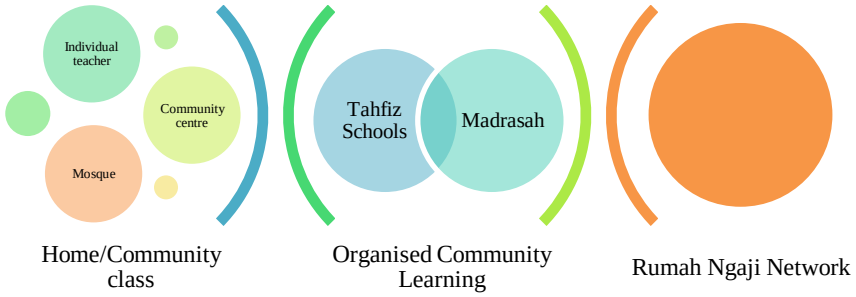

Figure 3 Organic Development of Qur'anic Learning in Sarawak

Rumah Ngaji therefore did not introduce the concept of teaching the Qur'an within homes. Rather, it provides a contemporary structure that connects and gives visibility to a longstanding practice. This is an important distinction. The development can be simplified as Individual teacher → Home/community Qur'an class → Organised community learning → Rumah Ngaji network.

4.2 Rumah Ngaji Sarawak Emerged as an Organised Network

The documentary evidence indicates that Rumah Ngaji Sarawak became identifiable as an organised movement around 2015. By 2018, 25 Rumah Ngaji were reported in Sarawak (Utusan Borneo, 2018). The movement was also collaborating with JAIS, Islamic Information Centre, Pustaka Negeri Sarawak and other organisations in Qur'an-centred programmes such as World #QuranHour. This provides evidence that Rumah Ngaji had developed beyond isolated individual classes towards an organised community network. In March 2026, MIS reported 32 registered Rumah Ngaji across Sarawak, including centres in Lawas and Limbang (Unit Komunikasi Awam Sarawak, 2026). MIS also confirmed that Rumah Ngaji operate through different types of premises, including private residences, mosques and surau. This demonstrates continuity between traditional home-based Qur'anic learning and the modern Rumah Ngaji model.

4.3 Motivation Centres on Qur'anic Engagement and Community Service

The documentary evidence suggests several major motivations behind Rumah Ngaji. The first is the desire to strengthen Qur'anic literacy. The second is to encourage participants not merely to read the Qur'an but also to understand and practise its teachings. The third is to improve access to Qur'anic learning. The fourth is community service. The movement relies considerably upon teachers, organisers and volunteers willing to contribute their knowledge and time. Finally, Rumah Ngaji creates opportunities for social relationships and community participation through Qur'anic learning. These findings correspond with the concepts of competence and relatedness proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000).

4.4 Institutional Collaboration Has Increased

Another important development is increasing collaboration between community initiatives and formal institutions. Rumah Ngaji Sarawak has participated in programmes involving organisations such as Majlis Islam Sarawak, Pustaka Negeri Sarawak, Islamic Information Centre, JAIS, mosques, community organisations, and educational institutions. This suggests that Rumah Ngaji should not be understood solely as an independent grassroots movement. Instead, its contemporary development increasingly reflects a grassroots–institutional partnership.

4.5 Darul Hana Quranic Centre Represents a New Development

The establishment of the Darul Hana Quranic Centre under MIS represents another stage in Sarawak's Qur'anic education development.

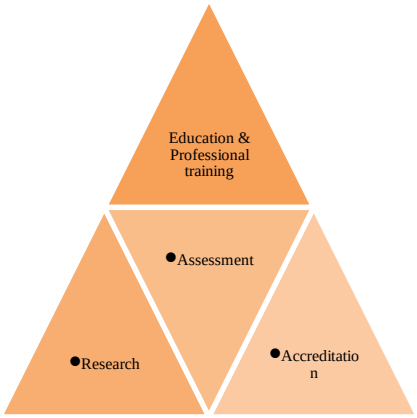

Figure 4 Responsibilities of Darul Hana Quranic Centre

Official information indicates that DHQC has responsibilities relating to Qur'anic education, professional training, research, assessment, and accreditation. MIS has also expressed the intention of coordinating Qur'an teachers throughout Sarawak through a more integrated platform. This is significant because community Qur'anic learning has historically been highly decentralised. DHQC therefore provides an opportunity to improve coordination while continuing to support community-based initiatives such as Rumah Ngaji.



Figure 5 Evolution of Qur'anic Learning in Sarawak

The development can be viewed as individual/community learning > Rumah Ngaji network > institutional partnerships > state-level coordination through MIS/DHQC.

4.6 Geographical Coverage Remains an Important Issue

Although the number of registered Rumah Ngaji has increased, the available evidence does not show whether learning opportunities are distributed equally throughout Sarawak. Twenty-five centres in 2018 and 32 registered centres in 2026 indicate continued development, but total numbers do not necessarily demonstrate equitable access (Utusan Borneo, 2018; Unit Komunikasi Awam Sarawak, 2026). Some urban or well-connected areas may contain several centres while rural or interior communities may have fewer opportunities. This is important because earlier research has identified shortages of Qur'an teachers in some interior communities in Sarawak (Rambli et al., 2020).

Future expansion should therefore consider not merely:

How many Rumah Ngaji are there?

but also:

Where are they located and which communities remain underserved?

5. Recommendations

5.1 Improve Statewide Coordination

The various organisations involved in Qur'anic education should strengthen coordination. Possible partners include MIS, DHQC, Rumah Ngaji Sarawak, JAIS, mosques, surau, Islamic Information Centre, educational institutions and community organisations. Coordination is important because an entirely decentralised approach may result in repeated activities within well-served communities while other areas remain overlooked. A coordinated approach can identify gaps and direct resources towards underserved areas.

5.2 Map Underserved Areas

A statewide map of Qur'anic learning facilities should be developed. The mapping should identify Rumah Ngaji, other community Qur'an classes, available Qur'an teachers, learner populations, and areas without sufficient access. Geographical mapping would allow decision makers to determine where new Rumah Ngaji or additional teachers are most needed.

5.3 Develop Minimum Teaching Standards

Community-based flexibility should be maintained, but minimum teaching standards are important. A common basic framework could cover Qur'anic recitation, makhraj, tajwid, teaching methodology, learner progression, assessment; and teaching ethics.

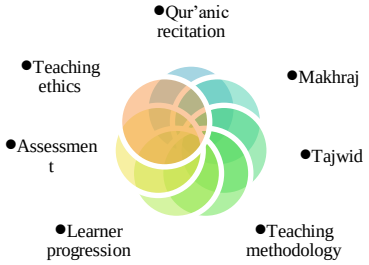

Figure 6 Minimum Teaching Standards for Rumah Ngaji

Standardisation should not mean that every centre must operate identically. Rather, it should ensure that learners receive an acceptable minimum quality of Qur'anic instruction regardless of where they study.

5.4 Provide Continuous Training for Qur'an Teachers

Qur'an teachers should have access to regular training. Training may include *tajwid* and recitation, teaching methodology, adult learning, teaching children, teaching new Muslims, *tadabbur*, learner assessment, and digital teaching:

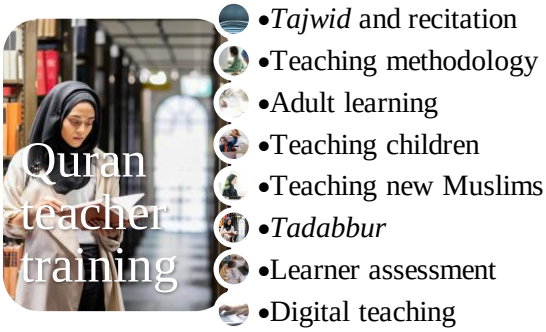

Figure 7 Training Needs for Quran Teachers

DHQC could potentially coordinate teacher-development programmes because training and professional development fall within its stated functions.

5.5 Evaluate Teaching and Learning Performance

Training should be accompanied by appropriate evaluation. Teacher evaluation should be developmental rather than punitive. Possible areas include Qur'anic competency, teaching skills, learner engagement, student progression and professional development:

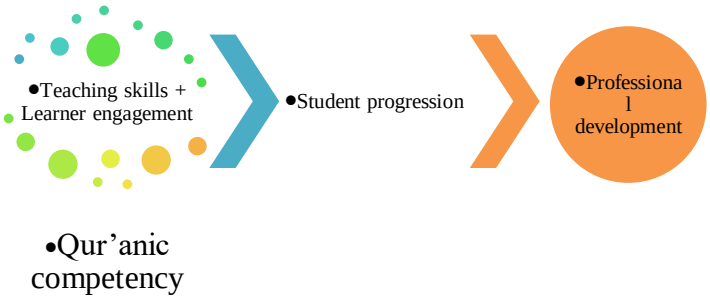

Figure 8 Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Performance

Learners should also be assessed periodically so that programmes can determine whether participants are improving. Evaluation would allow Rumah Ngaji to move beyond measuring only the number of programmes or participants towards measuring actual learning outcomes.

5.6 Develop a Central Database

A statewide database should collect basic information concerning centres, teachers and learners. Centre, teacher and learners could include the following information:

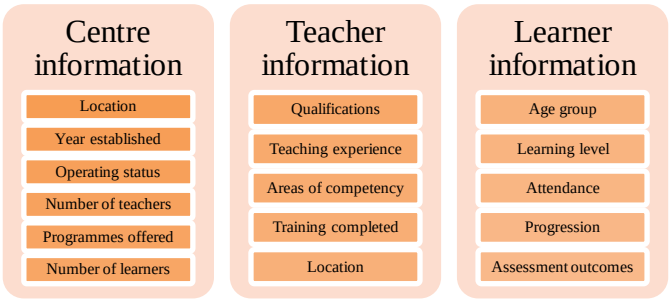

Figure 9 Database Information for Better Coordination

The database would enable better planning and help identify areas where teachers or learning opportunities are insufficient. Appropriate privacy and data-protection requirements should be observed.

6. Conclusion

This preliminary study shows that Rumah Ngaji is part of a much longer history of community-based Qur'anic learning in Sarawak. Historical literature demonstrates that Qur'an classes were traditionally conducted by individual teachers in homes, mosques and surau. Community-based Qur'anic education therefore existed long before the establishment of the contemporary Rumah Ngaji movement. Rumah Ngaji's main contribution is not the introduction of home-based Qur'an classes but the organisation and networking of an established community tradition. The documentary evidence indicates that Rumah Ngaji Sarawak developed as an identifiable movement around 2015. Twenty-five centres were reported by 2018, while MIS reported 32 registered Rumah Ngaji in 2026 (Utusan Borneo, 2018; Unit Komunikasi Awam Sarawak, 2026). The movement has also developed increasingly close relationships with public, Islamic and community institutions. The establishment of Darul Hana Quranic Centre represents another significant development by creating the possibility of more systematic statewide coordination, teacher development, assessment and quality assurance. Nevertheless, several issues require further attention. Expansion alone does not guarantee equal geographical access. Without effective coordination, some communities may remain underserved. Likewise, community flexibility should be supported by minimum teaching standards, appropriate teacher training and mechanisms for evaluating teaching and learning outcomes. A comprehensive database containing information on centres, teachers and learners would also improve future planning. The future development of Rumah Ngaji should therefore seek to maintain its grassroots character while strengthening coordination, quality and geographical inclusion. Ultimately, the aim should not simply be to increase the number of Rumah Ngaji, but to ensure that accessible and quality Qur'anic learning is available to communities throughout Sarawak.

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