

“The Paradox of Early Childhood Qur’anic Education: A Critical Analysis of Tahfidz Practices Based on the Tabarok Method and Islamic Psychology Perspective A Case Study at Pondok El-Zahro, Lamongan”

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the paradoxes of Qur’anic education for early childhood through the practice of Qur’an memorization (tahfidz) at El-Zahro Institute, Lamongan, with a particular focus on the implementation of the Tabarok (al-Labudi) method viewed from the perspective of Islamic psychology. The growing trend of tahfidz programs among children reflects the enthusiasm of Muslim communities toward religious education; however, it simultaneously generates pedagogical and psychological challenges. Theoretically, the age of 0–7 years is a developmental stage characterized by playfulness and the formation of basic emotions, requiring educational approaches that align with children’s developmental readiness. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving teachers, parents, and institutional administrators. Data analysis was conducted thematically and reflectively to identify the gap between the ideal concept of the Tabarok method which emphasizes the blessings (tabarok) of early memorization and the psychopedagogical realities of children’s learning experiences. The findings reveal that tahfidz practice at El-Zahro tends to prioritize the quantity of memorization over students’ cognitive, emotional, and spiritual readiness. A paradox emerges when the value of tabarok shifts into academic pressure that neglects children’s psychological well-being. This study recommends a more integrative and compassion-based (rahmah) model of Qur’anic education that

balances spiritual values, psychological readiness, and play-based learning approaches as an effective strategy for internalizing Qur'anic values in early childhood.

Keywords

Qur'anic Education Early
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Islamic Psychology

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Introduction

While Over the past decade, Indonesia has witnessed a significant socio-religious phenomenon marked by the rapid growth of Qur'anic education for early childhood [1]

This phenomenon has emerged not only in urban areas but has also expanded into rural regions, indicating a strong religious dynamic within Muslim communities. This trend is evident from the proliferation of children's tahfidz institutions offering Qur'an memorization programs from preschool to elementary school levels.[2] In the context of contemporary socio-religious life, this development reflects a profound spiritual need among communities facing the challenges of modernity, globalization, and digital disruption. In many Islamic educational institutions, activities such as one day one ayat, tahfidz camps, and daily juz 'amma memorization targets have become routine practices and indicators of religious

educational success. The spiritual aspirations of parents to raise a Qur'anic generation children who are emotionally and cognitively connected to the Qur'an serve as a major driving force behind this trend[3]. At the same time, many communities perceive memorization achievements as symbols of piety and social prestige. This phenomenon illustrates the emergence of a new form of religious consciousness in the digital era, in which religious education functions not only as a transmission of spiritual values but also as a form of social identity amid the modernization of values.[4] However, beneath this spiritual enthusiasm lies a paradox that requires critical examination. Previous studies by Akhyar and Ningsih (2023) show that early childhood tahfidz practices in many institutions tend to be oriented toward the quantity of memorization rather than the depth of meaning. Memorization is often carried out mechanically through repetitive methods without contextual understanding of the moral and spiritual messages embedded in Qur'anic verses [5]. As a result, Qur'anic values that are intended to shape behavior and spiritual awareness among children are not fully internalized. Qur'anic education, which ideally nurtures faith, morality, and love for the Qur'an, risks being reduced to merely cognitive and ritualistic activities.[6] This phenomenon is clearly visible in the practices of Pondok El-Zahro Lamongan, an early childhood tahfidz institution known for applying the Tabarok (al- Labudi) method. This method emphasizes tabarruk (seeking blessings) through intensive repetition, strict discipline, and a rigorous daily tasmi' system.[7] (Preliminary observations show that most students are able to complete memorization within a relatively short time. However, behind these achievements lie affective and spiritual gaps: some students exhibit emotional fatigue, lack inner tranquility, and have limited understanding of the verses they memorize.[8] Teachers and parents often measure educational success based solely on the number of verses memorized rather than the depth of Qur'anic values embodied within the child. This reveals a dissonance between the ideal goal of Qur'anic education namely, the formation of a holistic Qur'anic personality and the empirical reality that tends to prioritize narrow cognitive outcomes.[9] From the perspective of Islamic psychology, Qur'anic education should be integrative, considering the balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects.[10] Early childhood represents a sensitive stage of spiritual development in which religious experiences must be accompanied by emotional and affective modeling. The process of memorizing the Qur'an should not only cultivate the ability to recall the text but should also provide a nurturing spiritual experience, foster love for the Qur'an, and build an awareness of life's purpose oriented toward God.[11] Within the theoretical framework of religious development, children's spiritual fitrah becomes a fundamental starting point in nurturing spirituality, making emotional readiness, environmental context, and teacher role

modeling (murabbi) crucial components in Qur'anic education[12]. However, empirical reality shows that the Tabarok method often presents a reductionist approach using memorization as the primary indicator of success without adequately considering children's psychological readiness. This creates a gap between the holistic theoretical ideals of Qur'anic education and fragmentary empirical practices. Therefore, there is a need for a new approach that integrates traditional methods such as Tabarok with the principles of Islamic psychology, ensuring that tahfidz education does not lose its spiritual and humanistic dimensions[13] Based on these phenomena and theoretical considerations, this study is crucial for critically analyzing the practice of Qur'anic memorization using the Tabarok method at Pondok El-Zahro Lamongan through the lens of Islamic psychology [14]. The main focus is to understand how the internalization of Qur'anic values occurs within the context of early childhood tahfidz education and how children's spiritual and emotional experiences are shaped within a structured and disciplined learning environment [15]. Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute conceptually to the development of a more integrative model of Qur'anic education that combines memorization, interpretation, and spiritual character formation.[16] Practically, the findings may serve as a foundation for Islamic educational institutions in designing more humane tahfidz curricula that are adaptive to children's developmental psychology and oriented toward the formation of holistic Qur'anic character. In this regard, the study not only bridges the gap between the ideal and actual practice of Qur'anic education but also offers new directions for developing contextual Islamic education in the era of digitalization and spiritual modernity. [17]

Research Methods

To understand this phenomenon comprehensively, this study employs the following methodological components:

1. Research Approach: This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, which enables the researcher to capture in detail how the scholarly sanad tradition is practiced, negotiated, and even reconstructed within the context of pesantren digitalization.
2. Research Design: A case study design is employed to examine the digitalization of pesantren as a specific phenomenon situated within a particular social and cultural context. Through this design, the dynamics of technological integration such as the use of digital kitab kuning applications, video-based learning platforms, and online talaqqī systems can be analyzed as realities that influence the authority and quality of sanad transmission.
3. Data Sources: The study utilizes two main categories of data: a. Primary Data, consisting of in-depth interviews with kiai, teachers (ustādz/ustādzah), and students (santri); as well as

observations of digital learning practices within the pesantren environment. b. Secondary Data, including curriculum documents, virtual learning archives, and scholarly references related to sanad, pesantren digitalization, and Islamic scholarly authority.

4. Data Collection Techniques: Several data collection techniques were employed, including: a. Observation, to directly examine how talaqqī, baḥts al-masā'il, and sorogan practices adapt to digital formats. b. Interviews, conducted systematically to explore the kiai's scholarly authority and students' perceptions of sanad legitimacy within digital media. c. Documentation, through the collection of various relevant documents to strengthen interpretations using historical and administrative data.

5. Data Analysis Techniques: After data collection, analysis was conducted by categorizing findings into major themes such as scholarly authority, sanad legitimacy, technological mediation, and pedagogical transformation within the pesantren. The analysis followed a layered approach to identify patterns illustrating how digitalization affects the continuity of sanad: whether it enhances access and Results and Discussions

The *Results* section should be clear and concise, presenting the findings in a logical sequence. Results must be interpreted in the context of the literature previously reviewed. Avoid repeating results in the *Discussion* section; instead, focus there on the interpretation and significance of the findings. A combined *Results* and *Discussion* section is acceptable and often recommended for coherence.

Results And Discussion

This study reveals that Qur'anic education for early childhood, particularly in tahfidz-oriented programs, continues to be dominated by formalistic approaches that emphasize quantitative achievement. Qur'an memorization is conducted intensively and systematically, with predetermined targets that must be reached within specific time frames. Repetitive recitation becomes the primary indicator of success, while the dimensions of meaning-making and spiritual internalization are often marginalized. Based on direct classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis conducted at El-Zahro Islamic Boarding School, Lamongan, this study identifies four key findings that illuminate the dynamics of early childhood Qur'anic memorization practices. These findings reveal tensions between the ideal goals of Qur'anic education and its practical implementation, while also illustrating how teachers, parents, and children negotiate cognitive, affective, and spiritual expectations within the learning process. The following

sections present the empirical findings alongside theoretical analyses to clarify the meaning of the phenomena observed in the field.

1. The Paradox between the Ideals and Realities of Qur'anic Education

Classroom observations show that tahfidz learning predominantly centers on repetitive memorization, quantitative target-setting, and daily recitations used as assessment indicators. Interviews with teachers reveal that memorization output is often viewed as the primary indicator of success, whereas the dimensions of meaning-making, emotional expression, and spiritual internalization remain secondary. Curriculum documents support this finding by showing an emphasis on the quantity of memorized verses rather than depth of understanding. Teachers and parents acknowledge that fast memorization is perceived as an achievement, prompting children to pursue predetermined targets despite varying levels of psychological readiness. This demonstrates a paradox between the holistic ideals of Qur'anic education which should foster character formation and the practice in the field, which disproportionately emphasizes cognitive elements. From a developmental psychology perspective, both Piaget and Vygotsky assert that young children learn more effectively through concrete experiences, emotional interactions, and moral habituation rather than through repetitive and pressure-driven activities. From an Islamic psychology standpoint, the imbalance between memorization and meaning-making inhibits tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul) and weakens spiritual development aligned with children's innate disposition (fitrah). This finding aligns with Wardati et al. (2024), who argue that effective Qur'anic education integrates cognitive (memorization), affective (love, sincerity, emotional bonding), and spiritual (divine awareness and understanding of meaning) dimensions. Thus, the study highlights a significant gap between theory and practice, wherein early childhood Qur'anic education remains cognitively heavy but affectively and spiritually light.

2 Pedagogical Dilemmas and Children's Psychological Burdens

Interviews with teachers reveal ongoing dilemmas between: a. Meeting institutional memorization targets, and b. Ensuring children's emotional comfort and well-being. Classroom observations show signs of fatigue, disengagement, and reluctance among children who are required to repeat verses intensively. Some children appear distressed when asked to redo specific verses, while interviews with parents confirm episodes of frustration when children fail to meet daily targets. Excessive emphasis on repetitive memorization without activity variation contributes to psychological strain in early childhood, consistent with Tarmilia et al. (2022). According to Erikson's

developmental theory, such pressures may impede the development of confidence and evoke fear of failure. The “drill and repeat” approach for young learners contradicts evidence-based play-based pedagogies, which enhance emotional engagement, social motivation, and value comprehension. In Islamic psychology, excessive psychological pressure may obstruct the growth of spiritual sensitivity (*ruhaniyyah*) and weaken the child’s emotional bond with the Qur’an. These observations indicate the need for a more humanistic pedagogical approach one that balances memorization goals with the mental and spiritual well-being of children.

3 Internalization of Qur’anic Values through Teacher Exemplification

Observations and interviews show that teachers at El-Zahro display *uswah* (role modeling) through discipline, patience, composure in guiding memorization, and consistent Qur’an reading in front of the children. Children are seen mimicking the teachers’ sitting posture, recitation style, and seriousness during lessons. However, documentation and interviews suggest that such imitation is largely behavioral rather than conceptual. Without complementary activities such as storytelling, meaning-based discussions, or reflective exercises, the internalization of values remains fragile. This finding supports Bandura’s Social Cognitive Learning Theory, which posits that moral behavior develops largely through observational learning, yet meaningful internalization requires reflective processes like *tadabbur*. In Islamic psychology, the role of a *murabbi* is central in bridging imitation and spiritual consciousness. A *murabbi* does not merely demonstrate correct behavior but also facilitates meaning-making, provides emotional reinforcement, and guides children toward embodying Qur’anic values in their inner selves.

4 Memorization as a Path to Spirituality through Meaning-Making

The study finds that memorization can serve as a spiritual formation process when accompanied by meaning-making. Interviews with teachers reveal that when they explain the meaning of verses in a simple manner, children become more enthusiastic, memorize faster, and display behaviors that reflect the values conveyed. Observations further show that when children experience positive emotions such as pride after understanding the meaning of a verse memorization becomes a spiritually meaningful experience rather than a mechanical routine. Integrating *tilawah* (recitation), *tahfidz* (memorization), and *tadabbur* (reflection) produces a balanced approach that nurtures cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development. Theories on multiple intelligences (Gardner) and emotional intelligence (Goleman) reinforce the

importance of meaning and emotional engagement in children's learning processes. In Islamic psychology, understanding the meaning of verses is the primary gateway to moral awareness and divine consciousness. Without meaning-making, memorization risks becoming mere verbal repetition devoid of transformative spiritual power

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal four key dynamics in the practice of Qur'anic education for early childhood learners at El-zahro Islamic Boarding School, Lamongan.

1. There is a clear paradox between the ideals and realities of Qur'anic education. Ideally, early childhood Qur'anic education aims to cultivate love for the Qur'an, inner tranquility, and Qur'anic character. However, the actual practice remains dominated by quantitative orientations focused on achieving memorization targets, leaving aspects of meaning-making, affective development, and spiritual internalization underemphasized. This finding underscores the gap between the holistic vision of Qur'anic education and its implementation, which remains predominantly cognitively driven.

2. The study identifies pedagogical dilemmas that contribute to children's psychological burden. Teachers experience pressure to meet institutional memorization goals, while children's capacity to understand and internalize verses is often overlooked. Intensive and repetitive memorization patterns lead to boredom, anxiety, and fatigue among children, indicating the need for more humanistic, play-based, and developmentally appropriate approaches. These findings show that memorization demands do not always align with children's emotional and spiritual well-being.

3. Internalization of Qur'anic values is more effectively achieved through teacher exemplification. Children learn not only from verbal instruction but also from observing teachers who model patience, devotion, and sincerity. However, this imitative process does not fully foster children's self-awareness unless accompanied by emotional reinforcement and deeper meaning-making. This highlights the essential role of the murabbi as a spiritual guide who integrates memorization with moral and character formation.

4. Memorization can become a pathway to spiritual development when combined with meaning. When tahfidz is integrated with tadabbur, value reflection, and positive emotional experiences, memorization transforms from a mechanical activity into a process of moral and spiritual consciousness-building. Children not only memorize verses but also understand the embedded values of compassion, honesty, and sincerity. Overall, this study affirms that ideal Qur'anic education for early childhood requires the integration of

memorization, meaning-making, exemplary behavior, and psychological well-being. These findings provide direction for developing a more humane, spiritually grounded, and developmentally appropriate model of tahfidz for young learners..

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