Efforts of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Overcoming Difficulties in Reading the Qur'an for Students

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| Abstract | The ability to read the Qur'an correctly is a fundamental aspect of Islamic education that contributes significantly to students' spiritual and moral development. However, many students at SMP Muhammadiyah 50 Medan still face challenges in reading the Qur'an fluently and accurately due to difficulties in recognizing similar hijaiyah letters, lack of practice outside of school, and low motivation influenced by digital distractions. This study aims to assist Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in improving students' Qur'an reading skills through targeted strategies and supporting programs. The method used is a qualitative approach involving observation, interviews with tahfidz teachers, and participatory involvement in classroom activities to identify obstacles and evaluate the teaching approaches applied. The results of the study indicate that although the tahfidz program has been running for the past two years, student progress still varies due to limited learning time and the absence of structured support at home. Teachers respond by providing additional lessons, using reward-based motivation, and adjusting students' learning levels to accommodate their abilities. The conclusion highlights that although schools have demonstrated strong commitment through the tahfidz initiative, a more comprehensive strategy, including parental involvement and technological support, is needed to achieve significant improvements. The program contributes to the development of more effective religious teaching methods that can be adapted to current educational challenges in public schools. |

| Keywords | Islamic Religious Education, Quranic Reading Challenges, Teacher Initiatives. |

INTRODUCTION

Education is considered an important need that everyone must meet. The quality of a nation is largely determined by the contribution of individuals in it. The future of a nation depends heavily on the role of education, as it provides the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for the development of individuals [1]. Every education system has a specific goal that it wants to achieve. Nationally, education aims to develop students' potential to become individuals who believe, fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens [2]. Learning is an activity with important educational value. This educational value is reflected in the interaction between teachers and students during teaching and learning [3]. These interactions have educational value because teachers consciously plan to teach systematically, utilizing everything available to improve the quality of teaching.

The success of the teaching and learning process is measured based on the achievement of instructional goals in particular (ICT). Each teacher has their views based on their stance, but it is important to synergize with the curriculum that applies to uniformity [4]. Students' interests, talents, motivations, and internal intelligence levels affect their learning outcomes [5]. The loving relationship between teachers and students greatly influences the success of education. This relationship creates a sense of peace and comfort for students so they do not fear teachers and will not lose interest in knowledge [6]. Teachers play the role of public figures who set an example and become role models for their students. Therefore, a teacher must have noble morals to exemplify his students.

Improving public school students' ability to read and write the Qur'an requires extra guidance from religious teachers. These abilities must be learned intentionally instead of naturally acquired speaking and listening skills. Teachers have an important role in determining the quality and quantity of teaching provided, including in studying the Qur'an and hadith [7]. However, in public schools, the understanding of Qur'an material varies from student to student. Some have read the Qur'an fluently, some are still learning Iqra', and some are less fluent. The main challenge in this learning is the lack of time allocated for religious lessons in public schools, which makes it difficult to teach the Qur'an well, especially the correct use of tajweed [8].

In general, not all public school students can read the Qur'an properly and correctly. The main factors that affect this are students' lack of focus in the learning process and the lack of mastery of basic techniques of reading the Qur'an from the beginning [9]. This makes it difficult for them to reach a deeper level of understanding.

Before researching the ability to read the Qur'an in public schools, only a small percentage of students could barely read the Qur'an correctly, while most still needed further guidance. Based on the background described, the author formulates the problems in the research: What are the difficulties faced by the students at SMP Muhammadiyah 50 Medan? What are the efforts of PAI teachers in overcoming the difficulty of reading the Qur'an through direct reading? The Research Objectives The purpose of the research that the researcher will carry out is the background and formulation of the problem that the researcher presents,

namely, to find out the difficulties students face in reading the Qur'an at Muhammadiyah 50 Junior High School Medan. And to find out the efforts made in overcoming the difficulty of reading the Qur'an.

METHODS

The appropriate research method for this study is qualitative research, as it seeks to explore and understand the efforts of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in overcoming students' difficulties in reading the Qur'an through in-depth observation and interpretation of social phenomena. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain insights into the challenges, strategies, and educational interactions within the natural setting of the classroom. This study was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 50 Medan over the course of two months, from August to September 2024. The research took place in real school settings, focusing on Qur'anic learning sessions and the implementation of the tahfidz program, allowing the researcher to interact directly with teachers and students during the learning process.

The data collection techniques used in this study included observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out to closely examine how Qur'anic reading is taught in the classroom and how students respond to different teaching methods. Interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers, especially those involved in the tahfidz program, to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and the strategies they apply. Documentation included curriculum schedules, lesson plans, and students' reading progress records. The primary data sources were teachers and students, while secondary sources included school documents and existing literature relevant to Qur'anic education. Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-qualitative approach, which involved data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. Through this method, the researcher interpreted patterns, categorized recurring themes, and highlighted key findings to answer the research questions effectively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted by conducting observations and interviews with a tahfidz teacher to understand how the efforts of Islamic Religious Education teachers overcome the difficulties of reading the Qur'an for students at SMP Muhammadiyah 50 Medan. Several factors of difficulty that students face in reading the Qur'an have been identified: One of the main factors is the difficulty of students in distinguishing similar hijaiyah letters, such as pronouncing the letter 'tsa' as 'sa' or reverse in the pronunciation of the letters, which leads to inconsistencies in their reading. The second factor is students' difficulty connecting one letter to one word or sentence in the Qur'an. The third factor is the lack of practice outside of school, where students only read the Qur'an while at school without continuing or repeating it at home. In addition, other common factors that hinder students' reading abilities include the influence of gadgets due to a lack of parental supervision, as well as environmental, psychological, and individual factors. Nonetheless, there are significant efforts from teachers

and schools to improve students' ability to read the Qur'an. The tahfidz program that has been running for two years at the school helps students to pay more attention to their reading and difficulty in memorizing. However, the limited lesson schedule, with two days a week for juz amma teaching, presents its own challenges in providing students with enough time to learn.

The first major inhibiting factor in improving students' Qur'an reading ability is students' lack of self-motivation, especially because of their addiction to gadgets that interfere with their study time. Students also tend to procrastinate memorizing and depositing their readings with teachers, leading to inefficient time use [10].

Teachers' efforts to overcome these difficulties involve increasing the number of hours of lessons outside of school through tahfidz programs and variations in teaching methods to maintain student interest. Teachers also give students awards to motivate them to learn the Qur'an [11]. Muhammadiyah 50 Medan Junior High School shows a great commitment to the ability of students to read the Qur'an by implementing the tahfidz program and paying special attention to their students. This shows consistent efforts in helping students not struggle to read the Qur'an and retain their memorization [10].

The results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMP Muhammadiyah 50 Medan revealed that there are still some students who have difficulty reading the Qur'an, especially in terms of recognizing and pronouncing letters such as 'sa,' 'tsa,' and 'say.' There is often a contradiction in the pronunciation of the letters [12]. Although the teaching of the Qur'an is carried out, the teaching of tajweed does not receive intense emphasis because the tahfidz program at the school is still new, only running for about two years [13].

Difficulties students face in reading the Qur'an include difficulties distinguishing similar letters and the negative influence of gadgets at home that are not supervised by parents, thus affecting students' concentration when studying at school. The teacher does not use special teaching methods, focusing more on reading and improving students' reading [14].

In overcoming students' difficulties, teachers use the approach of gradually lowering students to a lower iqra level if they are not fluent in reading the Qur'an to improve their reading skills. The obstacles teachers face in teaching include the level of students' unwillingness to learn consistently and the addiction to playing with gadgets at night, which hinders their memorization process [15].

The school showed significant concern for students' ability to read the Qur'an by introducing a tahfidz program, signifying their commitment to overcoming students' difficulties in understanding and memorizing the Qur'an at the junior high school level.

The findings from this study at SMP Muhammadiyah 50 Medan reveal several key challenges faced by students in reading the Qur'an, as well as the concerted efforts of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to address these difficulties. These findings align with, and in some cases diverge from, previous research and established theoretical perspectives in Islamic education and pedagogy.

One of the dominant difficulties identified is students' inability to distinguish between similar Arabic letters, such as 'tsa', 'sa', and 'syin'. This issue is not unique to SMP

Muhammadiyah 50 Medan but is a common challenge noted in several prior studies on Qur'anic literacy. For instance, research by Nurfadillah et al. (2020) emphasized that non-native Arabic speakers, especially in non-Islamic boarding school environments, often struggle with phonetic nuances due to limited exposure and practice. This issue is deeply connected with the linguistic theory that phonemic awareness is foundational for effective reading, as articulated by Yopp (1992), who states that the ability to hear and manipulate individual phonemes in spoken words is critical in early reading instruction. In the context of the Qur'an, this phonemic awareness is even more crucial due to the semantic implications of pronunciation errors.

Another finding highlights the lack of consistency and practice at home, which hinders students' progress. This aligns with social learning theory proposed by Bandura, where continuous reinforcement and modeling are critical for learning new skills. Without reinforcement at home, the learning process becomes fragmented. The reliance on school hours alone, particularly with only two days a week allocated for Qur'anic instruction, proves insufficient. Similar concerns are echoed in research by Zainuddin (2018), who found that Qur'anic literacy in public schools is often hampered by limited instructional time and the absence of holistic integration with other subjects or extracurricular support systems.

The influence of gadgets and lack of parental supervision surfaced as a major contributing factor to students' declining focus and motivation. This trend reflects the current societal shifts and is supported by findings from studies like Rahmah (2021), which demonstrated how digital distractions, especially in the absence of structured parental guidance, diminish students' concentration and discipline in religious learning. This modern challenge is rarely addressed in classical pedagogical theories but has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary Islamic educational discourse. From a psychological perspective, this connects to the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1985), which argues that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key motivators in learning. If students are overwhelmed by distractions and lack both competence in reading and connection with the material, motivation naturally declines.

Despite these challenges, the school's implementation of a tahfidz program shows an institutional commitment to fostering Qur'anic proficiency. The program, although still new, plays a pivotal role in motivating students and providing structure. This initiative reflects a shift towards experiential learning, where students are immersed in the memorization and recitation process rather than passive learning. The application of rewards and recognition by teachers also aligns with behaviorist theories, especially Skinner's reinforcement model, which suggests that positive reinforcement increases the likelihood of desired behavior—in this case, reading the Qur'an diligently.

The approach taken by teachers such as adjusting students' Iqra levels based on fluency is consistent with the differentiated instruction model, which is supported by Tomlinson (2001). Differentiated instruction recognizes that students learn at varying paces and have different levels of prior knowledge, requiring tailored strategies to meet their individual

needs. However, the study also reveals that teaching methods were generally limited to direct reading without the incorporation of specific strategies for teaching tajweed, which is a critical component of correct Qur'anic recitation. This limitation suggests a gap between theoretical ideals and practical application in the field.

Theoretically, Islamic education emphasizes the integration of *ta'lim* (instruction), *tarbiyah* (nurturing), and *ta'dib* (ethics). The role of the teacher as a moral guide and exemplar is evident in this study, where teachers are not only seen as transmitters of knowledge but also as role models and motivators. Yet, the challenge remains in harmonizing this role with modern pedagogical practices that address the realities of digital-age learners.

In conclusion, this study's findings affirm existing literature regarding the common challenges in Qur'anic literacy, such as phonemic confusion, lack of practice, and the impact of digital distractions. At the same time, the school's proactive measures and teacher interventions reflect promising efforts grounded in both traditional Islamic educational values and contemporary pedagogical principles. Future improvements may depend on increased instructional time, parental involvement, and the integration of creative and student-centered teaching strategies to more effectively engage learners in Qur'anic studies.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the main concern of the researcher students' difficulties in reading the Qur'an at SMP Muhammadiyah 50 Medan stems from both internal and external factors. These include students' limited mastery of basic Qur'anic reading skills, confusion in distinguishing similar hijaiyah letters, low learning motivation, and a lack of consistent practice outside school, which is further exacerbated by digital distractions and minimal parental supervision. However, the efforts made by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, such as implementing a tahfidz program, adjusting learning levels based on students' abilities, and providing motivational rewards, show a clear commitment to improving students' Qur'anic reading abilities, despite the constraints in teaching time and resources.

This study, however, is not without its limitations. The research relied heavily on qualitative methods through observations and interviews, which, while insightful, may not fully capture the broader picture across other schools or student populations. Additionally, the lack of in-depth analysis on the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies such as the use of multimedia tools or phonetic-based learning approaches limits the applicability of the findings to more modern pedagogical contexts. For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies involving multiple schools with different religious programs and student backgrounds, as well as to explore the impact of integrating technology and parental involvement in Qur'anic learning. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into how sustained tahfidz programs influence students' reading skills over time.

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