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### An analysis of Qur'an reading difficulties among TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan students

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#### Abstract

The Qur'an serves as a universal guide for humanity and particularly for Muslims. In order to gain guidance from the Qur'an, one must begin by learning to read its verses correctly, then proceed to memorize, understand, implement, and propagate its teachings. Reading the Qur'an accurately according to the rules of tajwid is obligatory. However, not all Muslims are capable of reading the Qur'an properly. One effort to eliminate Qur'anic illiteracy, especially among children, is through the establishment of Qur'anic Education Parks (TPQ). Nonetheless, challenges in learning to read the Qur'an are frequently found in these institutions. This study aims to describe the reading difficulties experienced by students at TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan, identify the contributing factors, and explore the solutions implemented to overcome these issues. This research uses a qualitative approach in the form of a case study, employing interviews, observation, and documentation as data collection methods. The findings indicate that: (1) students face challenges in distinguishing letters with similar shapes and sounds, as well as in recognizing length variations in pronunciation; (2) contributing factors include lack of seriousness and motivation, a tendency to play, low concentration, and unconducive learning environments; (3) solutions implemented include classroom management, motivation building, parental involvement, Islamic storytelling sessions, and occasional outdoor classes.

**Keywords:** Qur'an; learning difficulty; student; TPQ

#### INTRODUCTION

The *Qur'an* is the holy book of Islam that holds a central position in the life of every Muslim. It is an eternal miracle revealed by Allah (SWT) to the final prophet, Muḥammad (SAW), as a testament to his prophethood. The *Qur'an* contains vast knowledge and serves as divine guidance to ensure that humanity remains on the straight path (*ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*) (Sidiq & Subhan, 2022).

Etymologically, the word *Qur'an* is derived from the Arabic root *qara'a-yaqra'u*, *qirā'atan*, *qur'ānan*, as referenced in the verse "*Inna 'alainā jam'ahu wa qur'ānahu fa idhā qara'nāhu fa-ttabi' qur'ānahu*" (Q.S. 75:17). Terminologically, the *Qur'an* is defined as the speech of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (SAW), the recitation of which constitutes an act of worship (Daflaini, 2022). A more comprehensive definition describes it as the miraculous word of Allah, revealed in Arabic, transmitted through *mutawātir* narration, compiled in the *muṣḥaf*, and reciting it brings spiritual merit (as-Suyūṭī, 2006).

There is no book in the world, apart from the *Qur'an*, that is read and memorized by millions of people across diverse ethnicities, languages, and cultures. This widespread devotion illustrates one of the miraculous aspects of the *Qur'an*, which

continues to this day. The intense attention given to its recitation, interpretation, context, and legal derivation underscores its exceptional status (Nirwana, 2016).

To derive guidance from the *Qur'an*, one must first be able to read its verses. This process begins with learning to read, followed by memorization, understanding, application, and finally dissemination of its teachings (Adlan, 2022). However, reading the *Qur'an* is not the same as reading other texts. It requires precise pronunciation based on the rules of *tajwīd*, the science governing correct Qur'anic recitation. Mastery of *tajwīd* is essential for reading the *Qur'an* accurately and reverently (Fatah, 2011).

Despite this importance, many Muslims remain unable to read the *Qur'an* properly. Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population, faces a significant *Qur'anic* illiteracy problem. While 87.3% of its 273 million citizens identify as Muslims, only about 35% can read the *Qur'an*, leaving approximately 149 million Muslims *Qur'an*-illiterate, especially in rural areas (Anshory et al., 2023).

To address this issue, *Taman Pendidikan al-Qur'an* (TPQ) were established as non-formal religious education centers focused on Qur'anic literacy among children. TPQs serve a vital role in disseminating Islamic values and character development for the younger generation (Nurchasanah et al., 2021). Nevertheless, TPQs often face various challenges: limited facilities, lack of parental engagement, student motivation issues, curriculum limitations, and most notably, learning difficulties among students.

Learning difficulties are defined as conditions in which learners are unable to study effectively due to internal or external obstacles, leading to failure in achieving learning objectives (Djamarah, 2011). Specifically, difficulties in reading the *Qur'an* occur when individuals face barriers that hinder their ability to recite it correctly.

There are four major contributing factors to learning difficulties: (1) internal factors such as low motivation, poor health, and ineffective study habits; (2) school-related factors including inadequate learning materials and teaching methods; (3) family-related factors such as socioeconomic challenges and lack of support; and (4) social factors including peer influence and time constraints (Hamalik, 2005).

Several studies have explored Qur'anic reading difficulties. Nalysta and Kosasih (2021) found that middle school students struggled with fluency, recognition of diacritical marks, breath control, and lack of confidence. Kartika and Alfurqan (2022) identified difficulties in understanding *makhārij al-hurūf* and *tajwīd* rules. Novyardi (2022) noted that even older students at TPQs continued to struggle with basic reading. Meanwhile, Oktarina (2022) emphasized the role of teacher creativity in overcoming these challenges through engaging methods and media.

Building on these studies, this research aims to investigate the reading difficulties experienced by students at TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan, Dukuh Watur, Srikaton Village, Jaken Subdistrict, Pati Regency, Central Java. The study addresses the following questions:

1. What Qur'an reading difficulties do students at TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan face?
2. What factors contribute to these difficulties?
3. What strategies have been implemented to overcome them?

## METHOD

This research employed a qualitative paradigm using a case study design. The data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and documentation. The sources of data consisted of informants, activities, and documents. Data collection was

conducted from Monday, December 15, 2024, to Thursday, December 18, 2024, from 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM Western Indonesian Time (WIB), at TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan, located in Dukuh Watur, Srikaton Village, RW 03 / RT 05, Jaken Subdistrict, Pati Regency, Central Java.

The informants consisted of two individuals, selected through prior consent: the head of TPQ, Mr. Mochammad Mochtar, and one TPQ teacher, Ustadzah Siti Muthmainnah. Observational data were obtained from a Qur'an reading session at TPQ on Monday, April 22, 2024, from 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM WIB. Documentation data included the Yanbu'a Qur'an reading modules, photos of learning activities, and other relevant documents related to the research topic.

To analyze the data, a qualitative descriptive method was applied using a procedural model that included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (verification). The goal of this approach was to systematically and objectively describe the conditions and learning difficulties observed at the research site.

To ensure the credibility of the data, a triangulation technique was employed. Methodological triangulation was conducted by cross-checking data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. This strategy helped validate the consistency and accuracy of the information gathered throughout the study (Djamarah, 2011; Hamalik, 2005).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted at TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan, located in Dukuh Watur, Srikaton Village, RW 03 / RT 05, Jaken Subdistrict, Pati Regency, Central Java. The research began on Monday, December 15, 2024, during the regular class hours from 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM WIB, after obtaining permission from the head of TPQ. The TPQ operates six days a week, excluding Fridays, from 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM WIB.

The research process began with a brief interview with Mr. Mochammad Mochtar, the head of TPQ, concerning the history of the institution, the number of students and teachers, and the curriculum. This was followed by an observation of the teaching and learning activities, and an in-depth interview with Ustadzah Siti Muthmainnah, one of the Qur'an instructors. The interview focused on the teaching methods used in Qur'an reading classes, the challenges students faced, and the strategies adopted to address them. Documentation of learning activities and teaching materials, such as the Yanbu'a modules, was also collected.

According to Mr. Mochtar, TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan was founded in 2018 on waqf land donated by a local benefactor. Its establishment was driven by the awareness among local religious teachers about the need for a structured and methodical Qur'an literacy program. Prior to the TPQ, Qur'an learning was informal and conducted at mushollas or teachers' homes. However, such methods were considered less systematic and lacked clear learning targets. The TPQ was thus formed to standardize the curriculum and methodology.

The institution has 10 teachers—2 male (*ustādh*) and 8 female (*ustādhah*)—all of whom were previously independent Qur'an tutors. Currently, TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan serves 50 students ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade. They are divided into three classes based on their progress with the Yanbu'a method: Class 1 (25 students) uses volumes I-IV, Class 2 (15 students) uses volumes V-VII, and Class 3 (10 students) focuses on direct Qur'an reading after completing Yanbu'a.

The curriculum centers on teaching students to recognize, pronounce, and fluently read *huruf hijā'iyyah* using the Yanbu'a method. This method, developed by KH. Ulil Albab Arwani of the Yanbu'ul Qur'an boarding school in Kudus, is structured in seven volumes and follows the *Rasm 'Uthmānī* script, incorporating authentic *waqf* and diacritical signs. The ultimate goal is to ensure students can read the Qur'an fluently and in accordance with *tajwīd* principles (Arwani et al., 2006; Fatah, 2011).

In addition to Qur'anic reading, other subjects taught include basic *fiqh* (ritual purity and prayer), basic *'aqīdah*, introductory Arabic, and memorization of short *sūrāhs*. During Ramadan, students learn about fasting and *zakāt al-fitr*. Occasionally, Islamic storytelling is integrated to instill moral values through narratives from prophetic and historical sources.

Findings from the interview with Ustadzah Siti Muthmainnah revealed that the most prevalent difficulties encountered by students were:

1. confusion in distinguishing similar-looking letters (e.g., *dāl* vs. *dhāl*, *sīn* vs. *shīn*, *sād* vs. *qād*),
2. difficulty distinguishing similar-sounding letters (e.g., *thā'*, *sīn*, *shīn*, *sād*, *zā'*), and
3. mispronunciation of vowel length (madd and *qasr*).

These observations were corroborated through classroom observation, which showed that some students frequently confused such letters or misread long and short sounds. Contributing factors identified included a lack of seriousness and motivation, a tendency to engage in play during class, low concentration, and an unconducive learning environment.

These findings align with studies by Nalysta and Kosasih (2021), who noted similar obstacles among middle school students, such as poor fluency, unfamiliarity with diacritical marks, and low self-confidence. Kartika and Alfurqan (2022) also highlighted difficulties in recognizing articulation points and understanding *tajwīd*. Furthermore, Novyardi (2022) confirmed that both younger and older students at TPQ levels often struggle with fundamental reading skills due to both internal and external factors.

Motivation was found to be a critical variable influencing learning outcomes. According to Trinoval, Sari, and Nini (2018), motivation is categorized as intrinsic (driven by personal goals or interest) and extrinsic (influenced by external rewards or pressure). Although intrinsic motivation is more effective in sustaining long-term engagement, extrinsic motivation remains important—especially when tailored to student developmental stages.

To overcome these difficulties, several interventions were implemented by the TPQ teachers, including:

1. **Classroom management**, such as opening and closing sessions with collective prayer, reinforcing order through queuing systems, and providing disciplinary feedback for disruptive behavior;
2. **Motivational reinforcement**, delivered generally to all students and specifically to those facing challenges;
3. **Parental involvement**, to monitor progress and encourage consistent practice at home;
4. **Islamic storytelling**, to increase engagement and instill spiritual values;

**5. Outing classes**, held periodically to promote physical and emotional well-being while strengthening student-teacher bonds.

An additional recommendation proposed by this study is to incorporate *play-based learning* techniques, given the young age of most TPQ students. This method integrates educational objectives into playful activities, which can improve attention, memory retention, and motivation. For instance, Harwini and Khaerudin (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of a Qur'anic-themed *snakes and ladders* game in teaching *nun sākinah* and *tanwīn* rules to TPQ students.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that the most common difficulties experienced by students at TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan in reading the Qur'an include challenges in differentiating similarly shaped letters (such as *dāl* and *dhāl*, *sin* and *shīn*, *ṣād* and *ḍād*), difficulties distinguishing similar-sounding letters (e.g., *thā'*, *sin*, *shīn*, *ṣād*, *ẓā'*), and improper articulation of long and short vowels (*madd* and *qaṣr*).

These difficulties were primarily attributed to internal factors such as lack of seriousness, low intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and poor concentration. External factors, especially an unconducive learning environment resulting from students' disruptive behaviors, also contributed to the challenges.

In response, the teachers at TPQ Hidayatus Syibyan implemented several strategies: (1) conditioning the classroom to create a conducive learning atmosphere, (2) providing motivational reinforcement, (3) collaborating with parents to support students at home, (4) conducting Islamic storytelling sessions to foster engagement and moral development, and (5) organizing periodic outing classes to refresh students physically and mentally.

As an additional recommendation, this study suggests incorporating *play-based learning* strategies—such as educational games tailored to Qur'an reading material—as a potentially effective method for improving students' motivation and overcoming learning barriers, especially among younger learners.

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