



Islamic Education Teachers' Strategies for Overcoming Qur'an Reading Difficulties: A Pesantren Case Study

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Abstract:

This study examines how Islamic Education teachers address Qur'an reading difficulties among santri at Pondok Tahfid Misbahul Qur'an Kudus. A qualitative case study was supported by diagnostic documentation from 24 santri in a basic tahsin class. Data were collected through observations of eight learning sessions, semi-structured interviews with three Islamic Education teachers, one pesantren caregiver, and ten santri, and documentation of reading development. Data were analyzed through the Miles and Huberman interactive model, supported by source and technique triangulation and member checking. The findings show that the most frequent difficulties involved makhraj, tajwid, fluency, mad-qashr, waqaf-ibtida, and confidence when reading aloud. Internal factors included unstable motivation, concentration, limited independent muroja'ah, and low self-efficacy, while external factors included limited parental support, dense school-pesantren schedules, and gadget distraction. Teachers responded through diagnostic assessment, ability grouping, talaqqi, drill, scheduled muroja'ah, individual guidance, peer tutoring, periodic evaluation, and parent communication. Average reading scores increased from 61.8 to 79.4 after eight weeks, accompanied by stronger fluency, discipline, and confidence. The findings highlight the value of adaptive, repetitive, and psychosocially supportive Qur'an instruction.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

The ability to read the Qur'an accurately is a basic competence in Islamic education because it provides access to religious knowledge, worship, moral formation, and the internalization of Islamic values. Accuracy requires more than recognizing Arabic letters. Learners must articulate letters from the appropriate makhraj, apply tajwid consistently, control the length of mad, choose appropriate points of waqaf and ibtida, and maintain fluency across connected verses. These interrelated skills develop through repeated guided practice rather than through conceptual explanation alone. Recent studies on Qur'an learning likewise emphasize that reading competence is strengthened when instruction combines technical correction, habituation, and sustained teacher guidance (Sar baini, 2024; Hasan et al., 2025; Adilla et al., 2025).

In practice, santri enter pesantren with unequal prior learning experiences. Some have received intensive Qur'an instruction at home or in earlier institutions, while others still struggle to distinguish letters with similar articulation points, apply nun mati and mim mati rules, control mad-qashr, or read a long verse without interruption. Such difficulties may create embarrassment when reading in front of teachers and peers. Fitri (2021), Gunawan et al. (2022), Ihsan and Muliati (2024), and Jan and Hadiati (2025) show that weak basic competence, discontinuous practice, and instructional approaches that are insufficiently responsive to learner needs can prolong reading problems. Learning difficulty therefore needs to be understood as both a technical and a pedagogical issue.

Islamic Education teachers occupy a central position in responding to these differences. Their role extends from transmitting rules to diagnosing errors, modeling correct recitation, organizing practice, motivating learners, and evaluating progress. Teacher competence and professional judgment influence whether correction becomes meaningful practice or simply repeated criticism (Ali, 2022; Erlinung, 2022; Huda, 2022). In Qur'an instruction, the choice of strategy is particularly important because reading performance is immediately observable and mistakes can easily become habitual when they are not corrected early. Studies at different educational levels have reported the usefulness of ability mapping, talaqqi, Iqra', Yanbu'a, repeated practice, and peer assistance, but they often focus on one method or on improvement in a single skill (Adibah, 2023; Sipahutar, 2023; Maulana, 2024; Oktaviani, 2025).

The difficulties experienced by santri are also influenced by conditions outside the immediate act of reading. Internally, unstable motivation, concentration, memory, independent muroja'ah habits, and self-confidence can affect persistence. Externally, family support, school and pesantren workloads, peer interaction, and access to gadgets influence how much time and attention can be devoted to practice. Hidayah et al. (2025) describe learning difficulties as multidimensional, Maulida (2024) highlights the role of learning motivation, while Nurindah (2025) demonstrates the importance of parental involvement in Qur'an learning. Rosyada et al. (2024) further indicate that learning effectiveness can be affected when educational workloads become dense. These findings suggest that a strategy directed only at technical mistakes may be insufficient when emotional and environmental barriers remain unaddressed.

Pondok Tahfid Misbahul Qur'an Kudus provides a relevant setting for examining this problem because tahsin and tahfid are central to its educational program, yet preliminary observations still identified difficulties in makhraj, tajwid, fluency, and length control among some santri. The analytical value of this context lies in the opportunity to examine not only which strategies teachers use, but how the strategies are selected according to diagnosed problems and how they influence both reading competence and learning attitudes. Bandura's (1977) social learning perspective is useful for understanding the role of successful experiences, modeling, peer observation, and verbal reinforcement in building self-efficacy. The instructional design logic of Dick and Carey (1996) also supports the alignment of learner needs, objectives, practice, feedback, and evaluation.

Accordingly, the study addresses two connected objectives: to identify the forms and causes of Qur'an reading difficulties experienced by santri and to analyze the strategies used by Islamic Education teachers to overcome those difficulties. The study also examines documented changes in reading performance and learning behavior after intensive guidance. Its contribution is an integrated account linking learner difficulties, internal and external causes, teacher responses, and subsequent changes within the institutional ecology of a tahfidz pesantren.

Method (منهج)

The study used a qualitative case study design to understand teacher strategies within the natural setting of Pondok Tahfid Misbahul Qur'an Kudus. A case study was selected because the focus was the interaction among teachers, santri, instructional routines, and the pesantren environment rather than the isolation of variables through experimental manipulation. The design follows the contextual

and interpretive orientation of qualitative educational research described by Creswell (2022) and Dintarini (2022).

Fieldwork was conducted from July to October 2026. Informants were selected purposively and consisted of three Islamic Education teachers responsible for tahsin, one pesantren caregiver, and ten santri representing high, medium, and low reading ability. In addition to interview data, diagnostic assessment documents from 24 santri in the basic tahsin class were used to map recurring reading difficulties and to support analysis of developmental patterns. These documents were treated as supporting evidence rather than as an independent quantitative design.

Data collection combined observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Eight learning sessions were observed to record teacher-santri interaction, forms of reading error, instructional responses, and santri participation. Interviews explored learners' experiences, teachers' reasons for choosing particular strategies, and institutional support for the tahsin program. Documentation included learning schedules, evaluation notes, mutaba'ah books, diagnostic sheets, and records of reading development. Source triangulation compared information from teachers, santri, and the caregiver, while technique triangulation compared observations, interviews, and documents. Member checking was used to confirm the main interpretations with teachers (Husnullail, 2024).

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive logic of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Reduction organized the evidence around four analytical categories: types of reading difficulty, causal factors, teacher strategies, and changes after guidance. The evidence was then displayed in narrative form, matrices, tables, and figures to identify convergent patterns. Interpretation compared field findings with relevant instructional and self-efficacy perspectives. This iterative process is consistent with qualitative analysis that moves repeatedly between categorization, comparison, and interpretation rather than treating analysis as a single final stage (Qomaruddin, 2024).

Result (نتائج)

3.1 Forms of Qur'an Reading Difficulty and Their Causes

Diagnostic documentation from 24 santri showed that reading difficulties formed an interconnected pattern rather than a single isolated weakness. Makhraj was the most frequent problem, followed by tajwid, fluency, mad-qashr, waqaf-ibtida, and low confidence when reading aloud. The pattern indicates that Qur'an reading difficulties involve phonological accuracy, procedural application of rules, continuity of reading, and affective readiness. Table 1 summarizes the diagnostic distribution.

Table 1. Forms of Qur'an Reading Difficulty among Santri

Difficulty	Observed indicator	n	%
Makhraj	Confusion between letters with close articulation points	18	75.0
Tajwid	Inconsistent idgham, ikhfa, and ghunnah application	16	66.7
Fluency	Frequent pauses, repetition, and fragmented reading	14	58.3
Mad-Qashr	Errors in controlling two to six harakat	11	45.8
Waqaf/Ibtida	Stopping or restarting at less appropriate points	9	37.5
Self-confidence	Low voice and hesitation when reading before the teacher	8	33.3

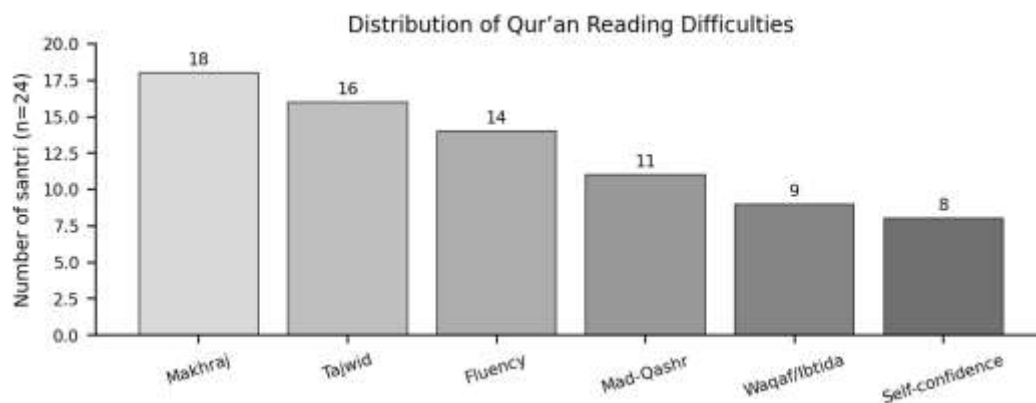


Figure 1. Distribution of Qur'an Reading Difficulties among 24 Santri

Classroom observations clarified how these categories appeared in practice. Teachers repeatedly stopped readings when santri confused similar sounds in connected text. One teacher explained that some santri recognized individual Arabic letters but still exchanged similar sounds when letters appeared within words, causing the same error to recur when immediate correction was absent (W/G1/12-08-2026). This supports Ihsan and Muliati's (2024) finding that articulation is a major barrier in Qur'an learning. Tajwid difficulty showed a similar gap between knowing a rule and applying it automatically. Several santri could name rules for nun mati or tanwin yet failed to distinguish ikhfa, idgham, or iqlab during continuous reading. The problem was therefore not only conceptual knowledge but the conversion of knowledge into stable performance.

Fluency problems were intensified by anxiety. A santri reported stopping during long verses because of uncertainty about continuation and nervousness when reading before peers (W/S4/18-08-2026). The statement illustrates how cognitive load and emotional pressure can interact with technical ability. The causal evidence was subsequently grouped into internal and external factors, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Internal and External Factors Contributing to Reading Difficulties

Category	Main finding	Field evidence	Analytical implication
Internal	Unstable motivation	Some santri relied on parental encouragement and lacked independent muroja'ah	Practice became inconsistent
Internal	Concentration and memory	Corrections were easily forgotten between sessions	Makhraj and tajwid errors recurred
Internal	Low confidence	Hesitation, low voice, and fear of making mistakes	Performance and participation declined
External	Limited parental support	Home practice was not equally monitored	Reinforcement outside class weakened
External	Dense school-pesantren schedule	Fatigue reduced evening concentration	Repetition time decreased
External	Gadgets and peers	Leisure attention was frequently diverted	Learning discipline was disrupted

3.2 Teacher Strategies for Addressing the Difficulties

Teacher responses were organized as a sequence rather than a single method. Instruction began with diagnostic assessment, followed by simple ability grouping. Santri who still needed basic work on makhraj and fluency received more foundational guidance, while those with stronger basic articulation were directed toward tajwid refinement and tartil fluency. This grouping reduced large differences in classroom pace and enabled teachers to define narrower targets for each learner group. The pattern is consistent with prior studies that emphasize ability mapping and targeted assistance (Oktaviani, 2025; Adibah, 2023).

Table 3. Integrated Teacher Strategies and Their Functions

Strategy	Implementation	Primary function	Observed effect
Diagnostic assessment	Short individual reading and error recording	Identify dominant needs	Targets became more specific

Ability grouping	Basic, intermediate, and reinforcement groups	Adjust learning pace	Guidance became more focused
Talaqqi	Teacher models pronunciation; santri imitates directly	Correct makhraj and sound	Errors corrected in real time
Drill and repetition	Repeated practice on the same verse or phrase	Build procedural accuracy	Tajwid and mad errors decreased
Scheduled muroja'ah	Brief repetition before and after tahsin	Retain corrections	Fluency became more stable
Individual guidance	Additional personal support after class	Address specific barriers	Santri asked questions more confidently
Peer tutoring	More proficient peers assist others	Provide social modeling	Learning became more collaborative
Evaluation and parent contact	Weekly monitoring and mutaba'ah notes	Sustain follow-up	Home and pesantren support became connected

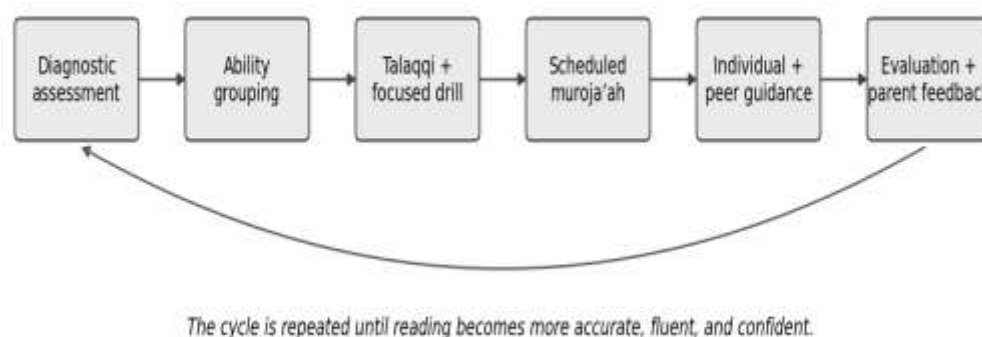


Figure 2. Cyclical Flow of the Integrated Teacher Strategy

Talaqqi functioned as the instructional core because the teacher could model articulation, observe the learner's response, and correct mistakes immediately. A teacher stated that theory alone was often insufficient because santri might understand a rule cognitively but still produce the wrong sound; direct listening, observation, and imitation were therefore essential (W/G3/22-08-2026). This finding corresponds with Akmal et al. (2024). Drill and muroja'ah then reinforced the correction. Rather than correcting many weaknesses at once, teachers often identified one or two dominant errors and asked santri to repeat the relevant passage three to five times at a slow pace. The smaller target made the learning task more manageable and helped turn correction into a repeated reading habit. Repetition is also emphasized in tahfidz-oriented learning as a mechanism for strengthening retention (Maulana & Latifah, 2025).

Individual guidance and peer tutoring were particularly important for santri with low confidence. Personal guidance provided a safer space to admit difficulty, while peer tutoring reduced psychological pressure through social modeling. Weekly evaluation through mutaba'ah records and communication with parents extended the strategy beyond the classroom. The caregiver explained that brief weekly notes helped identify santri who were progressing and those needing additional attention, while selected parents were informed so that practice at home could be strengthened (W/P1/24-08-2026).

3.3 Changes in Reading Performance and Learning Attitudes

Eight weeks of consistent guidance were accompanied by improvement across all documented reading indicators. Because the study was qualitative, these scores were used to clarify the direction of change rather than to claim an experimental causal effect. Tajwid increased by 20 points and makhraj by 19 points, the two largest gains, followed by mad-qashr, fluency, and waqaf-ibtida. The overall average increased from 61.8 to 79.4. Table 4 and Figure 3 present the documented pattern.

Table 4. Development of Average Qur'an Reading Scores

Aspect	Initial	Final	Gain	Interpretation
Makhraj	60	79	19	Strong improvement after direct correction
Tajwid	58	78	20	Repeated drill strengthened rule application
Fluency	63	80	17	Reading became more continuous
Mad-Qashr	61	79	18	Length control became more accurate
Waqaf/Ibtida	67	81	14	Stopping points became more appropriate
Overall average	61.8	79.4	17.6	General reading competence improved

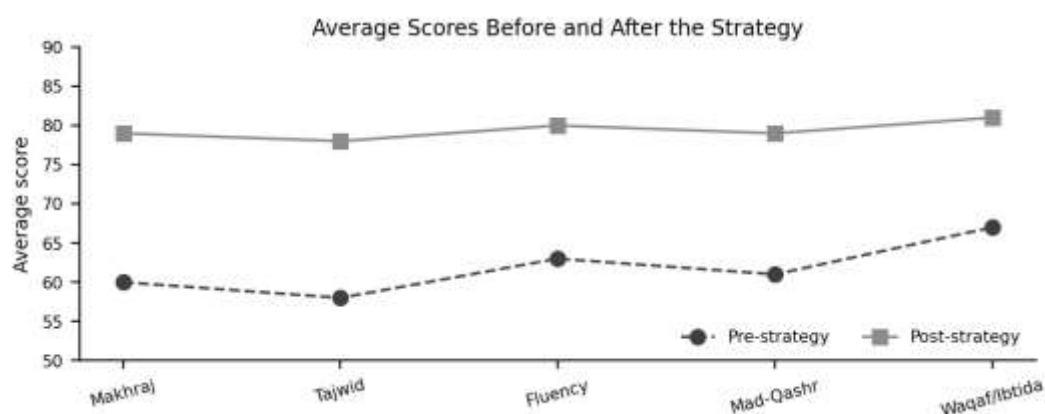


Figure 3. Average Scores Before and After the Eight-Week Strategy

Behavioral observations supported the documentary pattern. During the first weeks, several santri tended to avoid reading when called on. By weeks six to eight, voices were clearer, questions were asked more readily, and learners appeared more willing to request a repeated model after making a mistake. One santri described moving from persistent fear of error to actively asking the teacher to demonstrate the correct reading again (W/S2/28-09-2026). Muroja'ah also became more regular after short review sessions were scheduled before and after class. These changes indicate that the strategy influenced not only technical performance but also how santri approached mistakes, feedback, and practice.

Discussion (مناقشة)

The findings demonstrate that Qur'an reading difficulty is best interpreted as a layered learning problem. Makhraj, tajwid, fluency, mad-qashr, and waqaf-ibtida are technically distinct, but in practice they interact with confidence, motivation, concentration, and repetition habits. A santri who is unsure of articulation may pause excessively; repeated public mistakes may then reduce confidence, which further disrupts fluency. This explains why a technically correct method may produce limited progress when it is not paired with psychological and environmental support. The finding extends earlier work that identifies technical reading errors by showing how those errors operate within a broader learning ecology (Ihsan & Muliati, 2024; Hidayah et al., 2025).

Diagnostic assessment was therefore more than an administrative opening activity. It served as the basis for instructional differentiation. By identifying the dominant error of each santri, teachers narrowed the target of practice and avoided treating all learners as if they had the same starting point. Santri with weak makhraj received more articulation modeling, while those with adequate articulation but weak fluency practiced continuity and confidence. This alignment among diagnosed needs, learning targets, practice, and evaluation is consistent with the systematic logic of Dick and Carey (1996) and with the diagnostic orientation to learning difficulties described by Mulyadi (2010). It also helps explain why the strategy package was more meaningful than the use of one named method for every learner. Findings from Oktaviani (2025), Sipahutar (2023), and Maulana (2024) support the value of structured methods, but the present case indicates that method selection becomes stronger when preceded by diagnosis.

Talaqqi, drill, and muroja'ah formed a pedagogical sequence from modeling to guided correction and then to consolidation. Talaqqi provided an audible and visible model of accurate articulation. Drill converted immediate correction into repeated performance, while scheduled muroja'ah protected the correction from being lost between sessions. This sequence addresses the gap observed among santri who understood tajwid terminology but did not apply it automatically. The educational implication is that declarative knowledge of a rule cannot be treated as equivalent to procedural mastery. Learning must provide enough structured repetition for the rule to become part of fluent reading. Sarbaini (2024) and Khalijah (2023) similarly highlight the importance of appropriate methods and repeated practice in developing Qur'an learning outcomes.

The role of self-efficacy was equally important. Santri who repeatedly failed in public reading sometimes became quiet, spoke softly, or avoided participation. Teachers responded not only through correction but also through smaller achievable targets, individual guidance, peer modeling, and verbal reinforcement. In Bandura's (1977) perspective, mastery experiences, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion are major sources of efficacy beliefs. The classroom observations fit this pattern. When santri successfully corrected one recurring error or observed a peer completing a task, the reading situation became less threatening. The shift from fear of error to willingness to ask for another model suggests that improvement involved a reconstruction of the learner's sense of capability, not simply an increase in scores.

The external factors also show that teacher strategy cannot be separated from pesantren ecology. A dense school-pesantren schedule can reduce concentration, while inconsistent parental monitoring can weaken practice during periods away from the institution. Gadget use and peer activities can compete with muroja'ah time. Conversely, mutaba'ah books, short scheduled review, peer tutoring, caregiver monitoring, and parent communication create an environment in which correction is reinforced beyond a single class. This supports Nurindah's (2025) emphasis on parental support and Desrani and Juami's (2022) observation that Qur'an learning is strongly shaped by institutional routines. In this sense, effective tahsin instruction is a shared educational process involving teacher competence, learner commitment, family support, and institutional organization.

The study also suggests that progress should not be judged only through class averages. Santri with stronger prior Qur'an learning tended to absorb corrections faster, whereas those with weaker foundational skills needed longer repetition. The average increase from 61.8 to 79.4 is useful as a developmental indicator, but the more educationally important question is whether each santri moves from his or her own initial difficulty toward more accurate and confident reading. An evaluation model that combines common criteria with individual progress is therefore more appropriate for tahsin than a purely competitive comparison among learners. Such an approach is also consistent with teacher roles that emphasize guidance and learner development rather than score production alone (Aji, 2025; Ali, 2022).

The classroom management pattern also reveals that instructional effectiveness depended on balancing discipline with psychological safety. Teachers required santri to bring a mushaf, record key corrections, and repeat assigned passages before the next meeting, yet correction was not delivered through excessive pressure. This balance mattered in a pesantren environment where santri already faced dense daily activities. When rules were clear but interaction remained supportive, santri could understand the seriousness of tahsin without associating every mistake with embarrassment. The source observations therefore position classroom climate as part of the instructional strategy rather than as a background condition. A structured but humane climate supported persistence, especially among santri who had previously withdrawn after making repeated errors.

Verbal and emotional reinforcement further strengthened this climate. Teachers commonly used short encouraging responses that acknowledged partial improvement before asking for another attempt. The value of such feedback was not its wording alone, but its timing after observable effort. For santri who had become quiet or tearful after mistakes, encouragement helped them remain

engaged long enough to practice the corrected form. Within Bandura's (1977) framework, this resembles verbal persuasion operating together with mastery experience. The important implication is that feedback in Qur'an learning should tell learners what must be corrected while also signaling that correction is achievable. Harsh correction may identify an error, but supportive precision is more likely to sustain the repetition needed to remove it.

The findings also underline the multidimensional competence required of Islamic Education teachers in a tahfidz pesantren. Teachers need accurate Qur'an reading knowledge, the ability to model pronunciation, skill in diagnosing individual errors, classroom management competence, and sensitivity to learner emotion. Their role continues beyond a single explanation because the same santri may require different combinations of modeling, repetition, peer support, and individual guidance across stages of progress. Teacher competence is therefore expressed through adaptive decision making, not only through mastery of religious content. This interpretation is consistent with the broader professional role described by Ali (2022) and with studies emphasizing the teacher's formative influence on learners' religious development (Erlinung, 2022; Aji, 2025).

A further contribution of the case lies in the responsive character of the teaching process. Teachers did not begin from the assumption that a recognized Qur'an reading method would automatically solve every learner problem. They began from concrete errors and adjusted the task to the source of difficulty. When a santri repeatedly confused particular heavy and light sounds, practice was narrowed to short passages containing those sounds before the learner was asked to read longer verses. When articulation was adequate but continuity was weak, practice shifted toward connected reading, rhythm, and confidence. This responsiveness reduced unnecessary cognitive load and made the purpose of each exercise visible to the learner. It also explains why the same broad strategy could accommodate santri with different starting points without abandoning common tahsin standards. The approach therefore reframes effective Qur'an instruction as a process of matching diagnosis, task design, feedback, and follow-up rather than selecting one method and applying it uniformly.

Academically, this integrated pattern moves the discussion beyond descriptions of individual methods toward an explanation of why a set of strategies works within a specific educational context. Improvement emerged when the diagnosed form of difficulty corresponded with a focused instructional response and when that response was reinforced by a supportive learning environment. The relationship among learner condition, teacher decision, repeated practice, and institutional support is the central contribution of the case to the study of Islamic Education and tahsin pedagogy.

Three practical implications follow. First, tahsin programs should begin with brief individual diagnosis and written error mapping. Second, each learning session should prioritize a limited number of high-impact corrections and reinforce them through talaqqi, focused drill, and scheduled muroja'ah. Third, follow-up mechanisms should connect classroom learning with the wider pesantren and family environment through peer mentors, mutaba'ah records, and targeted communication. These practices can be adapted to other pesantren according to class size, teacher competence, and institutional routines. The study remains limited to one pesantren and a relatively small group of informants, and the documentary score change should not be interpreted as experimental proof of effectiveness. Future research can compare similar strategies across pesantren or examine their effects through mixed or quasi-experimental designs.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

Qur'an reading difficulties among santri at Pondok Tahfid Misbahul Qur'an Kudus were concentrated in makhraj, tajwid, fluency, mad-qashr, waqaf-ibtida, and confidence in oral reading. The problems were shaped by internal conditions, including motivation, concentration, weak independent muroja'ah, and self-efficacy, as well as external conditions such as limited parental support, dense school-pesantren schedules, and gadget distraction. Teachers addressed these difficulties through an integrated sequence of diagnostic assessment, ability grouping, talaqqi, drill, scheduled muroja'ah, individual guidance, peer tutoring, periodic evaluation, and parent

communication. Documentary records showed an increase in the overall average reading score from 61.8 to 79.4 after eight weeks, while observations and interviews indicated stronger fluency, participation, discipline, and confidence. The main educational implication is that effective tahsin instruction depends on the alignment of technical correction, repeated practice, psychosocial reinforcement, and environmental follow-up. Rather than relying on one method for all learners, teachers need to diagnose specific difficulties and provide focused support that allows each santri to progress from his or her own starting point.

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