



Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Strategies in Improving the Al-Qur'an Learning Achievement of Grade XI Students at the Binjai State Islamic Senior High School

Ibnu Jarot Jauhari¹, Hadi Saputra Panggabean²

^{1,2} Master of Islamic Religious Education Study Program, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The study also aims to demonstrate how Qur'anic instructional strategies contribute to shaping students' discipline, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and spiritual awareness as essential elements of Character Education.

Methodology: This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. The participants include Islamic Religious Education teachers of Grade XI, with the primary focus placed on the pedagogical strategies they implement. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers, school leaders, and students, and documentation of lesson plans, classroom activities, and assessment records. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Main Findings: The findings reveal that teachers implement several transformative learning strategies, including differentiated instruction, peer teaching, digital media integration, and motivational reinforcement. These strategies effectively meet students' diverse learning needs and significantly improve their Qur'anic recitation performance, tajwid accuracy, and memorization ability. Beyond academic outcomes, these approaches foster crucial social character values such as discipline, collaboration, empathy, perseverance, and responsibility. They also nurture students' respect for the Qur'an as both a moral compass and a spiritual foundation.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study provides empirical evidence that adaptive and transformative pedagogical strategies within Islamic Religious Education can simultaneously enhance Qur'anic learning outcomes and strengthen socio-moral character formation. Its originality lies in demonstrating how the integration of traditional teaching methods with modern instructional innovations contributes to academic achievement as well as the development of essential moral, social, and spiritual values. The research thus offers a meaningful contribution to contemporary discourse on Character Education in Islamic schooling.

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Corresponding Author:

Ibnu Jarot Jauhari,

Master of Islamic Religious Education Study Program, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, General Gatot Subroto Street, Km. 4.5, Sei Sikambing 20122, Medan City, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia

Email: ibnujarotjauhari@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, morality, and social behavior [1]. Qur'anic learning is a central component of this subject [2], aiming not only to develop students'

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ability to read and understand the Qur'an [3], but also to cultivate moral, spiritual, and social values essential for daily life [4]. Despite its importance, Qur'anic learning in Islamic schools still faces various challenges [5], including low learning interest, limited methodological variation, and insufficient learning media [6]. These issues contribute to low Qur'anic learning achievement, particularly at the upper secondary level [7].

Learning strategies are essential tools that determine the success of educational processes [8]. They are deliberately planned efforts designed to achieve long-term learning goals [9], with students positioned as the central focus [10]. Effective strategies facilitate learning, enhance motivation, and optimize learning outcomes [11]. Student motivation significantly influences achievement [12], [13], yet motivation alone cannot improve learning outcomes without appropriate instructional support [14], [15]. Teachers at the secondary level often manage heterogeneous classrooms with varied levels of Qur'anic competence, requiring differentiated and adaptive teaching approaches [16]. In Qur'anic learning, reading mastery is fundamental because higher-order comprehension cannot develop without fluency and accuracy in recitation [17].

Academic achievement related to memorization and understanding of religious texts forms a basic foundation of Islamic learning [18], supporting the correct performance of essential religious practices [19], [20]. Appropriate teaching strategies not only improve academic outcomes but also make the learning process more meaningful for students [21], [22]. Learning outcomes indicate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and skills [23], [24], and in Qur'anic education, the primary goal is for students to read the Qur'an fluently, accurately, and with understanding [25], [26].

In the Indonesian Islamic school context, Qur'anic learning is deeply shaped by local social dynamics and cultural values [27]. At Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai, such influences are especially prominent. The surrounding community upholds strong religious traditions that include communal recitation, halaqah study circles, ta'lim gatherings, and high respect for local religious leaders. These practices reinforce students' attachment to the Qur'an and strengthen key Character Education values, including discipline, cooperation, respect, responsibility, and humility. Understanding how these socio-cultural factors interact with instructional strategies at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai is therefore integral to enhancing both academic achievement and moral development among students.

Qur'anic learning in the school setting also plays a significant role in shaping students' social values, moral integration, and social behavior. Through continuous engagement with Qur'anic teachings, students internalize values such as cooperation, empathy, discipline, mutual respect, and social responsibility. These values develop organically through structured recitation activities, collaborative learning practices, and classroom interactions grounded in Qur'anic ethics. Thus, Qur'anic learning functions not only as a religious instructional domain but also as a powerful socio-educational platform that molds students' behavior and social identity within the school environment.

To strengthen the theoretical foundation, this study draws on Character Education theory, which emphasizes the cultivation of ethical behavior, moral reasoning, and prosocial attitudes through structured educational processes [28]. Values such as integrity, perseverance, empathy, and responsibility align closely with the objectives of Qur'anic learning. Integrating this theoretical perspective deepens the understanding of how Qur'anic education contributes to holistic student development [29].

Although previous studies have examined learning strategies, motivation, and academic achievement, most remain general and do not specifically address Qur'anic learning in heterogeneous classrooms [30]. Furthermore, no prior research has examined how teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai design and implement transformative strategies that accommodate diverse student abilities while integrating local cultural values and principles of Character Education. This gap in the literature underscores the need for targeted research.

There is also a clear urgency and novelty in conducting this study. Qur'anic learning is undergoing rapid transformation due to technological advancements, shifting student learning preferences, and the increasing emphasis on Character Education in national curricula. Consequently, teachers require innovative and integrative strategies that respond to contemporary educational demands while maintaining fidelity to Qur'anic pedagogy. This research is timely in documenting these emerging practices and providing empirical insight into how transformative pedagogical approaches can simultaneously enhance Qur'anic competence and strengthen students' social-moral character formation.

Based on these considerations, this study analyzes the strategies used by Islamic Religious Education teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai to enhance Qur'anic learning achievement among grade eleven students. The research offers an empirical contribution by examining how instructional strategies, student motivation, and socio-cultural conditions interact to strengthen both Qur'anic competence and character development. In doing so, the study enriches scholarly literature and provides practical guidance for improving the quality of Qur'anic learning in Islamic educational institutions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of the transformative strategies used by Islamic Religious Education teachers to enhance the Qur'anic learning achievement of grade eleven students at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables the researcher to explore pedagogical processes, interpret social meaning, and examine classroom practices within natural learning environments. The population included all Islamic Religious Education teachers and grade eleven students in the institution, while the sample consisted of sixteen participants selected purposively based on specific criteria. Three Islamic Religious Education teachers were chosen as the primary subjects of inquiry, each possessing at least three years of teaching experience and direct responsibility for Qur'anic instruction. Additional participants included one school principal and twelve grade eleven students representing different levels of Qur'anic proficiency to ensure maximum variation in data representation. Data collection was carried out through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to record teaching behaviors, instructional interactions, and classroom dynamics using structured observation sheets, whereas interviews were conducted with teachers, the principal, and students using semi-structured interview guides designed to explore instructional strategies, pedagogical reasoning, and perceived impacts on learning. Documentation such as lesson plans, assessments, student worksheets, learning media, class schedules, and photographs served as supplementary sources to validate observational and interview data. The three instruments used in this study included observation sheets that identified instructional behaviors and student engagement, interview guides that captured perceptions and instructional rationale, and documentation checklists that verified the content of lesson plans, assessments, and instructional materials. Data were analyzed through Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [31].

This model was supported by additional methodological perspectives emphasizing iterative qualitative analysis and interpretive depth [32]. The research followed a structured procedure that began with identifying the research problem, followed by determining the qualitative design, selecting participants and the research site, preparing and validating data collection instruments, gathering data through observation, interviews, and documentation, analyzing data through the interactive model, and conducting validity checks using triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. The sequence of procedures can be illustrated through the following logical flow: identification of the research problem, determination of the qualitative approach, participant and site selection, instrument preparation, systematic data collection, data reduction, data display, data verification, and the final interpretation and reporting of findings. Ethical approval was obtained from the school administration, and informed consent was provided by all participants, who were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation throughout the research process in accordance with standard qualitative research ethics in education

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Islamic Education Teachers' Strategies in Managing Al-Qur'an Learning in Heterogeneous Classes at the Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai

Qur'anic learning at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai is shaped by the heterogeneity of eleventh-grade students who come from diverse educational backgrounds and exhibit varying levels of Qur'anic literacy. Some students are already familiar with memorization practices, while others struggle with basic Arabic letter recognition. This condition requires Islamic Religious Education teachers to design adaptive learning strategies aimed at addressing differences in readiness levels while ensuring that the learning process remains meaningful and effective [33]. Without such adaptive approaches, heterogeneity can widen learning disparities and reduce overall achievement.

Teachers at the madrasah implement differentiated instruction as a key strategy. Differentiation is applied not only through ability-based grouping but also through the design of learning tasks aligned with students' individual learning profiles [34]. Teachers often create mixed-ability groups in which more proficient students serve as peer mentors for learners who need additional support. This approach promotes cooperation, strengthens classroom cohesion, and creates a supportive learning climate. As one teacher stated in an interview in July 2025, *"Some students can read fluently, and others still struggle. I use mixed groups so that they learn together. This makes the class more active."* This narrative demonstrates how collaborative learning fosters student confidence and builds collective responsibility in line with the principles of Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through interaction, modeling, and shared participation.

Peer teaching is another central strategy. Students frequently report that learning from peers feels more relaxed and less intimidating than teacher-led instruction, facilitating faster knowledge transfer and strengthening social-emotional values such as empathy and mutual care. Teachers act as facilitators who monitor peer interactions, clarify misconceptions, and evaluate group performance. Peer teaching also develops leadership qualities among proficient students who value contributing to the progress of their classmates. A student

interviewed in September 2025 expressed, *"In a group, I feel more confident. When studying alone in front of the class, I get nervous. But with friends, learning feels easier."* This statement illustrates the importance of emotional security and social connectedness, which are essential principles in both Social Learning Theory and Character Education frameworks.

Digital media integration further enhances learning. Teachers use Qur'anic learning applications, tajwid tutorial videos, and simple learning management tools to support instruction. These resources allow learners who require additional time to review materials repeatedly, while enabling advanced learners to explore extended modules. Digital learning increases student motivation by aligning instructional processes with contemporary technological preferences. The principal of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai stated in an interview in August 2025, *"The children are more enthusiastic with digital media. We provide LCD projectors and internet access to support teachers."* This institutional support reflects the role of Social Capital Theory in education, where networks of support, shared resources, and communal trust improve learning quality and collective outcomes.

Personalized assignments tailored to individual ability levels also strengthen the effectiveness of Qur'anic learning. Students receive differentiated targets; proficient learners may focus on memorization and tartil, while beginners concentrate on tajwid accuracy and makhraj improvement. This approach prevents frustration caused by overly difficult tasks and reduces boredom from tasks that are too easy. By focusing on steady progress rather than standardized outcomes, teachers promote discipline, perseverance, and intrinsic motivation. Teachers also employ direct demonstration techniques, reciting verses with tartil for students to imitate. This method sharpens listening acuity, improves tajwid sensitivity, and strengthens recitation fluency through repetitive and guided imitation.

Supportive feedback is consistently provided to maintain motivation. Teachers use constructive language to affirm small improvements, especially among low-performing students. Encouraging comments such as "Good job, but try to focus on this pronunciation" help students feel supported while reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement. A reward system is also used, in which students who achieve their targets receive verbal recognition or symbolic rewards. This reinforces self-discipline, sustained effort, and positive competition.

To overcome limited classroom time, teachers initiate additional learning activities such as weekly Qur'anic halaqah facilitated by teachers and alumni. These sessions provide extended practice opportunities and strengthen the religious atmosphere of the school. They also cultivate cooperative behavior, mutual support, and shared responsibility for spiritual growth. Students who struggle with recitation benefit greatly from these supplementary sessions.

The strategies implemented by teachers strongly reflect Islamic social values. Mixed-ability grouping fosters cooperation and empathy, peer teaching promotes mutual care and leadership [35], and routine Qur'anic halaqah encourages collective responsibility for spiritual development. Differentiated tasks encourage discipline and persistence as students work consistently toward achievable goals. The integration of reflection on Qur'anic verses further reinforces social values such as honesty, respect, and maintaining good relationships. Through these strategies, Qur'anic learning becomes not only an academic exercise but also a meaningful process of character and social development.

The findings of this study align with previous research showing that differentiated instruction improves learning outcomes in heterogeneous classes [36]. Studies on peer-assisted learning have also highlighted its effectiveness in enhancing student confidence and academic performance. Research in Islamic education contexts similarly emphasizes the importance of integrating digital media and contextual approaches to strengthen Qur'anic literacy. These studies collectively support the conclusion that varied and student-centered strategies enhance both academic and non-academic outcomes in Qur'anic learning [37].

This study provides empirical insights into how adaptive strategies contribute to improved Qur'anic learning achievement and character development. Its impact lies in demonstrating that heterogeneity, often perceived as a challenge, can become an opportunity for deeper and more meaningful learning when managed appropriately. However, the study has limitations. First, it focuses only on one madrasah, limiting generalizability. Second, it relies heavily on qualitative data, which may be influenced by participants' self-perceptions. Third, the study did not measure long-term character development outcomes, which may require longitudinal approaches.

The findings demonstrate important implications for pedagogy and character education. By combining differentiated instruction, peer learning, digital integration, and consistent feedback, teachers instill values of discipline, responsibility, hard work, and sincerity. When students work persistently toward tailored goals, discipline and intrinsic motivation are strengthened. Peer teaching cultivates responsibility and sincerity, as proficient students willingly assist weaker ones without expecting rewards. Digital tools encourage independent work habits, while group reflection on Qur'anic meaning deepens moral reasoning.

These findings resonate with Character Education theory, which emphasizes intentional cultivation of moral values, prosocial behavior, and ethical reasoning. The strategies also reflect principles of ethno-social pedagogy [38]. Freire's perspective on dialogical learning appears in the collaborative and student-centered discussions, while Banks' multicultural and community-responsive framework is evident in the integration of local cultural values, collective learning traditions [39], and social ethics derived from Qur'anic teachings. Through this

blend of pedagogical approaches, Qur'anic learning at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai becomes a holistic process that strengthens both academic competence and moral identity.

This study offers empirical evidence that adaptive strategies significantly improve Qur'anic learning achievement and contribute to students' character formation. Importantly, the findings reveal that heterogeneity, rather than being a challenge, presents opportunities for deeper learning when managed effectively. Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study focused on a single madrasah, which limits broader generalizability. It also relied heavily on qualitative data that may reflect subjective perceptions. In addition, long-term impacts on character development were not measured, indicating a need for future longitudinal research.

The findings carry meaningful implications for pedagogy and character education. The integration of differentiated instruction, peer learning, digital tools, and constructive feedback strengthens values such as discipline, responsibility, perseverance, and sincerity. Peer teaching cultivates responsibility and care, digital resources promote autonomous learning, and reflection on Qur'anic meanings deepens moral reasoning. These align strongly with Character Education Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Social Capital Theory. Furthermore, the incorporation of local cultural traditions reaffirms the importance of Ethno-Social Pedagogy in enhancing teaching relevance and cultural connectedness. Through this combination of pedagogical and theoretical perspectives, Qur'anic learning at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai becomes a holistic process that enhances academic performance, nurtures moral identity, and reinforces social values.

3.2. The Relationship between Learning Strategies, Motivation, and Al-Qur'an Learning Achievement

The Qur'anic learning achievement of students at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai is closely related to the learning strategies implemented by teachers, which directly influence students' levels of motivation and engagement. When teachers employ varied and student-centered strategies, learners become more enthusiastic, persistent, and willing to practice independently. Conversely, conventional and monotonous methods can quickly generate boredom, reducing students' intrinsic desire to improve. For this reason, understanding the relationship between strategy, motivation, and achievement is essential to explain how learning outcomes are produced within a heterogeneous classroom context.

Learning motivation, whether internal or external, acts as an important driver that encourages students to participate actively in learning. Islamic Religious Education teachers at the madrasah understand that motivation must be created through conducive learning conditions and instructional strategies that respect individual differences. Reward-based strategies, such as verbal praise or small symbolic acknowledgments, have been shown to strengthen students' enthusiasm. High motivation encourages students to continue practicing at home, which leads to measurable improvements in reading fluency, tajwid accuracy, and memorization. As a teacher expressed in an interview in July 2025, *"Some students are given reading targets, others receive small rewards. When their motivation increases, their recitation usually improves as well."* Such testimony illustrates how strategies directly shape motivational processes.

In Qur'anic instruction, strategies that address psychological and spiritual dimensions are often more effective than those focusing solely on technical mastery. When teachers connect verse recitation with meaningful reflections on daily life, intrinsic motivation emerges [40]. Students read the sacred text not only because it is required but because they understand its relevance to moral behavior and spiritual identity. This deeper motivation increases their willingness to learn with sincerity, awareness, and personal responsibility. In line with this, teachers often emphasize that reading with *tartil* reflects discipline and perseverance, which reinforces the synergy between academic achievement and character formation.

Collaborative strategies, such as peer teaching, also significantly influence students' motivation. When high-performing students assist their peers, values of solidarity, empathy, and mutual care emerge naturally. Students who are typically reluctant to read aloud in front of the class build confidence through small-group interactions. These social interactions generate a sense of belonging and reduce anxiety, making students more persistent in practicing recitation. A student stated in September 2025, *"When teachers give challenges or rewards, I become more enthusiastic. I practice more diligently at home because I want to get praise. Finally, my reading became more fluent."* This narrative highlights the gradual transformation of motivation into achievement.

The supportive environment created by the madrasah also strengthens motivation. The principal encourages collaborative religious practices such as morning Qur'an reading, contributing to a school culture that values discipline, consistency, and collective devotion. As expressed in an interview in August 2025, *"The results can be seen in their improved reading fluency compared to previous years."* Institutional support enriches the ecosystem in which learning strategies operate, demonstrating how leadership and school culture contribute to sustained motivation and improved academic results.

Qur'anic learning achievement at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai is assessed through reading fluency, tajwid accuracy, and memorization. Effective learning strategies, supported by motivation, have led to improvements in all three domains. Students who initially struggled with pronunciation showed significant progress after receiving ongoing encouragement from teachers and peers. Additional programs such as weekly

Qur'anic halaqah provide extended practice time and encourage cooperation, persistence, and shared commitment. Teachers observe that students who regularly attend these sessions achieve better outcomes than those who do not.

The relationship between learning strategy, motivation, and achievement forms a cyclical pattern: effective strategies stimulate motivation, increased motivation leads to improved achievement, and achievement reinforces motivation. The phenomenon at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai demonstrates that motivation built through learning strategies is not only academic but also spiritual. Students feel closer to the values embedded in the Qur'an, creating a deeper sense of purpose in learning. This situation shows that Qur'anic learning can serve as a transformative space that develops both intellectual proficiency and noble character.

The pedagogical processes observed align with Character Education theory, which emphasizes the cultivation of discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and sincerity through intentional educational activities. Differentiated learning and personalized targets teach discipline and self-regulation, while peer teaching encourages responsibility and social care. Meanwhile, reflection on Qur'anic values nurtures sincerity and moral awareness. Ethno-social pedagogical approaches, particularly those proposed by Freire and Banks, are also reflected in these practices. Freire's dialogical model is visible in collaborative discussions and peer-based interactions, where knowledge is co-constructed rather than transmitted authoritatively. Banks' multicultural and community-responsive framework is evident in the integration of local cultural values, communal learning traditions, and the school's religious ecosystem [41].

In this sense, Qur'anic learning at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai not only increases academic competence but also instills core character values that strengthen students' moral and social identity. The synthesis of strategy, motivation, culture, and character development demonstrates the multidimensional nature of effective Qur'anic education.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the adaptive strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in managing Qur'anic learning for grade eleven students at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Binjai play a pivotal role in addressing classroom heterogeneity. Differentiated instruction, peer teaching, digital media integration, direct demonstration, and small collaborative group learning collectively support students with varying levels of Qur'anic proficiency. These strategies not only assist students who struggle with recitation but also empower proficient learners to refine their skills while fostering cooperation, empathy, and collective responsibility. The support of the madrasah principal and the positive engagement of students further contribute to shaping an inclusive, student-centered, and culturally grounded learning environment.

Moreover, the study confirms a strong relationship between learning strategies, student motivation, and Qur'anic learning achievement. When teachers connect verses to daily life, provide meaningful rewards, and cultivate a religious school culture, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are reinforced. This heightened motivation positively contributes to improved reading fluency, tajwid accuracy, and memorization outcomes. The dynamics create a progressive cycle in which well-designed strategies stimulate motivation, motivation enhances achievement, and improved achievement strengthens students' persistence and spiritual engagement.

This study further highlights that the success of Qur'anic learning is not solely determined by pedagogical techniques but by how these strategies nurture students' character, social values, and religious identity. The findings contribute theoretically to Islamic-based character education by illustrating how Qur'anic learning can serve as a medium for cultivating discipline, cooperation, sincerity, and moral awareness. These insights reinforce the relevance of character education theory and ethno-social pedagogical perspectives within the context of Islamic schooling.

For future research, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in different educational settings and regions to assess the broader effectiveness and contextual adaptability of these strategies. Comparative or longitudinal studies may also provide deeper insights into long-term impacts on students' character development and Qur'anic literacy.

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