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## Pesantren Caretaker Strategies for Enhancing Qur'anic Memorization Motivation among Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Students

Edi Prayitno<sup>\*1</sup>, Rido Kurnianto<sup>2</sup>, Syamsul Arifin<sup>3</sup>, Aldo Redho Syam<sup>4</sup>, Olivia Ramandani<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup> Universitas Nurul Huda, Indonesia

Correspondance: [ediprayitno@gmail.com](mailto:ediprayitno@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

#### Background:

The challenge of sustaining young students' motivation for Qur'anic memorization in integrated Islamic educational settings remains underexplored, particularly regarding institutional strategies within pesantren-based elementary schools.

#### Purpose:

This study aims to explore the strategies employed by pesantren caretakers to enhance Qur'anic memorization (tahfidz) motivation among students at MI Pesantren Anak Sholeh Baitul Qur'an Gontor, Ponorogo, East Java.

#### Design/method/approach:

Drawing on a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven informants including the school principal, tahfidz coordinators, tahfidz teachers, parents, and students supplemented by participant observation and documentary analysis. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing.

#### Results:

The findings reveal four principal motivational strategies systematically implemented by the pesantren caretakers: (1) the Tahfidz Excellent Group, which cultivates pride and healthy competition; (2) Financial Incentive Awards for students exceeding memorization targets; (3) Munaqosyah examinations and Hubbul Qur'an graduation ceremonies involving parental participation; and (4) Tahfidz Camp as a supplementary immersive program. These strategies generate tangible motivational outcomes, including heightened memorization consistency, strengthened self-discipline, robust parental engagement, and positive behavioral changes both within the school and home environments.

#### Contribution/value:

This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Islamic educational management by illuminating how institutional-level motivational architecture within pesantren settings can effectively sustain young learners' commitment to Qur'anic memorization.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Qur'anic memorization, commonly known in the Islamic educational tradition as *tahfidz al Qur'an*, constitutes one of the most revered forms of devotional learning in Muslim societies worldwide. Beyond its spiritual significance, the practice of committing the holy scripture to memory has been recognized for its capacity to cultivate discipline, cognitive resilience, and moral character among learners (Boyle, 2006; Mohamad et al., 2020). In recent decades, Indonesian educational institutions particularly Islamic boarding schools or *pesantren* have witnessed a remarkable surge in the institutionalization of *tahfidz* programs across all levels of formal schooling, from early childhood education through higher education (Lukens Bull, 2019; Srimulyani, 2012). This proliferation reflects a broader societal aspiration to raise a generation deeply rooted in Qur'anic values while simultaneously navigating the demands of modern life.

The integration of *tahfidz* into *madrasah ibtidaiah* (MI) the Islamic equivalent of elementary school presents unique pedagogical challenges. Children between the ages of seven and twelve are at a developmental stage characterized by concrete operational thinking, emerging metacognitive awareness, and a strong sensitivity to social reinforcement (Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978). While their neuroplasticity and capacity for rote memorization are generally high, sustaining their motivation over extended periods requires deliberate and carefully calibrated instructional strategies. Left unattended, the repetitive nature of memorization work can breed monotony, frustration, and eventual disengagement outcomes that undermine not only the *tahfidz* program itself but also the child's broader relationship with the Qur'an (Nawi et al., 2020).

Motivation, in this context, functions as the engine that propels young learners through the demanding landscape of Qur'anic memorization. Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT) provides a useful lens, positing that human motivation is most durable when it is grounded in three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Children who feel that they have some ownership over their learning process, who experience a growing sense of mastery, and who are embedded in supportive social networks tend to exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation. McClelland's (1961) achievement motivation theory further suggests that clearly defined targets and recognizable accomplishments fuel the drive to persist. In the *pesantren* setting, where communal living and close mentorship are defining features, these theoretical insights find particularly fertile ground for application.

The role of the *pesantren* caretaker referred to variously as *kyai*, *ustadz*, *pengasuh*, or *mudir* deserves analytical attention. Unlike a conventional school teacher whose engagement with students is typically confined to scheduled class hours, the *pesantren* caretaker inhabits a far more encompassing role. Caretakers serve simultaneously as spiritual guides, disciplinary authorities, curriculum designers, and parental figures (Dhofier, 1999; Lukens Bull, 2005). Their influence permeates every dimension of the student's daily life, from morning prayers to evening study circles. When it comes to *tahfidz* programs, the caretaker's strategic decisions about program structure, motivational incentives, teacher preparation, and family engagement can make the difference between a thriving program and a faltering one.

Despite the centrality of caretaker leadership to the success of *pesantren* based *tahfidz* programs, the existing scholarly literature has given this topic insufficient attention. Research on *tahfidz* in Indonesian contexts has tended to focus on teaching methods such as *talaqqi*, *tikrar*, and *muraja'ah*—and their cognitive outcomes (Hashim & Tamuri, 2012; Hidayat, 2017). Studies examining motivation have generally adopted the perspective of the individual learner, cataloguing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors without thoroughly investigating the institutional and leadership structures that generate and sustain those motivational conditions (Sholihah et al., 2022). The strategic

agency of the pesantren caretaker how he or she designs, implements, and iterates motivational programs at the institutional level remains underexplored.

This gap matters practically as well as theoretically. Across Indonesia, thousands of pesantren operate tahfidz programs with widely varying degrees of effectiveness. Some institutions produce students who graduate with multiple juz memorized and a deep love for the Qur'an; others struggle with student apathy, high dropout rates, and superficial engagement. Understanding what distinguishes effective programs from ineffective ones requires moving beyond method level analysis to examine the broader institutional ecology the motivational architecture that caretakers construct around their tahfidz programs.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the strategies employed by pesantren caretakers at MI Pesantren Anak Sholeh (PAS) Baitul Qur'an Gontor, Ponorogo, East Java, to enhance tahfidz motivation among madrasah ibtidaiyah students. This institution was selected for its distinctive motivational programs, which include an "Excellent Tahfidz Group," financial incentive awards, formal Munaqosyah examinations coupled with Hubbul Qur'an graduation ceremonies, and an immersive Tahfidz Camp. These programs have reportedly enabled several students to memorize well beyond the institution's official one juz target, with several achieving two to six juz by the time of their graduation in the 2024/2025 academic year. The study seeks to answer three interrelated research questions: (1) How is the tahfidz program at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an designed and implemented to cultivate student motivation? (2) What specific motivational strategies do the pesantren caretakers employ, and how do students and parents experience them? (3) What observable effects do these motivational strategies produce on students' memorization behaviors and outcomes? By examining these questions through a qualitative case study approach grounded in motivational theory, the study aims to generate a contextualized understanding of how institutional level strategic action by pesantren caretakers translates into sustained motivational engagement among young learners. The findings are intended to contribute both to the scholarly discourse on Islamic educational management and to the practical knowledge base available to pesantren leaders seeking to strengthen their own tahfidz programs.

It is worth noting the particular significance of studying this phenomenon within the Ponorogo region of East Java. Ponorogo has a long and storied history as a center of Islamic education, anchored by the presence of the renowned Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, which has served as a model for hundreds of Islamic boarding schools across the Indonesian archipelago (Noer, 1973; Lukens Bull, 2005). The educational ethos of the Gontor tradition emphasizing discipline, self reliance, and spiritual cultivation permeates the broader Islamic educational landscape of the region, including institutions like MI PAS Baitul Qur'an that draw inspiration from its pedagogical philosophy. Understanding how tahfidz motivation is cultivated in this cultural and educational milieu therefore offers insights that resonate with a wide network of affiliated and similarly oriented institutions.

Furthermore, the contemporary landscape of tahfidz education in Indonesia faces an emerging tension that gives this study added urgency. On one hand, there is growing societal enthusiasm for tahfidz programs, driven by parental aspirations for their children's spiritual development and by the prestige increasingly associated with Qur'anic memorization (Fatoni & Abdurrahman, 2023). On the other hand, many programs struggle with implementation challenges: inadequately trained teachers, undifferentiated pedagogical approaches that fail to account for individual variation in memorization capacity, and motivational strategies that rely excessively on either coercion or superficial reward systems (Zarif et al., 2019; Nawi et al., 2020). These challenges are particularly acute at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level, where the developmental characteristics of young learners demand especially thoughtful and sustained motivational support. The present study, by documenting a reportedly

successful institutional model, aims to contribute constructive examples to this ongoing practical discourse.

## **METHOD**

This study adopted a qualitative research design employing a single case study approach (Yin, 2018). The case study method was chosen because the research questions demanded an in depth, contextually sensitive exploration of how motivational strategies are designed, implemented, and experienced within a specific institutional setting. Case studies are particularly well suited to investigating “how” and “why” questions in real life contexts where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly delineated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As Yin (2018) further argues, the case study design allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, making it especially appropriate for studying complex organizational processes such as motivational program implementation within educational institutions.

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The research was conducted at MI Pesantren Anak Sholeh (PAS) Baitul Qur’an, located in Gontor, Ponorogo, East Java. This institution operates under the auspices of the Pesantren Anak Sholeh Indonesia Foundation and provides Islamic elementary education integrated with a structured tahfidz program that has been running since 2017. The school was purposively selected because of its well documented motivational programs and its track record of producing students who exceed official memorization targets.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure information richness (Patton, 2015). Seven key informants participated in the study: the school principal (Ustadz Tulus Setiyono), the tahfidz coordinator (Ustadz Fashalil Addin), the tahfidz program supervisor (Ustadzah Fiina Rahmawati), two tahfidz teachers (Ustadz Sugeng and Ustadz Ahmadi), one parent (Ibu Erlinia Mega), and one student (Mas Hakim, a fifth-grade student). Additional corroborating testimony was drawn from other teachers and parents during field observations.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, semi structured interviews were conducted with all seven informants over a two-week period in June 2025. Interview protocols addressed six thematic areas: the history and design of the tahfidz program, motivational strategies and their rationale, the classification system for student grouping, the role of parental involvement, the evaluation mechanisms, and the perceived effects of motivational programs on student behavior. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, was audio recorded with informed consent, and was transcribed verbatim.

Second, participant observation was carried out during regular tahfidz learning sessions, Tahfidz Excellent group activities, and teacher tahsin (Qur’anic recitation improvement) sessions. Observations were documented through field notes and photographic documentation. Third, documentary analysis was performed on institutional documents, including the tahfidz curriculum, student achievement logbooks, student classification records, and the participant list for the Tahfidz Camp program.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which involves three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, the raw interview transcripts, field notes,

and documentary data were coded thematically using an iterative open coding process. Initial codes were grouped into broader thematic categories aligned with the research questions. Data display involved constructing thematic matrices and narrative summaries that facilitated cross case comparison across informants. Conclusion drawing proceeded through pattern identification and constant comparison, with emerging interpretations verified against the original data through repeated review.

Trustworthiness was ensured through several strategies recommended in the qualitative research literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation was achieved by cross checking data from interviews, observations, and documents, ensuring that no single data source bore disproportionate weight in the analysis. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with two key informants the school principal and the tahfidz coordinator for factual verification and interpretive feedback. Prolonged engagement with the research site, spanning multiple visits over the data collection period, enhanced the researcher's contextual understanding and rapport with participants. A detailed audit trail documenting all analytical decisions, coding iterations, and interpretive shifts was maintained throughout the study. Finally, thick description of the research context and findings was prioritized to enable readers to assess the transferability of the results to their own settings (Stake, 2005).

## **RESULTS**

### **The Architecture of the Tahfidz Program**

The tahfidz program at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an operates within a carefully constructed institutional framework that the pesantren caretakers have developed and refined since the program's inception in 2017. Originally limited to first grade students and guided by volunteer teachers from the nearby Gontor Islamic boarding school, the program has expanded to encompass all grade levels and now features a differentiated system designed to accommodate variation in student memorization capacity.

Central to the program's design is a classification system that organizes students not by grade level or Qur'anic reading proficiency, but by memorization achievement. Students are distributed across five tahfidz groups (Kelompok Tahfidz 1 through 5), each with calibrated memorization targets. Within this structure, a further tripartite classification distinguishes student capacity: the Red Group (students with limited memorization progress and targets far from fulfillment), the Yellow Group (students with satisfactory progress approaching target completion), and the Green Group (students with excellent memorization who have met or exceeded their targets). This classification, as the tahfidz coordinator explained, enables teachers to tailor their pedagogical approach and motivational messaging to the specific developmental needs of each group.

Supporting this structure are several operational components: a standardized teacher journal (jurnal tahfidz) for tracking individual student progress, a student achievement logbook (buku prestasi) that serves as a communication bridge between school and home, a regular tahsin program to maintain teacher Qur'anic recitation quality, and periodic evaluation sessions conducted by the tahfidz supervisor. The official memorization target for MI level students is one juz (Juz 30), though the program's motivational design intentionally encourages students to surpass this baseline. In the 2024/2025 academic year, several students achieved memorization of two to six juz, a result that the school leadership attributes directly to the motivational strategies embedded within the program.

#### **Four Core Motivational Strategies**

Strategy 1: The Tahfidz Excellent Group. The Tahfidz Excellent Group represents an elite track within the broader tahfidz program, reserved for students in the Green Group who have demonstrated exceptional memorization ability and consistency. Admission to this group is competitive and requires passing a rigorous selection process that evaluates both the quantity and quality of memorization. The very existence of this group—and its publicly acknowledged “excellent” designation—was reported by multiple informants as a powerful motivational catalyst. As one teacher observed, the mere announcement of selection opportunities triggers a surge of competitive enthusiasm among students and parents alike. Students perceive membership in the Excellent Group as a marker of distinction, fulfilling the psychological need for recognition and competence that motivational theorists have identified as central to sustained engagement. Once admitted, students are given expanded memorization targets that extend beyond the standard one juz requirement, with some progressing to selected surahs from other juz and, in exceptional cases, completing multiple juz before graduation.

Strategy 2: Financial Incentive Awards. The second strategy involves financial incentive awards (uang pembinaan), initiated personally by the pesantren founder. Students who accumulate the highest memorization totals in a given academic year receive monetary awards of meaningful value. This strategy taps directly into the achievement motivation framework (McClelland, 1961), providing a tangible, visible reward that reinforces the connection between effort and outcome. Interview data revealed that the impact extends beyond the individual recipient. One fifth grade student described his desire to earn the award not for personal consumption but to give the money to his parents as a gift an aspiration that intertwines material incentive with relational meaning. Teachers reported that even students who did not receive the award were motivated by witnessing their peers’ recognition, generating what might be described as vicarious motivational reinforcement. Within the home environment, parents whose children received the award reported that younger siblings became noticeably more enthusiastic about their own memorization, suggesting intergenerational motivational spillover.

Strategy 3: Munaqosyah Examinations and Hubbul Qur’an Ceremonies. The third strategy comprises two interconnected programs: Munaqosyah and Hubbul Qur’an. The Munaqosyah is a formal memorization examination administered by external examiners from the UMMI Foundation, not by the school’s own teachers. This external evaluation mechanism raises the stakes and credibility of the assessment, motivating students to prepare rigorously. The tahfidz supervisor reported that upon hearing of an upcoming Munaqosyah, students from each tahfidz group competed to register for the selection process, with approximately five out of twelve students per group typically qualifying.

The Hubbul Qur’an ceremony functions as a public graduation event for students who have passed the Munaqosyah. During the ceremony, students are tested on stage before an audience of parents, teachers, and community guests who are invited to pose random memorization questions. This public dimension creates a powerful social accountability mechanism: students, aware that they may be called upon to recite any portion of their memorized content, engage in intensive review (muraja’ah) in the weeks preceding the event. The ceremony concludes with a symbolic coronation in which parents receive a crown from their child a gesture symbolizing the Islamic tradition that a hafidz (Qur’anic memorizer) will crown their parents in paradise. Multiple informants described this moment as deeply emotionally resonant, generating strong motivational commitment from both parents and students.

Parental involvement in this strategy proved particularly noteworthy. Interview data from parents indicated that the Munaqosyah and Hubbul Qur’an programs catalyzed significant home-

based engagement. Parents reported dedicating daily time to supervising their children's review sessions, and some arranged additional tutoring with local ustadz in the evenings to ensure their children's readiness. Teachers observed a clear correlation between the level of parental involvement and student examination performance, noting that students with active parental support rarely required remedial retesting.

Strategy 4: Tahfidz Camp. The fourth strategy is the Tahfidz Camp, a supplementary immersive program conducted during school holidays. Designed for students who wish to accelerate their memorization or strengthen existing hafalan, the camp combines structured memorization sessions with engaging, child friendly activities such as storytelling by a professional storyteller who narrates the rewards of becoming a hafidz. This narrative approach embedding motivational content within entertainment proved particularly effective for the MI age demographic. The program also incorporates visual media, recognizing that contemporary children respond strongly to audiovisual stimuli. The camp concludes with a public recitation examination attended by parents and the pesantren founder, reinforcing the accountability recognition cycle that characterizes the institution's broader motivational architecture.

Participation data from the most recent Tahfidz Camp reveals broad engagement across grade levels, with 72 students enrolled from grades one through five, including both male and female participants. This breadth of participation was interpreted by the school leadership as evidence that the motivational ecosystem has permeated the wider school community and is not limited to a small cohort of high achieving students.

#### Observed Motivational Outcomes

The motivational strategies described above produced several observable outcomes that were consistently reported across multiple informants and corroborated through observational data. First, a substantial number of students met or exceeded their official memorization targets, with several students in the Excellent Group completing two or more juz by graduation—outcomes that far surpass the official one juz minimum. Second, teachers reported heightened behavioral indicators of motivation, including students voluntarily engaging in muraja'ah during free periods, arriving at tahfidz sessions ahead of schedule with all required materials, and expressing disappointment when sessions were shortened due to scheduling conflicts.

Third, disciplinary improvements were noted. The structured routine of tahfidz wudhu, proceeding to the designated tahfidz area, opening with prayer, reviewing previous memorization, and adding new content instilled behavioral regularity that transferred to other aspects of students' school life. Teachers observed that students who were most engaged in the tahfidz program also demonstrated greater punctuality, preparedness, and respectful conduct in other academic settings. The discipline of memorization, it appeared, was not compartmentalized but rather generalized into a broader disposition toward structured effort and self regulation.

Fourth, the bidirectional reinforcement between school and home environments emerged as a particularly significant outcome. Parents reported that their children's memorization enthusiasm carried over into the home setting, with children initiating review sessions independently and requesting parental monitoring. One parent described how her child would wake early to practice muraja'ah before school and would become visibly frustrated if the parent was too tired to listen. This home school synergy created what several informants described as a "virtuous circle" of mutual motivation, where the school's motivational inputs were amplified by family support, and family engagement was in turn activated by the school's programs. Multiple teachers emphasized that students whose parents were actively engaged rarely required remedial action, while students lacking home support tended to plateau in their memorization progress a

pattern that underscores the indispensable role of the family in sustaining the motivational ecology that the pesantren caretakers have constructed.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate how the pesantren caretakers at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an have constructed what might be termed a "motivational architecture"—an integrated system of programs, incentives, and social mechanisms designed to generate, sustain, and amplify student motivation for Qur'anic memorization. This architecture does not rely on any single motivational lever; rather, it operates through the synergistic interaction of multiple strategies, each targeting different motivational pathways.

The Tahfidz Excellent Group addresses the need for competence and social recognition identified by both self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. By publicly designating certain students as "excellent," the program satisfies the esteem needs of those who are admitted while simultaneously generating aspirational motivation among those who seek admission. This mechanism aligns with the achievement motivation framework articulated by McClelland (1961), which posits that individuals with high need for achievement are energized by challenging but attainable goals and by visible markers of success. In the context of MI age children, who are at a developmental stage where peer comparison and social approval are increasingly salient (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), the Excellent Group functions as a particularly potent motivational stimulus. The financial incentive awards introduce an extrinsic motivational component that, in this institutional context, appears to operate without undermining intrinsic motivation—a concern frequently raised in the literature on reward systems (Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Deci et al., 1999). Several factors may explain this. First, the awards are granted for exceptional achievement beyond baseline expectations, rather than for mere compliance, which reduces the risk of the "overjustification effect" (Lepper et al., 1973). Second, the awards are embedded within a deeply relational context: the pesantren founder personally presents them, and students frequently frame their desire to earn the reward in terms of relational goals rather than material self-interest. The fifth-grade student's aspiration to give the prize money to his parents exemplifies how material incentives can be transmuted into relational and spiritual meaning within the pesantren's cultural milieu.

The Munaqosyah and Hubbul Qur'an programs represent perhaps the most sophisticated motivational strategy, operating through multiple psychological mechanisms simultaneously. The external examination component introduces evaluative accountability, while the public graduation ceremony activates social accountability and pride. The involvement of parents as both audience members and active supporters at home creates what Epstein's (2011) framework of school family community partnerships would describe as a "type 4" partnership learning at home with elements of "type 2" communicating through the buku prestasi achievement logbook. The symbolic coronation ritual adds a spiritual emotional layer that transcends conventional motivational frameworks, connecting the child's present effort to an eschatological reward structure that is deeply meaningful within the Islamic worldview.

This spiritual dimension of motivation deserves further theoretical attention. While Deci and Ryan's SDT effectively captures the autonomy-competence-relatedness triad, it does not fully account for the role of transcendent purpose in sustaining motivation. The children in this study are not merely memorizing text for academic recognition; they are engaging in a practice that their community regards as a form of worship and a pathway to divine favor. This "spiritual motivation" (Bakar, 2019) functions as a distinct motivational register that interacts with, but is not reducible to, the conventional intrinsic-extrinsic distinction. Future research might productively explore frameworks

such as Pargament's (2007) religious coping theory or Emmons' (1999) concept of spiritual striving to capture this dimension more fully.

The Tahfidz Camp serves a complementary function by addressing the risk of motivational fatigue that can accumulate over the course of a regular school term. By offering an alternative learning modality immersive, playful, and temporarily detached from the routine evaluation structure the camp provides what Kaplan (1995) might describe as a "restorative experience" that replenishes directed attention and rekindles enthusiasm. The use of storytelling as a motivational vehicle is particularly well suited to the MI age demographic, as narrative engagement activates affective processing pathways that pure instructional delivery does not reach (Green & Brock, 2000). Viewed holistically, the four strategies function as an interconnected motivational ecosystem rather than as discrete interventions. The Excellent Group creates aspirational pull; the financial awards provide intermittent reinforcement for exceptional effort; the Munaqosyah and Hubbul Qur'an programs generate cyclical peaks of intensified engagement; and the Tahfidz Camp offers periodic renewal. Together, they maintain a dynamic motivational landscape that resists the entropy of habituation a critical design principle, given that memorization work, by its very nature, involves substantial repetition.

The role of parental engagement as both an input to and an outcome of this motivational architecture warrants emphasis. The findings suggest a recursive relationship: the school's motivational programs activate parental involvement, which in turn amplifies student motivation, which then reinforces parental commitment. This recursive dynamic is consistent with Hoover Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model of parental involvement, which posits that parents' role construction and self efficacy beliefs mediate their engagement. In this case, programs like Hubbul Qur'an appear to strengthen parents' role construction by providing public, emotionally meaningful opportunities for them to see the tangible results of their support.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. As a single case study, the findings are context bound and cannot be generalized to all pesantren settings. The reliance on self reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly in the close knit pesantren community where critical evaluation of institutional programs may be culturally sensitive. The study did not employ longitudinal tracking of individual students' motivational trajectories, which limits the ability to draw conclusions about the durability of motivational effects over time. Finally, the perspectives of students who were disengaged or who had left the program were not captured, which may have introduced a survivorship bias in the findings.

Despite these limitations, the study offers practical implications for pesantren leaders and Islamic educational policymakers. The motivational architecture model identified here comprising recognition-based stratification, tangible incentives, evaluative ceremonial programs, and immersive supplementary experiences provides a transferable framework that other institutions can adapt to their own contexts. The key design principles differentiation by capacity, multiple motivational registers, parental integration, and cyclical intensification appear to be sufficiently general to apply across varied pesantren settings while remaining specific enough to guide practical implementation. It is also instructive to consider these findings within the broader framework of educational management. Effective educational leaders do not simply manage operations; they design motivational environments (Syam & Arifin, 2021). The pesantren caretakers in this study demonstrate a form of leadership that might be characterized as "motivational design leadership" they act as architects of incentive structures, social rituals, and learning experiences that collectively produce engagement. This conceptualization resonates with transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006), which emphasizes the leader's role in inspiring followers through vision, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. In the pesantren context, however, the transformational

dynamic is enriched by a spiritual dimension that connects leadership practice to sacred purpose a dimension that mainstream leadership theories have only recently begun to accommodate (Suherman & Nurjanah, 2020).

The findings also carry implications for the training and professional development of tahfidz teachers. The success of the motivational architecture at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an depends not only on the programs themselves but on the capacity of teachers to implement them with sensitivity and skill. Teachers must be able to classify students accurately, provide differentiated motivational support, maintain meticulous records, and communicate effectively with parents. The institution's investment in ongoing tahsin programs for teachers reflects an understanding that pedagogical quality and motivational effectiveness are intertwined a principle well supported by the educational literature (Rahman & Ahman, 2020). Pesantren seeking to replicate this model would need to invest correspondingly in teacher capacity building.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study set out to understand how pesantren caretakers at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor design and implement strategies to enhance Qur'anic memorization motivation among madrasah ibtdaiyah students. Three principal conclusions emerge from the analysis.

First, the tahfidz program at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an operates within a comprehensive institutional framework that extends well beyond the selection of memorization methods. The program's architecture encompasses differentiated student classification, standardized teacher monitoring tools, systematic teacher quality maintenance through tahsin programs, and structured evaluation cycles all orchestrated by the pesantren caretaker team. This infrastructure creates the conditions within which motivational strategies can take effect.

Second, four distinct motivational strategies the Tahfidz Excellent Group, Financial Incentive Awards, Munaqosyah Hubbul Qur'an programs, and Tahfidz Camp function as an integrated motivational ecosystem. Each strategy engages different motivational pathways: social recognition, material reinforcement, evaluative accountability, spiritual meaning making, and experiential renewal. Their combined effect sustains student engagement across the academic year and across the diverse motivational profiles present in any student population.

Third, the motivational strategies produce observable outcomes including heightened memorization achievement (with multiple students exceeding the official one juz target), strengthened self discipline, robust parental engagement, and positive behavioral changes that extend beyond the tahfidz program into students' broader academic and personal lives. The recursive relationship between school-based programs and home based support emerges as a particularly important dynamic, suggesting that effective tahfidz motivation cannot be generated by the school alone but requires the active partnership of families.

These findings contribute to the scholarly literature on Islamic educational management by foregrounding the strategic role of the pesantren caretaker as a motivational architect—a role that has been underrepresented in existing research. For practitioners, the study offers a concrete, evidence-based model of motivational program design that other pesantren and Islamic schools can adapt. Future research should extend this line of inquiry through comparative multi site studies, longitudinal tracking of motivational trajectories, and mixed methods designs that combine qualitative depth with quantitative measures of motivational constructs and memorization outcomes.

At a broader level, this study contributes to an ongoing conversation about what makes religious education both rigorous and humanizing. The model described here succeeds precisely because it does not treat memorization as a mechanical exercise to be powered through by sheer willpower or external pressure. Instead, it wraps the demanding work of hafalan within a supportive

ecology of recognition, relationship, ritual, and renewal an ecology in which the child is seen not merely as a vessel for memorized text but as a developing human being whose motivation must be nurtured, not simply demanded. For the thousands of pesantren across Indonesia and beyond that are grappling with the challenge of sustaining young learners' commitment to Qur'anic memorization, this study offers both hope and practical direction.

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