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Beyond Competition: *Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an* Training and Young Participants' Interest in and Love for the Qur'an at Sanggar Al-Fatih

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Abstract

Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) is commonly understood as a Qur'anic recitation competition, yet its educational contribution to participants' sustained interest and affective attachment to the Qur'an remains insufficiently examined. This study analyzes the implementation of MTQ training and its role in fostering participants' interest in and love for the Qur'an at Sanggar Al-Fatih, Tebing Tinggi. A qualitative case-study design was employed. Data were obtained through direct observation, in-depth interviews with administrators, trainers, and participants, and analysis of program documentation. The data were condensed, organized thematically, and interpreted through iterative conclusion drawing, while source and method triangulation were used to strengthen credibility. The findings show that training was conducted progressively through instruction in *makharij al-huruf*, *tajwid*, *naghham*, breathing and voice control, interpretive recitation, and performance readiness. Regular practice increased participants' enthusiasm, discipline, confidence, and willingness to study the Qur'an beyond competition preparation. Intensive interaction with Qur'anic verses also encouraged habitual recitation, participation in religious activities, moral self-regulation, and a stronger sense of closeness to the Qur'an. These outcomes were supported by competent trainers, parental encouragement, senior role models, and a conducive religious environment, but constrained by differences in initial ability, limited practice time, and funding. The study concludes that MTQ training can function as sustained non-formal Qur'anic education when technical coaching is integrated with motivation, habituation, and character formation.

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Introduction

The Qur'an occupies a central position in Muslim religious life as a source of belief, worship, ethical orientation, and social guidance. Qur'anic engagement therefore extends beyond oral recitation to include comprehension, reflection, and the enactment of its values in everyday conduct. Qur'an 38:29 presents the scripture as a blessed revelation intended for contemplation, while a widely transmitted prophetic tradition identifies learning and teaching the Qur'an as exemplary religious practice (Al-Bukhari, 2002; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). These foundations give Qur'anic education both devotional and pedagogical significance.

Sustaining such engagement among children and adolescents has become increasingly complex. Digital entertainment, competing school demands, and uneven access to attractive non-formal religious instruction may weaken the regularity of Qur'anic learning. Indonesian studies report that young people's interest is shaped not only by personal motivation but also by teaching quality, family encouragement, institutional support, and the relevance of learning activities to their social environment (Alim et al., 2020; Anwar & Munastiwi, 2021; Isabellapavytha & Munawaroh, 2023). Programs that combine technical competence, meaningful participation, and sustained mentoring are therefore needed to make Qur'anic learning both accessible and personally significant.

One influential form of community-based Qur'anic education in Indonesia is *Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an* (MTQ). Although MTQ is publicly recognized as a competition in recitation, memorization, interpretation, calligraphy, and other Qur'anic arts, its educational function is broader. The development of MTQ has connected aesthetic reception, public religious expression, structured training, and institutional collaboration (Jannah, 2016; Ronaldi et al., 2023). Historical evidence further indicates that MTQ has gradually evolved from a periodic community event into an institutional mechanism for continuous Qur'anic education, particularly where local government, LPTQ, pesantren, madrasahs, and community learning centers coordinate participant development (Hasibuan et al., 2026).

The educational potential of MTQ is especially visible in local training institutions. Previous research shows that experienced reciters and coaches can attract young learners through aesthetically engaging recitation, appropriate teaching methods, and credible role modeling (Fahmi, 2021). Structured coaching can also improve recitation skills, discipline, confidence, and achievement motivation (Pertiwi, 2018; Setiawan et al., 2024; Syahid, 2023). Institutional studies similarly emphasize that program continuity, trainer competence, management, parental involvement, and adequate facilities determine whether participant development can be sustained (Rahman, 2021; Sari et al., 2023; Suseno & Indra, 2024).

Interest and love, however, represent related but distinct educational outcomes. Interest refers to focused attention, positive affect, and a growing willingness to reengage with a domain; it can develop through repeated meaningful experiences and increasing competence (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). A more durable commitment emerges when external structures such as schedules, feedback, and competitions are gradually internalized as personally valued activities (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In Qur'anic education, this distinction suggests that enthusiasm for improving recitation does not automatically amount to an enduring love for the Qur'an. Affective attachment is more convincingly

reflected when participants continue reading outside formal sessions, associate the Qur'an with personal guidance, and translate learning into religious and ethical practice.

Sanggar Al-Fatih in Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra, provides a relevant setting for examining this process. Established in 2016, the center trains children and adolescents in Qur'anic recitation and prepares selected participants for MTQ events from the subdistrict to the provincial level. Its program combines instruction in pronunciation, recitation rules, melodic patterns, voice production, performance readiness, and religious character formation. This combination makes the center more than a short-term competition workshop: it operates as a non-formal learning environment in which repeated contact with Qur'anic verses may shape both competence and affective engagement.

Research on MTQ has predominantly examined recitation achievement, participant selection, institutional management, memorization outcomes, and competition preparation (Andriyani & Masrurah, 2025; Murtadlo & Yuliastutik, 2025; Pasolo et al., 2025). Other studies demonstrate that MTQ-based outreach can improve young people's participation and interest in Qur'anic learning (Hansyah et al., 2025). Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to how everyday coaching practices simultaneously cultivate learning interest and a deeper, value-oriented love for the Qur'an within a specific community training center. The affective transition from competition-driven participation to voluntary Qur'anic engagement therefore remains insufficiently explained.

This study addresses that gap by examining MTQ as a sustained educational process rather than merely a competitive event. It investigates how MTQ training is implemented at Sanggar Al-Fatih, how the program fosters participants' interest in Qur'anic learning, and how intensive recitation practice contributes to love for the Qur'an in everyday life. The study's contribution lies in connecting the technical, motivational, affective, and institutional dimensions of MTQ training within a single qualitative account. Its findings are expected to inform the design of community-based Qur'anic programs that seek to balance achievement, learning continuity, and character formation.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to investigate MTQ training as an educational process in its real-life institutional setting. A case study was appropriate because the research focused on the interaction among program structure, trainer practices, participant experiences, and the social environment of one Qur'anic training center rather than on measuring a decontextualized causal effect (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The unit of analysis was the MTQ coaching program implemented by Sanggar Al-Fatih in Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra.

The research site was selected purposively because Sanggar Al-Fatih has provided continuous recitation training since 2016 and has prepared children and adolescents for MTQ events at multiple administrative levels. The center's dual emphasis on competition readiness and Qur'anic character formation made it an information-rich case for examining the development of learning interest and affective attachment. Field data were collected on 15-16 June 2026 during scheduled program activities.

Informants were selected purposively according to their direct involvement in the program and their capacity to explain its implementation and perceived outcomes. They comprised center administrators, trainers responsible for technical and motivational

guidance, and participants who had experienced the coaching process. These categories enabled the study to compare institutional intentions, instructional practices, and participant experiences. Documentary and observational data were used to complement the interview accounts and reduce dependence on a single perspective.

Data were collected through direct observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation focused on the organization of training, instructional sequences, trainer-participant interaction, technical recitation exercises, and the learning environment. Interviews explored the center's objectives, coaching practices, perceived changes in participants' motivation and habits, enabling conditions, and constraints. Documents and activity records, including photographs, program archives, and competition-related materials, were examined to contextualize and corroborate the oral accounts.

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative procedures of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). Interview, observational, and documentary materials were first selected and coded according to the research questions. Codes were then grouped into four thematic categories: training structure, growth of learning interest, development of affective and religious engagement, and enabling conditions and constraints. The resulting thematic displays were compared iteratively so that interpretations remained anchored in convergent evidence rather than isolated statements.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source and method triangulation. Source triangulation compared the accounts of administrators, trainers, and participants, whereas method triangulation compared interview evidence with observation and documentation. Interpretations were retained when they were supported across roles or evidence types, and apparent differences were examined contextually. These procedures supported credibility and confirmability while recognizing that the findings remain bounded by the characteristics of a single training center (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

Structured and Progressive MTQ Training

Sanggar Al-Fatih was established in 2016 as a community-based center for children and adolescents interested in developing their Qur'anic recitation. The center's stated mission combined three objectives: improving accurate and aesthetically appropriate recitation, preparing participants for MTQ competitions, and cultivating a Qur'anic orientation in everyday conduct. Administrators and trainers consistently described competitive achievement as one indicator of progress, but not as the program's sole purpose.

Training was organized as a gradual sequence. New participants first received correction in *makharij al-huruf* and *tajwid* so that pronunciation and recitation rules became stable foundations. Participants who demonstrated sufficient control progressed to *nagham*, breathing technique, voice regulation, phrasing, and interpretive delivery. The sequence was adjusted to individual ability; participants were not expected to learn advanced melodic patterns before their basic reading had become accurate.

Regular practice combined demonstration, imitation, individual correction, repetition, and performance simulation. Trainers modeled a passage, listened to each participant,

identified technical errors, and required repeated practice until improvement was evident. Participants also received mental preparation and opportunities to recite before others. These activities reduced anxiety, strengthened confidence, and familiarized participants with the communicative demands of formal MTQ performance.

The coaching system was continuous rather than activated only before competitions. Participants moved from basic correction to advanced recitation and competition preparation according to their development. This progression allowed trainers to monitor improvement over time and to assign exercises suited to individual needs. Observation also showed that the religious atmosphere of the center supported concentration, respectful interaction, and a shared expectation of disciplined practice.

Growing Interest in Qur'anic Learning

Participants and trainers reported that sustained involvement in MTQ coaching increased enthusiasm for studying the Qur'an. Some participants had not previously maintained regular recitation, but the training schedule created repeated opportunities to read, listen, receive feedback, and practice independently. Interest was visible in their willingness to attend sessions, repeat difficult passages, ask for correction, and continue learning *tajwid* and melodic recitation beyond the minimum required for a competition.

Improvement in competence reinforced this engagement. As participants became more capable of producing accurate pronunciation, controlling breath, and using melodic patterns, they experienced recitation as an attainable skill rather than an intimidating task. Trainers' incremental feedback made progress recognizable and gave participants concrete goals. The combination of challenge and attainable improvement encouraged persistence, especially among learners who initially had weaker foundational skills.

Senior participants and alumni who had achieved success in MTQ events functioned as visible role models. Their achievements gave younger learners a credible image of what disciplined practice could produce. Competition therefore operated as a motivational horizon: it provided goals, recognition, and opportunities to demonstrate competence. Importantly, the participants' accounts indicated that motivation was not restricted to winning; many valued the ability to recite more confidently and correctly in religious and family settings.

The evidence thus identifies interest as a pattern of increasingly voluntary engagement. Participants devoted more attention to recitation, showed greater discipline during training, and expressed a desire to continue developing their ability. These changes were supported by repeated practice and social encouragement rather than by a single competition experience. MTQ became a structured reason to begin learning and, for many participants, a continuing reason to remain engaged with the Qur'an.

Cultivating Love for the Qur'an and Everyday Religious Engagement

Affective attachment emerged when recitation extended beyond scheduled training. Participants reported becoming more accustomed to reading the Qur'an at home and not only during coaching or immediately before competitions. Frequent interaction with the same and new passages created familiarity, while melodic and interpretive practice made participants attend more closely to the sound and meaning of the verses. This sustained

exposure fostered a sense of closeness that participants associated with love for the Qur'an.

Participants also connected MTQ involvement with broader religious habits. Interview accounts described greater diligence in worship, increased participation in religious activities, and stronger efforts to regulate behavior in accordance with Qur'anic values. One participant explained that near-daily interaction with Qur'anic verses during training made the scripture feel more personally present. Such statements indicate that love was understood not only as positive emotion but also as a willingness to preserve routines and align conduct with religious learning.

Trainers deliberately reinforced this interpretation. They reminded participants that the purpose of coaching was not exhausted by rankings or trophies and encouraged them to regard the Qur'an as a companion and guide. From the trainers' perspective, successful development included improvement in recitation, disciplined practice, respectful conduct, and continued engagement after a competition had ended. This message helped connect technical exercises with a broader religious purpose.

The data therefore reveal a progression from repeated contact to habitual recitation and from habitual recitation to affective and moral commitment. Participants' growing love for the Qur'an was expressed through regular reading, attentiveness to recitation quality, participation in religious life, and efforts to embody Qur'anic values. The program did not separate skill development from character formation; instead, the two were treated as mutually reinforcing outcomes.

Enabling Conditions and Program Constraints

Four conditions supported the program's effectiveness: experienced trainers, parental encouragement, participant commitment, and a conducive religious environment. Trainers provided technical credibility and individualized feedback. Parents enabled attendance and reinforced practice outside the center. The presence of motivated peers and successful seniors created a social climate in which effort was recognized. Regular MTQ events supplied attainable goals and maintained a sense of progression.

The program nevertheless faced differences in participants' initial ability, limited training time caused by school schedules, and restricted funding for coaching and competition preparation. These constraints required trainers to differentiate instruction and prioritize essential skills. They also limited the frequency of extended practice and access to supporting resources. Despite these challenges, the continuity of the program and the shared commitment of trainers, parents, and participants prevented competition preparation from becoming an isolated or temporary activity.

Discussion

From Competition to Sustained Qur'anic Pedagogy

The findings demonstrate that MTQ training at Sanggar Al-Fatih functions as sustained non-formal Qur'anic pedagogy. Competition provides public goals and performance standards, but the educational substance lies in the repeated sequence of modeling, correction, practice, reflection, and gradual advancement. This interpretation supports research that positions MTQ as a mechanism for community education rather than a ceremonial contest (Jannah, 2016; Ronaldi et al., 2023). It also accords with

historical evidence that MTQ becomes educationally durable when coaching is institutionalized beyond the event itself (Hasibuan et al., 2026).

The program's progression from *makharij al-huruf* and *tajwid* to *nagham*, voice control, and performance readiness reflects a scaffolded model of skill development. Accurate foundational recitation is treated as a prerequisite for aesthetic elaboration. Similar patterns have been reported in formal MTQ preparation and LPTQ management, where participant development depends on sequenced instruction, expert correction, and continuous evaluation (Arfa, 2016; Pertiwi, 2018; Suseno & Indra, 2024). Training is therefore effective not because repetition occurs in isolation, but because repetition is guided by explicit standards and responsive feedback.

This result also clarifies the role of the local training center. Sanggar Al-Fatih connects institutional objectives with close interpersonal mentoring. Larger organizations may provide policy, events, and networks, while a community center translates those structures into regular learning encounters. Studies of LPTQ in Aceh and North Sumatra similarly show that trainer competence, institutional coordination, and local accessibility are central to developing *qari* and *qariah* (Rahman, 2021; Sari et al., 2023). The present study extends those findings by showing how these institutional resources support not only performance quality but also sustained personal engagement.

How Structured Practice Develops Learning Interest

Participants' interest developed through a combination of recurring contact, visible progress, supportive feedback, and meaningful goals. This pattern is consistent with the four-phase model of interest development, which explains how situational attention can become a more enduring individual interest when learners repeatedly reengage and accumulate knowledge and value (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). MTQ initially triggers attention through melody, performance, and competition; coaching sustains that attention by enabling participants to experience mastery and recognize improvement.

The findings also illustrate motivational internalization. Schedules, competitions, trainer expectations, and parental encouragement are external structures, yet participants increasingly valued accurate recitation and independent practice for their own religious and personal significance. According to self-determination theory, such internalization is more likely when learners experience competence, relatedness, and meaningful choice (Ryan & Deci, 2020). At Sanggar Al-Fatih, individualized correction supported competence, the training community supported relatedness, and opportunities for independent practice allowed participants to exercise growing agency.

The motivating role of skilled trainers and senior exemplars reinforces earlier Indonesian research. Experienced *qari* and *qariah* can attract learners not only through vocal performance but also through appropriate pedagogy and credible modeling (Fahmi, 2021). Achievement-oriented MTQ programs likewise report that coaching, goal setting, and supportive interaction strengthen persistence and confidence (Setiawan et al., 2024). The current findings add that senior achievement is most productive when it inspires disciplined learning rather than reducing participation to trophy seeking.

Interest also depended on the quality of the learning environment. Research on Qur'anic programs shows that competent teachers, clear learning resources, family support, and engaging methods can increase willingness to participate (Alim et al., 2020;

Anwar & Munastiwi, 2021). Conversely, digital distraction and weak non-formal support may reduce adolescents' engagement (Isabellapavytha & Munawaroh, 2023). Sanggar Al-Fatih countered these pressures by providing regular face-to-face guidance and a community in which Qur'anic effort was socially valued.

From Recitation Practice to Affective and Moral Internalization

A central contribution of this study is the distinction between interest in learning recitation and love for the Qur'an. Interest was observable in attention, attendance, persistence, and skill-seeking. Love was expressed through voluntary recitation outside training, a sense of closeness to the scripture, participation in religious activities, and efforts to align behavior with Qur'anic values. This distinction avoids treating technical improvement as sufficient evidence of affective transformation.

Repeated recitation created conditions for affective internalization because participants encountered the Qur'an through voice, listening, interpretation, correction, and performance. The aesthetic dimension of *tilawah* can make the Qur'an emotionally salient, while disciplined repetition stabilizes engagement (Jannah, 2016; Khasanah, 2019). When trainers explicitly connect recitation with guidance and character, technical practice acquires moral meaning. The program thus integrates cognitive knowledge, embodied skill, aesthetic experience, and religious purpose.

Comparable studies report that MTQ and related Qur'anic programs can strengthen memorization, reading ability, discipline, and interest (Andriyani & Masrurroh, 2025; Hansyah et al., 2025; Syahid, 2023). The present case goes further by identifying everyday indicators of attachment after scheduled practice: habitual reading, greater religious participation, and moral self-monitoring. These findings also align with research that defines the Qur'an's educational function in terms of guidance and personal formation rather than reading proficiency alone (Hasan, 2019; Sjafi'i, 2019).

The relationship between competition and love is therefore conditional. Competition can initiate effort, provide standards, and generate recognition, but it does not automatically produce enduring commitment. Affective engagement develops when competition is embedded within continuous mentoring, reflection, habituation, and character guidance. This explains why the trainers' repeated message that trophies were not the ultimate goal was pedagogically important: it redirected achievement motivation toward a lasting relationship with the Qur'an.

Institutional Support, Constraints, and Program Sustainability

The enabling conditions identified in this study are consistent with broader research on participant development. Competent trainers ensure technical accuracy; parents sustain attendance and home practice; religious environments normalize commitment; and regular events provide milestones. Studies of MTQ mentoring and participant selection likewise identify enthusiasm, family support, expert guidance, and stakeholder collaboration as critical resources (Azmi, 2025; Murtadlo & Yuliastutik, 2025; Pasolo et al., 2025). These resources form an educational ecosystem rather than a collection of isolated supports.

The constraints also have pedagogical implications. Differences in initial ability require differentiated targets and prevent uniform pacing. School schedules limit practice intensity, while restricted funding affects access to trainers, facilities, and competition

participation. Similar institutional challenges have been reported in MTQ and LPTQ programs, particularly limited resources and inconsistent community participation (Rahman, 2021; Suseno & Indra, 2024). Program sustainability therefore depends on planning that protects routine coaching even when competitions are not imminent.

A practical model emerging from the findings comprises four interconnected elements: progressive technical instruction, motivational support and role modeling, habituation beyond formal sessions, and institutional collaboration among trainers, parents, alumni, and event organizers. Technical instruction without motivation may not sustain participation; motivation without accurate coaching may not produce competence; habituation without value-oriented guidance may remain mechanical; and all three require institutional continuity. This integrated model explains how MTQ can simultaneously support achievement, learning interest, and affective commitment.

Conclusion

MTQ training at Sanggar Al-Fatih is implemented through structured, progressive, and continuous coaching in *makharij al-huruf*, *tajwid*, *nagham*, breathing and voice control, interpretive delivery, and performance readiness. The program fosters learning interest by providing repeated practice, recognizable progress, supportive feedback, credible role models, and attainable competition goals. It cultivates love for the Qur'an when technical training is connected with habitual recitation, religious participation, moral self-regulation, and the understanding of the Qur'an as a personal guide. MTQ therefore operates most productively as non-formal Qur'anic education rather than as an isolated competition.

The study proposes an integrated model consisting of progressive instruction, motivational support, habituation, and institutional collaboration. Sanggar Al-Fatih and comparable institutions should strengthen differentiated coaching, parent communication, alumni mentoring, trainer development, and stable funding for routine activities. Because this qualitative case study was limited to one center and did not quantify changes in recitation proficiency or religious behavior, its findings should be interpreted contextually. Future research should compare multiple training centers, follow participants longitudinally, and combine qualitative evidence with validated measures of learning interest, Qur'anic engagement, and recitation development.

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