



Motivational And Structural Barriers In Low Tahfiz Program Interest

Hambatan Motivasi Dan Struktural Dalam Minat Program Tahfiz Rendah

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General Background Tahfiz programs are central to Islamic education because they support Qur'an memorization, religious character formation, and students' sustained engagement with Islamic values. **Specific Background** In Islamic secondary education, student participation in Qur'an memorization programs remains a persistent challenge, particularly when learners participate because of external pressure rather than personal willingness. **Knowledge Gap** Previous studies have largely emphasized memorization outcomes, program management, and quantitative motivational factors, while students' subjective experiences, peer dynamics, and internal-external causes of disengagement in the Madrasah Aliyah context remain insufficiently explored. **Aims** This study aimed to analyze internal and external factors contributing to students' low interest in participating in the Qur'an memorization program. **Results** The findings show that most students joined the program due to obligation rather than intrinsic motivation, with only a few demonstrating self-initiated participation. Internal barriers included weak Qur'anic reading fluency, low confidence, embarrassment during recitation, and limited learning autonomy. External barriers included minimal parental support, demotivating peer dynamics, monotonous instructional practices, limited tahfiz teaching staff, and short memorization sessions of approximately 15 minutes. **Novelty** This study identifies peer-group dynamics and basic Qur'anic literacy insecurity as important demotivating factors within tahfiz learning. **Implications** The findings suggest the need for small-group talaqqi, systematic muraja'ah routines, literacy screening, teacher mentoring cycles, and stronger school-family communication to improve student participation.

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Highlights

- Most learners joined the program through obligation rather than personal initiative.
- Weak Qur'anic reading fluency reduced confidence during recitation activities.
- Family support, peer climate, teaching variation, and session duration shaped disengagement.

Keywords

Tahfiz Interest; Qur'an Memorization; Student Motivation; Structural Barriers; Islamic Education

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INTRODUCTION

Tahfiz programs, structured efforts to memorize the Qur'an, have come to occupy a central place in how many Islamic schools express their educational identity. These programs aim to do more than produce students who can recite verses accurately; the deeper intention is to draw learners into an ongoing, personal relationship with the Qur'an, one that gradually shapes how they reflect on moral questions and conduct themselves in ordinary life (Safinah, 2022); (Haidir et al., 2022). Given this broader purpose, it is no surprise that Islamic schools across Indonesia have increasingly moved tahfiz from the margins into the mainstream, treating it as a flagship program that reflects both the school's religious commitments and its educational ambitions..

At the policy level, the government has increasingly pushed religious education toward something more holistic than rote learning and tahfiz programs sit squarely within that vision. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (2024) has made clear that the goal is not simply to accumulate verses or achieve technical fluency, but to cultivate students' consistent, habitual engagement with the Qur'an over time. The expectation, then, is that tahfiz graduates leave school with more than academic knowledge, they carry with them a sense of spiritual grounding and personal integrity that comes from sustained closeness to the text.

In practice, however, many tahfiz programs run into the same wall: students who are not genuinely engaged. This is not a minor inconvenience. Interest is one of the more reliable predictors of whether learners will persist through something demanding. Students who care about what they are doing tend to show up, push through difficulty, and improve over time. Those who feel indifferent drift, fall behind, and disengage, often quietly enough that the problem goes unnoticed until it has accumulated for a while (Aniah et al., 2023). A number of previous studies show that the decline in students' interest in tahfiz programs does not stem from a single cause, but from a combination of various internal and external factors. (Ariffin, 2024) highlights that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation strongly influence students' consistency in muraja'ah, while Azmi et al. (2024) point out that difficulties in reading fluency create cognitive burden that reduces engagement in memorization. In addition, (Hussin et al., 2023) note that insufficient parental support can erode students' consistency once they leave the school environment. What these studies collectively suggest is that low interest in tahfiz is rarely reducible to a single explanation, it tends to emerge from layered causes. On the internal side, students' self-motivation, their familiarity with the Qur'anic text, and their confidence in their own reading ability all shape how willing they are to engage (Ariffin & Mohamad Shukor, 2024). On the external side, factors like repetitive teaching approaches, limited learning resources, and a lack of encouragement from family each play a part (Hussin et al., 2023); (Azmi, Din, Khalis, Jani, & Ahmad, 2024).

Educational psychology offers one useful lens for making sense of this. Maslow's motivational framework holds that people are driven, above all, by the need to satisfy a hierarchy of needs, and that learning is no exception. When students feel psychologically safe, socially connected, and recognized for their efforts, they tend to engage more fully (Mustofa & Maslow, 2022). Therefore, students' interest in tahfiz is closely related to how far the learning environment is able to respond to these needs..

[Figure 1. about here]

This lens matters because it reframes how we read the problem. Student disengagement in tahfiz is not simply a matter of personal motivation or willpower. It is also a product of whether the learning environment actually supports participation, whether students feel valued, whether guidance from teachers is genuinely helpful, and whether the atmosphere in the classroom is one that invites engagement rather than anxiety. When that support is absent, motivation tends to erode even in students who initially wanted to participate. Program success, it turns out, also depends heavily on organizational factors. Research has repeatedly shown that well-functioning tahfiz programs share certain features: clear management structures, competent and attentive teachers, motivated students, active family involvement, and learning approaches calibrated to students' actual needs (Latifah, 2021); (Nurhidayat, 2023); (Safinah, 2022). However, most of these studies focus more on program outcomes and management aspects, with limited attention given to students' experiences and reasons for disengagement, especially in the Madrasah Aliyah context.

These various factors can be summarized as shown in the following table.

[Table 1. about here]

Based on the classification presented, the success of the tahfiz program can be understood as the result of interaction between internal student factors and external institutional conditions. When one or more of these aspects are not properly addressed, the program may face various obstacles. One common consequence is the low persistence of students in participating consistently in memorization activities. This situation is also found at Madrasah Aliyah Insan Kamil. Initial observations and interviews with teachers and students indicate that student participation in the tahfiz program remains relatively low. Some students reported difficulties in reading the Qur'an fluently, which affected their confidence during memorization. In addition, limited variation in teaching methods and lack of family support were also mentioned as factors that reduced their motivation (Interview with Tahfiz Teachers and Students of MA Insan Kamil, 2025).

Despite growing research on tahfiz programs, gaps remain. Instead of studying why pupils are bored, many studies focus on results, particularly memorisation (Nurhidayat, 2023). Second, quantitative methods are extensively employed in motivational factor research, although they may not accurately capture student sentiments and opinions (Ariffin, 2024). Thirdly, Madrasah Aliyah students have more severe religious and academic requirements, although there is little study on them.

This study employed qualitative descriptive methods to fill these gaps by focusing on school authorities, instructors, and students. Learning what causes low student engagement is more essential than testing memorisation. The unique context of Madrasah Aliyah Insan Kamil has not been fully studied before, thus this study fills that gap. Tahfiz instructors in Indonesian Islamic secondary schools are the focus of this study.

Research that specifically examines the causes of low student interest, especially in the Madrasah Aliyah context, is still limited. In addition, the dominance of quantitative approaches in previous studies is considered less capable of capturing the

complexity of students' subjective experiences. Based on this gap, further in depth research is needed. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the internal and external factors that contribute to low student interest in participating in the Qur'an tahfiz program at Madrasah Aliyah Insan Kamil. The findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for improving instructional practices and institutional policies in Islamic secondary education.

METHOD

Types of research

To examine the issues addressed in this study, the researcher employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The selection of this qualitative framework was grounded in the need to develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of declining student interest in participating in the Qur'an memorization program by exploring subjective experiences, individual perceptions, and interactional dynamics within the educational environment. Through a qualitative perspective, researchers are able to describe social realities more holistically by interpreting primary data obtained directly from the research setting (MUNIR, 2021); (Veronika, 2024). Meanwhile, the descriptive method was utilized to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate description of field conditions related to the implementation of the memorization program and the various factors influencing the level of student participation.

Research Location

This study was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Insan Kamil, which served as the primary research site. The institution was selected purposively because it has implemented a Qur'an memorization program within its educational structure while still encountering instructional and managerial challenges, especially regarding students' low level of enthusiasm. The research was carried out during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, with observations focusing on memorization activities involving students from grades X, XI, and XII.

Data source

The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained directly from key informants through interviews and field observations. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, where participants were chosen according to predetermined criteria to ensure their direct relevance and adequate understanding of the tahfiz program at MA Insan Kamil (Robinson, 2023). Student participants were selected based on several criteria: (1) being actively enrolled in grades X, XI, or XII during the 2024/2025 academic year; (2) being registered in the tahfiz program, whether actively participating, less active, or previously disengaged; and (3) being willing to participate and capable of explaining their experiences related to the program. The teacher informant was chosen based on their job as the tahfiz instructor, their experience overseeing the program for at least one academic year, and their direct knowledge of program execution and student involvement. Students from grades X, XI, and XII and the program's tahfiz instructor conducted the research.

This study included 32 informants: 11 students from grade X, 10 from grade XI, and 10 from grade XII, plus one tahfiz teacher. A proportionate distribution was utilized to account for differences in involvement and motivation across educational levels. One teacher ran the tahfiz program, reflecting the school's condition. These informants, representing students and teachers in the program, were expected to provide rich and complex views. Secondary data were collected from supporting documents such

as memorization progress records, activity schedules, and administrative archives relevant to the research objectives.

Data Collection Techniques

Ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative findings required more than gathering information from multiple people, it demanded systematic cross-checking at every stage. Source triangulation involved comparing what students, the tahfiz teacher, and the principal said, paying particular attention to where accounts aligned and where they diverged. Triangulation allowed interview data to be layered with observation notes and documentation, reducing the chance of any one method affecting the results. Member checking brought selected participants back into the process by bringing back interpretive summaries and asking them if the results matched their experience. Beyond these methods, the researcher gained contextual acquaintance with the school for the even semester of 2024/2025 that shorter field visits could not provide. Qualitative research must be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable, and these techniques meet all four (Rumina, 2024).

1. Field Observation: Researchers used participant observation and controlled assessment to study classroom memorisation. The researcher observed students' behaviour, the teacher's methods, and interaction patterns during these sessions.
2. Each interview was semi-structured for the study. Students discussed five main topics: the tahfiz program, reading and memorising difficulties, class and family support, lessons, and systemic issues like class schedules and teacher availability. A significantly different interview with the teacher included current teaching approaches, disengagement patterns she had seen, and institutional and environmental obstacles that made program implementation challenging. It was purposely created to provide just enough structure to keep conversations on track because the interview guide did not want participants to explore issues beyond the semi-structured format.
3. Documentation: As a supporting technique, researchers collected various documents related to tahfiz management in the madrasa. These documents included student achievement records, memorization reports, and routine activity schedules, which were used to support and validate findings obtained from interviews and observations (Nikmah, 2021).

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman. This analytical framework involves three interconnected stages consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification (Rustiana & Ma'arif, 2022).

[Figure 2. about here]

The first stage, data reduction, involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data into more focused categories. At this stage, field findings were grouped according to major themes related to factors contributing to low student interest. The second stage, data presentation, involved arranging the reduced data

systematically in narrative form to facilitate identification of patterns and relationships between variables. The final stage consisted of drawing conclusions and verification, namely interpreting the meaning of the collected data in order to answer the research questions. During this phase, the researcher continuously compared interpretive findings with observation notes, interview transcripts, and documentary evidence to ensure that the conclusions remained strongly supported by empirical data and academically accountable (Latifah, 2021); (Rustiana et al., 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The central concern of this study was to understand why so many students at MA Insan Kamil remain on the margins of the tahfiz program rather than genuinely participating in it. Across interviews with the school principal, the tahfiz teacher, and students from three grade levels, a consistent pattern took shape: disengagement here is not the result of one thing going wrong, but of several things going wrong at the same time. Of all the factors that came up repeatedly, the absence of self-driven motivation stood out most, and it appeared to be reinforced and sustained by limited Qur'anic literacy, weak family support, monotonous instructional approaches, and insufficient staffing within the program structure.

Student Motivation in Participating in the Tahfiz Program

Data collected through in depth interviews with tahfiz teachers revealed that the majority of students participated in the program not because of strong personal willingness or intrinsic motivation, but mainly due to external encouragement from teachers. According to the instructor, only one or two students showed genuine personal initiative in memorizing the Qur'an, while most students tended to be passive and required continuous direction and motivation from educators to remain involved in the program. This condition is reflected in the teacher's statement:

"The kids study the Quran because their teachers urge it, not because they like it. Most kids need constant encouragement to learn, and few are interested."

Several students also admitted that their participation was largely driven by obligation rather than personal interest.

From a theoretical perspective, dependence on external motivation indicates that students' learning autonomy remains relatively weak. Intrinsic motivation functions as an important driving force in the learning process because individuals who possess internal motivation generally demonstrate stronger persistence, commitment, and consistency in achieving learning goals (Ryan et al., 2017). In contrast, reliance on external encouragement may result in unstable participation, particularly when teacher support decreases..

This finding differs from the study conducted by Ariffin and Mohamad Shukor (2024) among diploma level tahfiz students in Malaysia, where intrinsic and extrinsic motivation appeared more balanced. The difference may be influenced by institutional context. Diploma students voluntarily enrolled in a specialized tahfiz program, whereas students at MA Insan Kamil attend a general Islamic secondary school in which participation in tahfiz activities is more compulsory than voluntary..

The findings of this study also support (Aniah et al., 2023), who argue that the success of tahfiz programs is closely connected to students' motivation and learning interest. Students with low motivation generally show weaker commitment to memorization tasks and reduced engagement in classroom activities. From Maslow's humanistic perspective, learning motivation is closely

associated with the fulfillment of psychological needs such as self confidence and social recognition (Mustofa & Maslow, 2022). Students who doubt their own abilities are more likely to avoid activities they perceive as difficult, including Qur'an memorization. At the same time, the experiences expressed by students indicate that the motivational problem is not only psychological but also related to institutional and relational conditions, particularly when students feel pressured rather than personally inspired to participate.

Basic Skills in Reading the Qur'an

Another important factor identified in this study was the

disparity in students' basic Qur'anic reading skills. Observations and interviews with school leaders revealed that many students, especially those without previous Islamic educational backgrounds, still experienced considerable difficulty in reading the Qur'an fluently. This condition became a major obstacle to the implementation of the memorization program at MA Insan Kamil.

The principal explained:

"Some Islamic high school students struggle to read the Quran aloud. Since they had never attended a religious school, they had to make several changes when they entered the madrasa."

Most student informants confirmed this condition and connected their reluctance to participate with awareness of their limited reading abilities.

The psychological consequence of this situation was the emergence of feelings of inferiority when students had to recite memorization in front of teachers or classmates. One student explicitly mentioned feeling embarrassed to participate because of weak reading skills.

This finding is consistent with (Nurhidayat, 2023) who states that Qur'anic literacy is a basic requirement for successful memorization. Students who read fluently generally memorize more effectively. Likewise, (Ariffin, 2024) explains that weak reading skills increase cognitive burden and eventually reduce students' motivation to continue memorization activities. Compared with the findings of Azmi et al. (2024), reading difficulties at MA Insan Kamil appear more structurally widespread because the institution does not apply a preliminary literacy screening system before students enter the tahfiz program. This situation highlights the need for institutional improvement in supporting students' foundational reading competence.

Family and Environmental Support

The interview findings indicate that the family environment plays an important role in shaping students' interest in memorization activities. Tahfiz teachers consistently observed a relationship between students' learning persistence and the level of support they received at home. Although the madrasa attempted to motivate students during school activities, the absence of continued reinforcement at home often weakened students' consistency.

The tahfiz teacher stated that:

"Usually, what makes children less consistent in memorizing is their home environment. At school, we always encourage them to be able to do it, but at home, they may not get enough support from their parents."

"Most student informants similarly reported feeling unsupported at home, with a few describing their domestic environment as actively discouraging toward religious practice."

Limited parental supervision and moral support became

psychological barriers that reduced students' willingness to continue memorization independently. These findings strengthen the argument of Hussin et al. (2023), who emphasize that active parental involvement functions as an important catalyst in improving students' discipline and enthusiasm in

memorizing the Qur'an.

Parental and peer pressure affected whether students stayed in the program or dropped out. Some Tahfiz students lost interest since their classmates didn't support them. Vygotsky believed that social interactions affect learning and skill development (Vygotsky, 2024). Active classrooms with lots of positive peer

reinforcement produce more motivated pupils. Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on parental influence, this study found that peer group dynamics at MA Insan Kamil also functioned as a significant demotivating factor, an aspect that has received limited attention in earlier research..

Tahfiz Learning Method

Students stated that verbal explanations were intended to help them understand the significance of reciting the Qur'an before entering the memorization process. However, this repetitive instructional approach eventually contributed to boredom and reduced students' enthusiasm toward tahfiz activities.

Previous studies consistently show that variation in instructional methods is essential for improving student engagement in memorization programs (Rizki, 2009). Methods such as talaqqi, muraja'ah, and tikrar are considered more effective in strengthening memorization and improving reading accuracy. In addition, interactive and creative learning approaches are important for creating a more engaging educational environment. Sarbaitinil et al. (2024) argue that innovative teaching strategies provide more meaningful learning experiences and help reduce boredom during memorization activities. In the context of MA Insan Kamil, the continued reliance on conventional methods suggests that the challenge lies not only in limited resources but also in the lack of pedagogical adaptation to more interactive approaches.

Limited Teaching Staff in the Tahfiz Program

Another factor identified in this study was the limited number of educators specifically assigned to manage the tahfiz program. According to the principal, the program still faces shortages in human resources because the number of teachers available for memorization guidance is not proportional to the number of students. In practice, Islamic Religious Education teachers often cannot attend every tahfiz session consistently due to conflicts with their regular teaching schedules.

The principal stated:

"PAI teachers aren't always present every day because they have their own schedules. Therefore, their opportunities to support students in the intensive memorization program are still limited."

This shortage of personnel directly affected the intensity of mentoring received by students. As a result, tahfiz activities were often limited to short supplementary sessions of approximately 15 minutes before formal lessons began, a duration considered insufficient for systematic memorization development. This condition significantly reduced the effectiveness of the program implementation. Rustiana et al., (2022) explain that teacher presence and

active involvement are essential components in achieving memorization targets within educational institutions.

Within the tahfiz learning environment, teachers function not only as providers of knowledge but also as mentors and

motivators who offer continuous moral support. In addition, pedagogical competence and patience are important because students possess different levels of cognitive ability in memorizing Qur'anic verses. The tahfiz teachers in this study agreed that helping children memorise requires a more personalised and patient approach. This verifies what Aliksan (2024) suspected: persuasive, compassionate, and long-term techniques can motivate pupils better. Rustiana and Ma'arif (2022) described an institutional system with tahfiz coordinators, whereas MA Insan Kamil uses general Islamic studies lecturers who don't memorise. This mismatch between institutional expectations and teacher roles indicates a structural problem that requires broader institutional adjustment rather than depending solely on teacher commitment.

CONCLUSION

The picture that emerges from this study is one of accumulated disadvantage rather than a single, identifiable cause. Most of the 31 students interviewed were participating in the tahfiz program not because they had chosen to, but because the structure of the school left them little choice. A number of them also acknowledged that their uncertainty about their own reading ability made them reluctant to engage openly, particularly when memorization had to happen in front of others. What this study makes clear is that these are not separate problems, they feed into each other, producing a pattern of disengagement that no single intervention is likely to reverse on its own.

On the internal side, confidence was perhaps the most visible issue. Students who doubted their ability to read the Qur'an well enough were reluctant to put themselves in situations where that weakness might be exposed, and memorization, by its nature, is one of those situations. This lack of confidence evolved, gently removing students from difficult activities. Only a few of the 31 students assessed showed actual dedication. The rest relied on outside influences to stay interested, and as those dried up, so did their motivation. Outside, the program clearly didn't meet students' requirements or resources. Many students' homes discouraged memorisation. Due to a lack of dedicated tahfiz workers and a high reliance on verbal explanation and reading without meaningful variation in classroom instruction, sessions were sometimes curtailed to 15 minutes before school started. These factors maintained the disengagement, making it impossible for a single change to disrupt the pattern.

These findings indicate that students' disinterest in the tahfiz program is attributable to a lack of classroom structure that encourages active engagement, not to their own faults. We need solutions that reflect shared accountability. There are many inexpensive ways to do useful tasks. Teaching talaqqi in small groups of three or five students provides for more one-on-one time and allows teachers to identify struggling students before giving up. Starting each class with 10 minutes of systematic muraja'ah helps pupils gain enough repetition without needing to add another session. A proposed mentoring cycle among PAI teachers could improve program homogeneity without adding more staff. The house-school bridge is inadequate from a familial perspective.

Teachers should send home progress reports, set basic goals for home review, and schedule parent-teacher meetings to help pupils relate what they learn in school to what happens (or doesn't) outside of school.

Theoretically, this study adds something concrete to how Maslow's hierarchy of needs applies in Islamic secondary education. What the data show is that students' willingness to engage in tahfiz cannot be explained by their psychology alone, it is also shaped by the institutional environment around them and, just as importantly, by what happens at home. This has policy implications too. Before students are enrolled in tahfiz programs at the Madrasah Aliyah level, a basic literacy screening would go some way toward preventing the quiet sense of inadequacy that this study found to be such a consistent barrier. Looking ahead, it would be worth exploring whether technology-assisted approaches, mobile memorization tools, digital muraja'ah platforms, can make a practical difference, especially in helping families stay involved when

direct supervision is limited. Longitudinal research that tracks how student motivation shifts across grade levels would also add something that this study, by design, could not: a sense of when and why disengagement tends to take hold most firmly.

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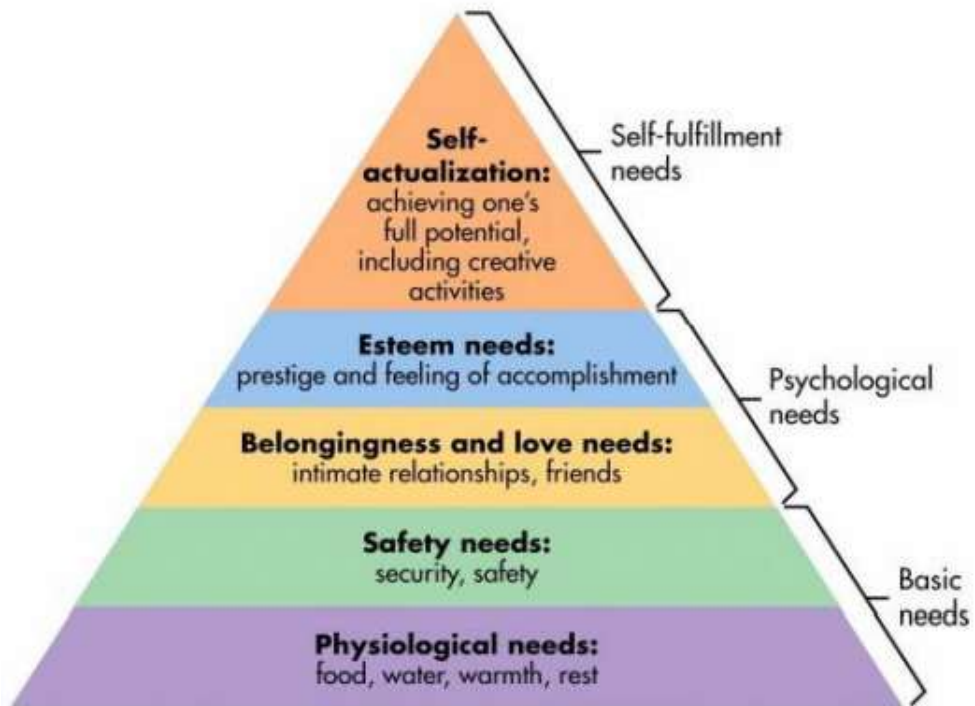
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TABLE 1 /Determining Factors for the Success of the Tahfiz Program

No.	Factor	Explanation	Source
1	Program Management	Thorough planning, continuous evaluation, and professional management systems.	Latifah (2021), Nurhidayat (2023)
2	Teacher Involvement	Teachers are competent in the material and able to provide psychological guidance.	Emilia dkk (2025)
3	Student Motivation	Students' internal motivation is very important for consistency in memorizing.	Latifah (2021)
4	Parental and Environmental Support	The involvement of family and the surrounding environment supports the memorization process and student enthusiasm.	Latifah (2021), Nurhidayat (2023)
5	Time Management	Good division of time between memorization and muroja'ah.	Nurhidayat (2023)
6	Teaching Quality	Appropriate learning approaches, understanding of tajwid, and effective memorization methods.	Nurhidayat (2023)
7	Curriculum Readiness	A curriculum that supports the integration of tahfiz learning with other learning activities.	Emilia dkk (2025)
8	Continuous Monitoring	Regular evaluation and monitoring of students' memorization progress.	Nurhidayat (2023)

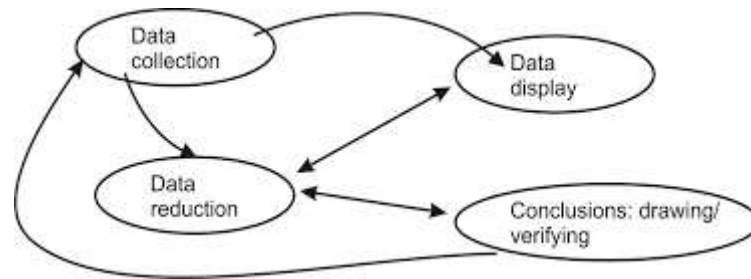
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Figure 1 / Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid

(Source: McLeod in Mustofa, 2022)

Figure 2/Data Analysis Techniques According to Miles & Huberman



Source: (Susilawati, Darniyanti, Prasetyo, Apreasta, & Novitasari, 2020)

