

Students' Interpretation of Muroja'ah Activities Between Obligation and Spirituality at MA Darul Hikmah Kyai Abdan

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Abstract. Muroja'ah (Qur'anic memorization review) is a core component of tahfidz learning in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), yet students' subjective and spiritual interpretations of this practice remain understudied. This study aims to analyze students' interpretations of muroja'ah, to understand its position as both an academic obligation and a spiritual practice, and to identify challenges and solutions in its implementation at MA Darul Hikmah Kyai Abdan. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach with purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving 15 informants comprising students from Grades X, XI, and XII, tahfidz teachers, the school principal, and the boarding school caretaker. Data analysis used the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana

interactive model. Results reveal that students' interpretations develop progressively: from institutional obligation to academic necessity, and ultimately to a spiritual practice that cultivates inner peace and deepens connection with the Qur'an. Muroja'ah occupies a strategic position as both a memorization maintenance mechanism and an integrated spiritual formation practice. Primary challenges stem from physical fatigue, motivational fluctuation, and routine burnout, addressed through habituation, teacher mentoring, and institutional cultural support.

Introduction

The pesantren (Islamic boarding school) as Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institution holds a strategic role in shaping the religious character of Muslim generations. In the context of accelerating globalization and modernization, pesantren serve not merely as custodians of classical Islamic scholarly tradition, but also as arenas for the complex formation of spiritual identity. Among its most distinctive learning practices is muroja'ah the structured, repetitive review of memorized Qur'anic verses as part of the tahfidz (memorization) program. Far beyond a cognitive activity for maintaining memorization quality, muroja'ah carries transformative potential that

touches the spiritual, emotional, and character dimensions of students in a comprehensive manner (Al-Ghazali, 2011; Nasution, 2021).

Globally, the phenomenon of Qur'anic memorization has attracted cross-disciplinary attention. Comparative studies across Muslim-majority countries show that tahfidz programs contribute to improvements in self-discipline, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Koenig, 2012; Nasr, 2019). In Indonesia, the growth of tahfidz-based educational institutions has accelerated significantly over the past two decades, making the study of students' subjective experiences within these programs an urgent scholarly agenda (Dhofier, 2011; Mastuhu, 1994).

In recent literature, muroja'ah is understood as an activity that integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously. Cognitively, it optimizes long-term memory consolidation through spaced repetition; affectively, it cultivates patience and self-regulation; spiritually, the repeated recitation of Qur'anic verses potentially constitutes a form of *riyadhah ruhaniyah* (spiritual exercise) that draws students closer to Allah (Rahman, 2017). Hidayat et al. (2025) demonstrated that implementing *murāja'ah* with *taqlīl al-ḥifẓ* and *takṣīr al-murāja'ah* approaches enhances the quality and consistency of memorization. Romziana et al. (2021) found that muroja'ah is interpreted by students not merely as a memorization technique but as a spiritual means of drawing closer to Allah. Samsul (2025) confirmed the consistent effectiveness of muroja'ah in improving memorization quality.

Previous scholarship leaves significant gaps. First, most studies focus on technical and quantitative aspects of method effectiveness without exploring students' subjective experiences in depth (Fattah & Rahmadani, 2023; Syahilanazuaritonga & Dahlan, 2022). Second, Zaini's (2020) study at Pesantren Darul Ulum Jombang provides an important foundation but does not explicitly examine the dynamic duality of meaning between academic obligation and personal spiritual experience. Third, the integration of classical Islamic spiritual educational theories particularly Al-Ghazali, Junaid al-Baghdadi, and Syekh Yusuf al-Makassari as analytical frameworks for understanding contemporary muroja'ah practice remains very limited.

Pre-study data collected at MA Darul Hikmah Kyai Abdan revealed a problematic phenomenon: a gap exists between quantitative memorization achievement and the internalization of Qur'anic values in daily conduct. Some students who have achieved high memorization targets do not fully reflect Qur'anic values for instance, in controlling speech, maintaining humility, and cultivating emotional composure. This phenomenon underscores the urgency of investigating how students interpret and internalize muroja'ah as a comprehensive process of self-formation, rather than merely as the achievement of memorization targets.

This study aims to: (1) analyze the interpretations of students at MA Darul Hikmah Kyai Abdan toward muroja'ah activities; (2) understand the position of muroja'ah as an academic obligation and spiritual practice simultaneously; and (3) identify challenges and solutions in its implementation. This research is expected to enrich Islamic educational scholarship with a subjective interpretive perspective in the study of Qur'anic-values-based tahfidz education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design grounded in Husserlian phenomenology as elaborated by Schutz (1967). This approach was chosen because the research aims to reveal the essence of students' subjective experiences in interpreting muroja'ah a phenomenon that cannot be reduced to numbers but must be understood holistically within the context of lived experience (Cresswell, 2018; Zahavi, 2019).

The research was conducted at MA Darul Hikmah Kyai Abdan, Desa Kembang Kuning Rejosari, Pakis, Magelang, Central Java, within the Madrasah Aliyah Tahfidz program, from

December 2025 to January 2026. The site was selected purposively: the madrasah has an intensive tahfidz program with muroja'ah as a daily activity, its salafiyah-modern boarding school context with resident students provides a rich research setting, and adequate institutional access was available.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (a) students who had participated in muroja'ah for at least one semester, maintained good attendance, and consented to participate; (b) tahfidz teachers with at least two years of teaching experience; (c) the school principal and boarding school caretaker with institutional and social perspectives. A total of 15 informants were recruited: 9 students (3 from each of Grades X, XI, XII), 2 tahfidz teachers, 1 school principal, 1 boarding school caretaker, and 2 non-tahfidz students as comparative respondents. Data saturation was reached after the 13th interview.

Table 1. Informant Profile

Informant Category	Number	Criterion	Role in Research
Grade X Students	3 persons	Active muroja'ah ≥ 1 semester	Primary informant: early-adaptive perspective
Grade XI Students	3 persons	Active muroja'ah ≥ 2 semesters	Primary informant: developing perspective
Grade XII Students	3 persons	Active muroja'ah ≥ 3 semesters	Primary informant: mature perspective
Tahfidz Teacher	2 persons	Teaching experience ≥ 2 years	Key informant: pedagogical perspective
School Principal	1 person	Active tenure ≥ 1 year	Key informant: institutional perspective
Boarding Caretaker	1 person	Active in student guidance	Key informant: socio-religious perspective
Non-Tahfidz Students	2 persons	Interact with tahfidz students	Additional informant: external perspective

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews using separate interview guides for each informant group, lasting 45–90 minutes per session, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Interview guides covered five dimensions: understanding of muroja'ah, implementation experiences, muroja'ah as academic obligation, muroja'ah as spiritual experience, and supporting-hindering factors. Second, participatory observation over one month encompassing morning muroja'ah sessions, memorization submission (setoran) sessions, and daily religious habituation activities. Third, document review of activity schedules, internal regulations, memorization progress records, and activity photographs.

Data trustworthiness was ensured through four strategies (Guba, 1985): (1) credibility source triangulation (comparing data from students, teachers, caretaker, and principal) and technique triangulation (comparing interview, observation, and documentation data), supplemented by member checking; (2) transferability providing thick description of the research setting, informant characteristics, and muroja'ah implementation context; (3) dependability systematic documentation of all research processes to enable external audit; and (4) confirmability field notes and researcher reflexivity to ensure findings originate from field data, not researcher bias.

Data analysis employed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) interactive model encompassing: (1) data condensation thematic coding conducted deductively from the theoretical framework and inductively from field data; (2) data display presentation in descriptive narratives,

thematic matrices, and interpretive process diagrams; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification formulation of final findings iteratively verified through re-checking, triangulation, and informant confirmation.

Results and Discussion

1. Students' Interpretations of Muroja'ah: From Obligation to Spirituality

a. Stage One: Institutional Compliance (Predominant in Grade X)

Among Grade X students who were still in the adaptation phase with the tahfidz system and boarding school life, muroja'ah was initially interpreted primarily as an obligation to be fulfilled in order to avoid difficulties during the memorization submission (setoran). Their orientation was short-term avoiding recitation errors before the teacher. One Grade X student disclosed:

"If I do not review first, my memorization usually becomes less fluent during setoran. So I really have to go over it first to be prepared." (W/SAF.GradeX/25/12/25)

Within Al-Ghazali's framework, this condition represents the stage of takalluf performing an act with effort that still feels burdensome before becoming a light habit (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Muroja'ah at this stage appears as external structural pressure, yet it simultaneously lays the foundation for early discipline formation necessary for the development of higher consciousness.

b. Stage Two: Academic Awareness (Predominant in Grade XI)

As experience accumulated, Grade XI students began developing the awareness that maintaining existing memorization is equally important indeed more challenging than adding new memorization. Interpretation shifted from technical orientation toward a broader sense of learning responsibility:

"If I rarely review, the memorization usually becomes easy to forget or gets mixed up. So it really must be done regularly to stay strong." (W/RRN.GradeXI/25/12/25)

This shift reflects the development of motivation from extrinsic toward intrinsic academic motivation. In the perspective of Ryan and Deci (1985), students began integrating the value of muroja'ah into their self-identity as responsible Qur'an memorizers. The motivational fluctuations that emerge at this stage boredom from repetitive routine constitute, in Junaid al-Baghdadi's perspective, a test of istiqamah: acts of value are those whose continuity is maintained even in ordinary circumstances (Al-Qusyairi, 2020).

c. Stage Three: Spiritual Internalization (Developing in Grade XII)

Among Grade XII students, the interpretation of muroja'ah reaches a maturity marked by the internalization of spiritual value. Muroja'ah is no longer viewed merely as obligation, but as an inner need and long-term commitment to the trust (amanah) of memorization that has been accumulated:

"When I review consistently, I feel closer to the Qur'an, because every day I interact with its verses." (W/SK.GradeXII/25/12/25)

The feelings of closeness to the Qur'an and inner peace reported by students align with the concept of riyadhah ruhaniyah (spiritual exercise) in Sufi tradition. Within Al-Ghazali's framework, this condition signals that the riyadhah process has successfully formed a new dispositional inclination of the soul: muroja'ah has transformed from a burden into a need, from external demand into internal motivation born of personal

consciousness (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Syekh Yusuf al-Makassari describes this stage as the dimension of haqiqa inner realization that develops behind adherence to schedule and rule (shari'ah) (al-Makassari, 2003).

Table 2. Matrix of Muroja'ah Interpretation Development by Grade Level

Grade	Dominant Interpretation	Experience Characteristics	Motivational Orientation	Theoretical Framework
Grade X	Institutional compliance	Adaptation, adherence, oriented	Extrinsic-regulatory	Takalluf (Al-Ghazali)
Grade XI	Academic necessity	Awareness of memorization maintenance, independence	Extrinsic-integrated	Istiqamah (Junaid)
Grade XII	Spiritual internalization	Value internalization, long-term commitment	Intrinsic-spiritual	Tahdzīb al-nafs (Syekh Yusuf)

2. The Position of Muroja'ah as Academic Obligation and Spiritual Practice

a. *Academic Dimension: Memorization Maintenance Mechanism*

Academically, muroja'ah occupies a strategic position within the tahfidz system as a mechanism for maintaining memorization quality. The school principal affirmed that success in tahfidz is measured not only by how many new verses are memorized, but by the ability to retain existing memorization stably over the long term. The tahfidz teacher explained:

"Muroja'ah is the process of systematically and continuously reviewing Qur'anic memorization so that students' memorization remains strong, fluent, and preserved from forgetting." (W/KMS.Teacher/11/01/26)

This finding confirms the position of muroja'ah as an inseparable component of the academic evaluation system through setoran. The fluency of recitation during setoran directly indicates the quality of muroja'ah undertaken. In Al-Ghazali's framework, regularity in righteous acts constitutes part of the education of the soul that builds discipline and diligence values aligned with the pesantren's educational goal of maturing students' character (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

b. *Spiritual Dimension: Worship Embedded within Obligation*

Students did not draw a sharp distinction between the academic and spiritual dimensions in their practice of muroja'ah. Regular interaction with Qur'anic verses even within the framework of academic obligation was still perceived as containing devotional value:

"Although it is part of studying, it still feels like an act of worship because what is being recited is the Qur'an." (W/SAF.GradeX/25/12/25)

This organically felt integration without rigid separation between studying and worshipping reflects the holistic character of Islamic education. The principal reinforced this perspective, stating that every interaction with the Qur'an carries devotional value, including within a learning context. In Syekh Yusuf al-Makassari's perspective, rules and schedules (shari'ah) undertaken with consciousness become pathways toward inner realization (haqiqa) the two are not opposites but two sides of the same coin (al-Makassari, 2003).

c. Integrative Three-Layer Model of Muroja'ah's Position

Based on comprehensive data analysis, the position of muroja'ah within the tahfidz educational system can be articulated through three mutually reinforcing layers: (1) the structural layer its existence within the educational system as a scheduled obligation with a setoran evaluation mechanism; (2) the pedagogical layer its role in maintaining memorization quality, building learning discipline, and developing personal responsibility; and (3) the religious layer its value as regular interaction with the Qur'an carrying devotional significance and potential for spiritual transformation. These three layers operate simultaneously and reinforce one another, rather than functioning hierarchically or sequentially.

3. Challenges and Solutions in Implementing Muroja'ah

a. Internal Challenges: Psychological and Physical Dimensions

The most dominant challenges originate from within students themselves. First, physical fatigue from the intensive schedule of school and boarding activities from morning through evening directly impacts concentration capacity and review quality. Second, motivational fluctuation feelings of laziness and mood changes affects students' mental readiness to begin muroja'ah:

"Sometimes the challenge is laziness or when my mood is not good, so it feels heavy to start muroja'ah."
(W/RRN.GradeXI/25/12/25)

Third, burnout from long-term routine repetition potentially reduces intrinsic motivation. From the Sufi perspective, these fluctuations constitute part of the trial of mujadah (spiritual striving) and when students can maintain the consistency of muroja'ah even when motivation declines, this is precisely the sign of genuine spiritual maturity (Al-Ghazali, 2011; Junaid, in Al-Qusyairi, 2020).

b. External Challenges: Academic Burden and Environmental Dynamics

The primary external challenge is the packed schedule that forces students to divide attention between formal school subjects and tahfidz obligations. The boarding school caretaker observed:

"From observation, some students are very enthusiastic in following muroja'ah, while others still need encouragement. Motivation typically increases when there is peer support and teacher guidance."
(W/NMN.Caretaker/11/01/26)

In Durkheim's (1956) sociology of education framework, collective norms and institutional culture exert significant influence on individuals' behavioral formation. The pesantren environment, which centers its activities on the Qur'an, functions as a positive social control system that encourages consistency both through normative pressure and through mutual inspiration among students.

c. Integrative Solutions: Individual and Institutional

Solutions identified in this research are multidimensional, operating simultaneously at individual and institutional levels. At the individual level: (1) scheduling muroja'ah at psychologically more favorable moments such as after the Fajr prayer or before sleep; (2) reinforcing intention through personal reflection on the trust of memorization; and (3) leveraging peer social support as a motivational resource:

"The role of friends, the teacher, or family is very important. When seeing them enthusiastic about muroja'ah, we feel motivated as well." (W/RNN.GradeXI/25/12/25)

At the institutional level: teachers serve not only as memorization evaluators but as mentors helping students find adaptive learning strategies; the principal ensures a

balance of burden between the formal curriculum and the tahfidz program; and the boarding caretaker builds a collective culture that makes muroja'ah an integral part of pesantren life's rhythm. In Syekh Yusuf al-Makassari's perspective, institutional structures applied with the purpose of guiding rather than merely controlling become means of sustaining the continuity of spiritual practice (al-Makassari, 2003).

Table 3. Challenges and Solutions in Muroja'ah Implementation

Dimension	Type of Challenge	Solutions Applied	Theoretical Basis
Internal-Psychological	Motivational fluctuation, laziness, mood shifts	Optimal time scheduling; peer support	Mujahadah (Al-Ghazali)
Internal-Physical	Physical fatigue from packed activities	Selecting optimal time (dawn/evening)	Gradual riyadhah
Affective	Routine burnout from repetition	Method variation; spiritual meaning reflection	Istiqamah (Junaid)
External-Academic	Packed schedule and exam preparation pressure	Time management; curriculum coordination	Mudâwamah (Syekh Yusuf)
External-Social	Distractions in dormitory environment	Independent muroja'ah in quiet moments	Collective norms (Durkheim)

4. Implications for Tahfidz Education Development

The findings of this study carry several important implications. First, the progressive development of muroja'ah interpretation suggests that the success of tahfidz programs cannot be measured solely by quantitative memorization achievement, but must encompass the development of spiritual awareness and character maturity. This demands a more comprehensive evaluation system one that transcends merely counting the number of juz or pages memorized.

Second, the gap between memorization achievement and the internalization of Qur'anic values identified in pre-study data confirms that muroja'ah processes need to be accompanied by explicit spiritual mentoring. Teachers require not only pedagogical competence in memorization techniques, but also the capacity to embed dimensions of sincere intention, sincerity (ikhlas), and meaning contemplation within every muroja'ah session. This finding aligns with Mubarak's (2019) argument regarding the importance of integrating spiritual values in pesantren education.

Third, the challenges faced by students indicate the need for more careful balance in curriculum management. Overly packed schedules without consideration for students' cognitive and emotional capacity risk reducing muroja'ah to a routine that is drained of meaning, even counterproductive to spiritual development. Zunaldi's (2024) findings on challenges of time constraints and burnout at Pesantren Darul Qur'an Kampar confirm the universality of these challenges across different contexts.

Fourth, the three-layer model of muroja'ah's position (structural, pedagogical, religious) and the three-stage model of interpretation (compliance–academic awareness–spiritual internalization) generated by this study can serve as a conceptual framework for tahfidz educational institutions in designing programs that more effectively balance academic targets and spiritual formation. This study's novelty positioning muroja'ah as the meeting point of cognitive-affective-spiritual dimensions within the framework of classical Islamic spiritual theory contributes an analytical perspective not previously present in the existing literature.

Conclusion

This study yields three primary findings. First, students' interpretation of muroja'ah develops progressively and non-linearly: from institutional compliance in Grade X driven by setoran orientation, to academic awareness in Grade XI recognizing the importance of memorization maintenance, to spiritual internalization in Grade XII where muroja'ah is interpreted as an inner need, a form of worship, and a commitment to the trust of accumulated memorization. This transformation from extrinsic motivation toward intrinsic-spiritual awareness is consistent with the stages of riyadhah in Al-Ghazali's educational theory, istiqamah in Junaid al-Baghdadi's thought, and tahdiz al-nafs in Syekh Yusuf al-Makassari's framework.

Second, muroja'ah occupies an integrative strategic position as the meeting point between structural regulation and spiritual formation. Its three positional layers (structural, pedagogical, religious) operate simultaneously. Students do not rigidly separate studying from worshipping in their practice of muroja'ah, which constitutes a manifestation of holistic Islamic education.

Third, challenges in muroja'ah implementation physical fatigue, motivational fluctuation, routine burnout, double academic burden, and environmental dynamics are not terminal, but rather serve as spaces for building spiritual resilience through mujahadah. The integrative solutions involving personal time management, peer support, teacher mentoring, and institutional cultural reinforcement demonstrate that tahfidz program success depends on the synergy between individual consciousness and institutional system support.

This study recommends that tahfidz educational institutions develop comprehensive evaluation systems that encompass spiritual and character dimensions (not only memorization quantity), strengthen teachers' capacity for explicit spiritual mentoring, and ensure a balance of curricular burden that accounts for students' cognitive and emotional capacity. Further research using longitudinal approaches, mixed methods, or cross-institution comparative designs is recommended to broaden the generalizability of these findings.

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