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Cultivating Qur'anic Character Through Gratitude-Based Learning: A Qualitative Action Research at TPA Muhajirin, Alafan, Simeulue

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ABSTRACT

This study explores a gratitude-centered Islamic learning model implemented in TPA Muhajirin, Alafan, Simeulue, through a qualitative action research design. The program, held every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoon, focuses on muraja'ah, makhārijul huruf practice, and basic Islamic values. Despite limited facilities, learning is consistently filled with joy, enthusiasm, and deep spiritual meaning. The research draws upon reflective cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, supported by relevant literature on Islamic pedagogy, affective learning, and community-based education. Data were collected through observation, reflective journals, informal interviews, and documentation. Results show that gratitude-based learning strengthens students' Qur'anic literacy, fosters moral awareness, and enhances classroom engagement. Three thematic findings are presented: emotional and spiritual engagement, improvement in Qur'anic reading fluency, and growth in Islamic character and social cooperation. The study offers practical insights for educators working in resource-limited settings, highlighting that sincere intention, consistency, and gratitude can sustain impactful religious education. Recommendations emphasize supporting community-based Islamic learning institutions and integrating affective components into Qur'anic pedagogy.

Keywords
Gratitude-Based Learning
Islamic Education

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Makhārijul Huruf
Moral Development
Qur'anic Literacy

Introduction

Community-based Islamic learning institutions such as TPA (Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an) play a significant role in developing children's religious identity, moral character, and Qur'anic literacy, particularly in rural or remote settings where resources are limited [1], [2], [3]. These institutions foster early exposure to Islamic values through routine activities including recitation, memorization, and storytelling, which contribute to holistic religious development [4], [5]. Scholars argue that children's moral and spiritual formation is shaped not only by formal schooling but also by non-formal religious environments that allow personalized interaction and community bonding [6], [7]. Such learning spaces are especially important for regions facing educational constraints, demonstrating that meaningful learning can occur even in simple settings [8], [9].

In TPA Muhajirin, located in Alafan, Simeulue, Aceh students gather every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoon with visible enthusiasm, displaying eagerness to participate in muraja'ah sessions, *makhārijul huruf* practice, and discussions of Islamic manners and prophetic stories. These moments illustrate how affective engagement and gratitude can strengthen students' learning motivation, aligning with literature on socio-emotional and spiritual dimensions of education [10], [11]. Studies have shown that positive emotions, including gratitude, can significantly enhance learning outcomes, classroom participation, and moral sensitivity [12], [13]. In Islamic pedagogy, gratitude (*syukur*) is considered a transformative spiritual attitude that cultivates humility, sincerity, and discipline in the learning process [14], [15].

This research seeks to explore how gratitude-based learning naturally emerges in this TPA context and how it contributes to students' Qur'anic literacy and character building. Using qualitative action research allows continuous reflection and iterative improvement, consistent with studies emphasizing practitioner involvement and contextual responsiveness in community education [16], [17]. The study thus not only documents practices at TPA Muhajirin but also offers insights into how affective and spiritual elements enrich Islamic learning even in resource-limited environments [18], [19].

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative action research design to investigate how gratitude-based learning practices enhance students' Qur'anic literacy and Islamic character at TPA Muhajirin. The action research model follows Kemmis and McTaggart's cyclical structure of

planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, enabling continuous improvement grounded in authentic classroom practice [5], [20]. The setting involves routine learning sessions conducted every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoon, involving 20–25 children aged 6–12 years.

A. Data Collection

Data were gathered using four techniques:

- Participant observation, capturing students' engagement during muraja'ah, *makhārijul huruf*, and value-based storytelling.
- Reflective journals, documenting the teacher's perceptions of gratitude practices, emotional moments, and challenges.
- Informal interviews with students to understand their feelings and motivations.
- Documentation of learning activities, photos, and attendance records.

These methods align with qualitative approaches emphasizing thick description, contextual depth, and meaning-making in natural settings [6], [17].

B. Conceptual Framework

Fig. 1 is the conceptual framework that guided the study.

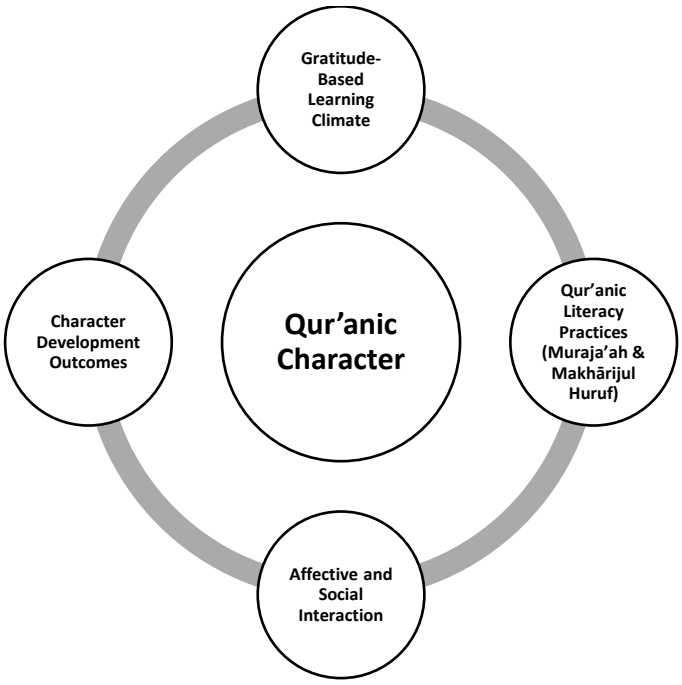


Fig. 1. The conceptual framework

The framework illustrates how gratitude-centered emotional climate nurtures students' positive attitudes, which enhance Qur'anic reading activities. These activities strengthen affective bonds and social cooperation among learners. In turn, this leads to observable character development outcomes such as discipline, empathy, and respect. Reflection feeds

back into improving the climate, creating continuous transformation consistent with action research.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented in three thematic subsections representing major findings. Each subsection integrates literature-based discussion and tables summarizing key patterns.

A. Emotional and Spiritual Engagement in Learning

Observations reveal that students arrive each afternoon with enthusiasm, demonstrating high emotional readiness for learning. The routine begins with collective prayer, fostering a sense of spiritual grounding consistent with research showing that ritualized practices enhance emotional stability and classroom focus [2], [12]. Gratitude is strongly felt among students and teachers despite limited facilities; this aligns with literature arguing that gratitude-oriented environments improve intrinsic motivation and relational warmth [10], [14].

During *makhārijul huruf* sessions, students often laugh while attempting difficult pronunciations, creating a positive socio-emotional atmosphere. Such joyfulness supports findings that affective engagement facilitates deeper learning, particularly in religious contexts where emotional resonance strengthens memory retention [15], [18]. The sense of warmth and mutual support observed at TPA Muhajirin corresponds to studies highlighting that Islamic learning spaces thrive when community values, emotional bonding, and shared faith are present [7], [11].

Table 1. Emotional Engagement Indicators

Indicator	Observation Summary	Implication
Student enthusiasm	Students arrive early and cheerful	Supports intrinsic motivation
Collective prayer	Creates calm, focused atmosphere	Enhances spiritual readiness
Joyful repetition	Laughter during difficult sounds	Reinforces emotional memory
Peer support	Students help each other	Builds social cooperation
Teacher gratitude	Expressed in reflections	Strengthens affective climate

B. Improvement in Qur'anic Fluency Through Muraja'ah and Makhārijul Huruf

The central focus of learning (muraja'ah and *makhārijul huruf* practice) shows clear improvement over the action cycles. Students increasingly articulate hijaiyah letters with accuracy, aligning with research that emphasizes repetitive oral practice and corrective feedback as essential for Qur'anic literacy [3], [9]. Literature suggests that children learn best when repetition is combined with interactive correction, especially in Tajwid-related skills [4], [16], which was evident in the students' progress.

Observations also show that students eagerly repeat short surahs together, creating rhythmic reinforcement. This mirrors studies demonstrating that collective recitation enhances memory, builds confidence, and strengthens communal identity [6], [19].



Fig. 2. Muraja'ah, makhārijul huruf, and value-based storytelling

The enthusiasm displayed during these sessions confirms that joyful learning can coexist with discipline in Islamic pedagogy, a theme widely emphasized by educational researchers [5], [13].

Table 2. Qur'anic Literacy Progress Indicators

Skill Aspect	Observation Summary	Improvement Noted
Letter articulation	Initially inconsistent	More accurate pronunciation
Short surah recall	Frequent hesitations	Stronger memorization
Tajwid awareness	Limited understanding	Gradual recognition of rules
Repetition stamina	Easily tired	Increased endurance
Self-confidence	Shy at first	More active participation

C. Growth of Islamic Character and Social Cooperation

In the final theme, results show significant character development among students, particularly in manners (*adab*), cooperation, and curiosity. Discussions related to prophetic stories often trigger thoughtful responses, reflecting literature indicating storytelling as an effective method for cultivating moral reasoning in children [8], [11]. Students' curiosity during discussions supports findings that young learners naturally relate narratives to their daily life experiences [12], [17].

Peer interactions became increasingly supportive. Students correct each other gently during recitation, echoing collaborative learning models in Islamic education that emphasize empathy and mutual assistance [7], [13]. The gratitude-centered environment further promotes humility and respect, aligning with studies showing that spiritual gratitude is foundational in shaping disciplined and ethical Muslim behavior [14], [18].

Table 3. Character Development Indicators

Character Trait	Observation Summary	Evidence of Growth
Adab (manners)	Increased respect during sessions	Fewer disruptions
Cooperation	Students assist peers	More collective recitations
Curiosity	Active questions about prophets	More engaged discussions
Responsibility	Students maintain attendance	More punctuality
Empathy	Encouraging struggling peers	Improved emotional maturity

Conclusion

This qualitative action research demonstrates that gratitude-based Islamic learning at TPA Muhajirin fosters strong emotional engagement, improves Qur'anic fluency, and cultivates Islamic character despite limited facilities. The findings reaffirm that sincere intention, joyful interaction, and consistent practice can sustain powerful religious education. By integrating affective and spiritual values into Qur'anic literacy activities, educators can promote holistic development. This study encourages support for community-based Islamic learning centers and highlights the importance of embedding gratitude and emotional warmth into Islamic pedagogy.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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