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## THE MEMORISATION CURRICULA IN THE ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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### Abstrak

*Pertanyaan apakah menghafal itu penting atau tidak akhir-akhir ini mendapat perhatian besar. Pakar pendidikan telah mengajukan berbagai argumen, baik yang mendukung maupun menentang, namun pendapat para pendidik Islam belum didengarkan. Dengan menelusuri perkembangan teknik hafalan di lembaga pendidikan Islam sejak masa Ottoman hingga saat ini di Indonesia, tulisan ini berupaya untuk mengatasi kesenjangan tersebut. Isu krusial kedua yang diangkat dari analisis literatur ini adalah terdepresiasi menghafal Al-Qur'an akibat meningkatnya jumlah rumah tangga tahfidz di Indonesia belakangan ini. Ringkasnya, artikel ini mengemukakan tiga poin penting: Pertama, kurikulum pendidikan Islam kini memasukkan hafalan sebagai strategi pembelajaran dan akan selalu demikian. Kedua, menghafal tidak secara inheren mendiskualifikasi proses pemahaman. Pertentangan antara kedua konsep ini hanyalah salah satu contoh bagaimana cara berpikir kita dikaburkan oleh perbedaan ontologi sistem pendidikan Islam dan Eropa. Ketiga, cita-cita luhur seorang Muslim untuk mewujudkan Al-Qur'an dalam dirinya telah menjadi ciri khas lembaga pendidikan Islam selama berabad-abad dan terancam punah. Ketiga kesimpulan ini berkaitan dengan peningkatan setidaknya dua metodologi pengajaran dalam pendidikan Indonesia: kebutuhan untuk mempertahankan sistem pendidikan yang asli dari lembaga pendidikan Islam dan keberlanjutan tingkat pendidikan Islam.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Hafalan, Lembaga Pendidikan Islam, Perwujudan Ilmu Pengetahuan*

### Abstract

The question of whether memorizing things is essential or not has recently gained substantial attention. Education specialists have offered a range of arguments, both for and against, but Islamic educators' opinions have not

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been heard. By tracking the development of memorization techniques in Islamic educational institutions from the Ottoman era to the present day in Indonesia, this essay seeks to address this gap. The second crucial issue brought up by this literature analysis is the depreciation of memorizing the Qur'an as a result of the recent increase in tahfidz households in Indonesia. In summary, this article makes three crucial points: First, the Islamic educational curriculum now incorporates memorization as a learning strategy and always will. Second, memorization does not inherently disqualify the understanding process. The conflict between these two concepts is just one example of how our way of thinking is clouded by the divergent ontologies of the Islamic and European educational systems. Third, the lofty goal of a Muslim embodying the Qur'an inside himself or herself has been the hallmark of Islamic educational institutions for centuries and is in risk of disappearing. These three conclusions are pertinent to the promotion of at least two instructional methodologies in Indonesian education: the need to maintain an educational system that is native to the womb of Islamic educational institutions and the sustainability of Islamic educational levels.

**Keywords:** Memorisation, Islamic Educational Institution, Embodiment of Knowledge

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a movement to mainstream the process of “understanding” instead of “memorising” for students. Among the most frequently cited excuses for this particular campaign are the statement of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Nadiem Makarim, that memorisation competencies are no longer necessary in the future. According to him, Future difficulties will be extremely complicated, thus skills other than memorization will be required. They include literacy (ability to read concepts), the capacity to apply numerical principles in an abstract or real-world setting (numeracy),<sup>1</sup> the ability to cooperate and collaborate, the competence to critically think and process information, to solve problems and to empathise. Makarim’s way of thinking then inspired him to design an “independent learning” curriculum (*kurikulum merdeka*

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Mana Lebih Baik Untuk Siswa: Menghafal Atau Memahami Pelajaran’, *Pijarsekolah.Id* (blog), 7 July 2021, <https://pijarsekolah.id/mana-lebih-baik-untuk-siswa-menghafal-atau-memahami-pelajaran/>.

*belajar*), which among its contents is to abolish the national exam, that is still oriented towards cognitive evaluation of students,<sup>2</sup> and to formulate a high learning level pattern that frees students to hone their soft skills through an off-campus internship process, even outside the fields they have been working on.<sup>3</sup>

Educators across the nation reacted differently to Makarim's proposal. Those who agree state that it would be challenging for kids to fully understand "concepts" due to their memorising tendencies. The myth that "learning" and "memorising" are two entirely separate things was propagated. If the former is a process of digesting information, the latter is simply a process of marking information in the brain that works the same way the weight training works: if it stops and is not repeated regularly, it will be forgotten.<sup>4</sup> The tagline of this group is very "straightforward" and to the point: don't memorise!<sup>5</sup> Even while this may come off as harsh, some of their viewpoints, including a criticism of Indonesia's overburdened student learning program, are understandable.<sup>6</sup>

On the other axis, there are those who think Makarim's idea is excessive and out of context because it does not address the core problem of the poor quality of education in Indonesia. "Memorisation", according to this group, is the initial step before any information can be processed to form the

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<sup>2</sup> 'Nadiem Sebut Kompetensi Menghafal Tak Lagi Dibutuhkan', *Cnnindonesia.Com* (blog), 14 December 2019, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20191214032015-20-456911/nadiem-sebut-kompetensi-menghafal-tak-lagi-dibutuhkan>.

<sup>3</sup> Sharp criticism was leveled against Makarim's policies, which were seen as being implemented in an immature manner. Makarim's desire for collaboration across educational institutions is made impossible by a closed administrative system. Not to mention the problem with the educational paradigm, which sees universities as merely places for training rather than places to develop students' skills in line with their chosen passions. Agus Suwignyo, 'Guncangan Kampus Merdeka', *Kompas*, 10 January 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Alifia Nuralita Rezqiana, 'Menghafal vs Memahami, Mana Cara Belajar Yang Paling Tepat?', *Kompas.Com* (blog), 27 January 2022, <https://www.kompas.com/edu/read/2022/01/27/100846871/menghafal-vs-memahami-mana-cara-belajar-paling-tepat?page=all>.

<sup>5</sup> Sri Rezeki, 'Jangan Menghafal', *Gurusiana.Id* (blog), 7-11-?, <https://www.gurusiana.id/read/srirezeki211335/article/jangan-menghafal-4036780>.

<sup>6</sup> Because it is impossible to comprehend all of this information, it is suggested that pupils merely memorize it. Wisnubrata, 'Menghafal Itu Bukan Belajar', *Edukasi.Kompas.Com* (blog), 14 December 2016, <https://edukasi.kompas.com/read/2016/12/14/15245261/menghafal.itu.bukan.belajar?page=all>.

basis of an argument that students can later create.<sup>7</sup> Children who don't practice memorising will have a dulled brain and become dependent on other items like books, cell phones, or computers. This group thinks that memorisation has a significant impact on enriching brain cells and strengthening the connection between them.<sup>8</sup>

The *Pesantren* institutions are among the educational institutions that have been most troubled by the notion that "memorising is not an adequate learning approach." In general, *Pesantren* educators hold that the power of memorisation, particularly of linguistic sciences, can enhance one's capacity to read Arabic books, the mastery of which is the core of the *Pesantren's* curricula.<sup>9</sup> The 30th section of the Qur'an, the *juz 'amma*, must be memorised by the *Santris* (pupils of *Pesantrens*) in practically all *Pesantren* institutions.<sup>10</sup> It is clear why the *Pesantren* community rejects the claim that memorisation weakens the brain or is a component of indoctrinating Muslim children to bow to and follow orthodoxy-established religious dogmas and practices.<sup>11</sup> As far as this research is concerned, the dispute over whether or not the tradition of memorisation is retained in the field of education has not yet produced any writing that takes the traditional pattern of education in *Pesantren*, which heavily relies on this style of memorisation, into serious consideration.

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<sup>7</sup> Mawardi Nurullah, 'Benarkah Kompetensi Menghafal Tidak Lagi Dibutuhkan Oleh Guru Dan Dosen?', Kumparan.Com (blog), 18 March 2022, <https://kumparan.com/nurullah-mawardi/benarkah-kompetensi-menghafal-tidak-lagi-dibutuhkan-oleh-guru-dan-dosen-1xgt6ex1z6a>.

<sup>8</sup> Rizqi Fadli Fauzi, 'Menghafal Mengancam Otak Anda!', Kompasiana.Com (blog), 17 June 2015, <https://www.kompasiana.com/bahasa.kita/55359cbf6ea834db05da42e7/menghafal-mengancam-otak-anda>.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance: Shidqi Mudzakkir and Khoirul Umam, 'Metode Hafalan Alfiah Ibn Malik Dalam Meningkatkan Kemampuan Membaca Dan Memahami Kitab Kuning Di Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Tebuireng Jombang', *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia* 3, no. 3 (2022): 273-85.

<sup>10</sup> Florian Pohl, 'Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia', *Comparative Education Review*, Special Issue on Islam and Education, 50, no. 3 (2006): 403.

<sup>11</sup> See this accusation in: G. D. Miller, 'Classroom 19: A Study of Behaviour in a Classroom of a Moroccan Primary School', in *Psychological Dimensions of Near Eastern Studies*, ed. L.C. Brown and N. Itzkowitz (Princeton: Darwin, 1977); A. Talbani, 'Pedagogy, Power and Discourse: Transformation of Islamic Education', *Comparative Education Review* 40, no. 1 (1977): 66-82.

Through a comprehensive examination of the tradition of memorising in Islamic educational institutions, this article aims to ease tension between the proponents and opponents of the removal of memorisation from the Indonesian learning curriculum. Through a literature study of the history of memorization in Islamic educational institutions, both of the Qur'an and of materials in other Islamic traditional sciences, this research makes the case that memorisation is still a crucial tool in the learning process and is too naive to be entirely eliminated. This does not mean, however, that this article does not criticize the Muslim community's predominate memorisation tendency. In the following sub-chapter on the Qur'an memorisation, which has recently proliferated in many *tahfidz* houses (*rumah tahfidz*), this article highlights the changes in how people engage with the Qur'an, which is in a way destructive of several Islamic educational values that should be preserved. A theoretical analysis of the debate over how the memorising process should be positioned in the prevalent educational curriculum in Indonesia will also be offered at the concluding remarks of this article.

## DISCUSSION

### **The Memorisation Curricula From Ottoman Madrasahs To Indonesian *Pesantrens***

The manner in which curricula are developed in the Islamic world and those that are common in contemporary Europe differ fundamentally from one another. Islamic education begins with a certain subject (in most cases, the Qur'an) and gradually broadens to include other topics. In contrast, western education begins with a broad focus, allowing pupils to study a range of courses, including science, math, languages, physics, art, music, and social sciences. Students will decide which of their favourite subject areas to focus on in higher education as they get older.<sup>12</sup>

The establishment of universities during the rules of the Ottoman Saljuk, in the 11th century, known as *Madrasahs*, where the elites and royal families (and in certain cases the common people) were educated and taught religious and natural sciences, was a significant aspect of the history of

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<sup>12</sup> Helen N. Boyle, 'Memorization and Learning in Islamic Schools', *Comparative Education Review*, The University of Chicago Press on Behalf of the Comparative and International Education Society 50, no. 3 (2006): 485.

Islamic education. Abū ‘Alī Ḥasan Ibn Alī Tūsī, also known as Nizām al-Mulk, the Seljuk empire’s prime minister and a Persian scholar, is recognized as a key player in the foundation of this institution. His institution was given the name “nizāmiyyah madrasa” in recognition of his contributions, and it is widely regarded as the start of the Islamic Renaissance. The curriculum and teaching techniques used in madrasahs are fascinating. In their early time, there was no such a school-mandated curriculum that must be followed by the madrasah teachers while instructing students. Instead, the course materials and references are chosen by the teachers based on their subject-matter knowledge.<sup>13</sup> At the end of the class, they will award the "ijazah" to their pupils, which is essentially a letter granting advanced pupils permission to teach other students what they have learned.<sup>14</sup>

Historical documents drawn from memoirs written by Ottoman scholars reveal that it was typical for Madrasah students to be expected to read and memorise the Qur’an at the outset of their studies. It was thought that memorisation would improve pupils’ comprehension of Arabic and its literary disciplines. After mastering these two areas of knowledge,<sup>15</sup> students would be instructed to read literature on logic, philosophy, astronomy, geometry, and mathematics in order to develop their methodological way of thinking.<sup>16</sup>

In practice, the teaching-learning process is done in a variety of methods, including: listening (*sama’*), reading (*qirā’ah*), dictation (*imlā’*), comparison (*muqābalah*), reading aloud (*istidhār/ ḥifz ghaiban*), research

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<sup>13</sup> Hence, each Madrassa has its own distinctiveness in terms of the branches of science that are specialised there. Hatim Mahamid, ‘Curricula and Educational Process in Mamluk Madrasahs’, *Education Research Journal* 1, no. 17 (2011): 143–44.

<sup>14</sup> Ali Tufekci, ‘Books, Syllabuses, Ijazah: A Look into the Educational System in Ottoman Madrassas’, *dailysabah.com*, 2 December 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/arts/books-syllabuses-ijazah-a-look-into-the-educational-system-in-ottoman-madrassas/news>.

<sup>15</sup> The first three were morphology (*sharf*) syntax (*naḥw*) and logic (*mantīq*), while the last two were hadith and tafsir. In between these two groups, students learnt various subjects such as elocution, rhetoric (*balāghah*), philosophical theology (*kalam*), philosophy, fiqh, inheritance science (*farā’idh*), tenets of faith (*aqīdah*) and legal theory and methodology (*ushūl al-Fiqh*). Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, ‘The Madrasahs of the Ottoman Empire’ (Foundation for Science, Tehcnology and Civilisation, 2004), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Tufekci, ‘Books, Syllabuses, Ijazah: A Look into the Educational System in Ottoman Madrassas’.

(*baḥth/ taḥqīq*), and discussion (*munāqashah*).<sup>17</sup> Among these many methods, the one that is considered the most successful in learning the traditional sciences (*al-‘Ulūm al-Naqliyyah*) is the method of reading aloud (*istidhār/ ḥifẓ ghaiban*), both by the student and by the teacher. In this method, the student is directed to understand and repeat the material taught until he memorises it. The *Kitab al-Ḥāwī*, for example, was memorised by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqallānī (d. 1448) by studying it page by page and reading it three times. On the first reading, Ibn Ḥajar read aloud so that his teacher could listen to his reading and correct any of his mistakes. In the second, Ibn Ḥajar read it to himself, and in the third, he read it aloud to the other students.<sup>18</sup>

This is not to say that all medieval scholars agreed with the use of memorisation. It was al-Jāhīẓ (776-868), the author of a short treatise entitled the book of teachers (*Kitāb al-Mu‘allimīn*), who contrasted memorisation with deductive thinking. He said that an independent thinker and a good scholar dislike memorisation, which prevents the mind from appreciating differences and makes it rely on the achievements of predecessors without being able to draw its own conclusions. Nonetheless, al-Jāhīẓ mentions that "good memorisation" is still necessary and valuable in the learning process, because without it, the learning process will not leave any concrete impact.<sup>19</sup> Thus, what al-Jāhīẓ opposes is not the process of memorisation, but the tendency of memorisers to close themselves off from the opportunity to use their intellect to activate their hidden potential for deduction. That is why al-Jāhīẓ advises students to become familiar with the arguments of famous authors, their elegant writing style and their abundant vocabularies.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, we see how memorisation has long been an important instrument in Islamic civilisation. Interestingly, it is not just memorisation that is emphasised, but memorisation that begins with a good understanding of the material being taught. We turn now to the memorisation curriculum in the *Pesantren* world. The *Pesantren* is an archetypal Islamic institution that still exist in the contemporary Indonesia. When talking about *Pesantren*, it

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<sup>17</sup> Mahamid, 'Curricula and Educational Process in Mamluk Madrasahs', 148.

<sup>18</sup> Mahamid, 149.

<sup>19</sup> Sebastian Günther, 'Be Masters in That You Teach and Continue to Learn: Medieval Muslim Thinkers on Educational Theory', *Comparative Education Review*, Special Issue on Islam and Education, 50, no. 3 (2006): 372.

<sup>20</sup> Günther, 373.

has always been interesting to explore the topic of where tradition and modernity converge.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Indonesia's *Pesantren* institutions are distinctive in that they have developed a hybrid education system that mixes religious instruction with technical and scientific training, in contrast to similar institutions in many other Islamic nations.<sup>22</sup> I believe that by seeing the process of memorising religious texts through this lens, we can see that while "memorising" is considered as a traditional form of learning, educational actors in *Pesantrens* do not view it as an antiquated practice that is no longer applicable in the modern world. In other words, the practice of memorising allows *Pesantren* to continue using traditional practices in contemporary settings. Memorisation of the yellow classical literature is still frequently used in the learning curriculum in many traditional *Pesantren*.<sup>23</sup>

The "reading, repeating, and memorising" triad is still utilized in the Indonesian *Pesantren*, just like it was in the Ottoman Madrasahs. When memorising short surahs from the Qur'an (as well as brief passages from some books), a teacher will typically read the text aloud and instruct the students to repeat it after him until they have internalized it. The teacher sings the recitation in a certain tone and tune to make it simpler and faster for pupils to memorize.<sup>24</sup> In general, *sorogan*, *bandongan*<sup>25</sup> and memorisation

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance: Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, 'Two Sides of the Same Coin: Modernity and Tradition in Islamic Education in Indonesia', *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2001): 350-72.

<sup>22</sup> Lukens-Bull, 368; Pohl, 'Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia', 403.

<sup>23</sup> See the case sample in one Pesantren located in East Java, Indonesia: irman G. Lanti, Akim Ebih, and Windy Dermawan, 'Examining the Growth of Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia: The Case of West Java' (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2019), 12.

<sup>24</sup> A.G. Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon* (Canberra: ANU Press, n.d.), 210; M. Athoillah, 'The Methods of Teaching and Learning Fiqh in Islamic Boarding School, Islamic School and Public School', *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (15 March 2016): 133, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v2i1.697>.

<sup>25</sup> In the Sorogan technique, one pupil is assigned to sit in front of his teacher with a specific book. A few lines from the text are read by the master, who explains each one. Then the pupil reiterates what the teacher has said. If the learner makes mistakes, the teacher will correct them and, if necessary, provide further explanation. Contrarily, the Bandongan Method is less complex. The teacher reads the book aloud to his students, translating it literally page by page. He then provides commentary and explanations as the students listen and take notes on his lessons. Athoillah, 'The Methods of Teaching and Learning Fiqh in Islamic Boarding School, Islamic School and Public School', 133-34.



are still very common methods used in *pesantren*,<sup>26</sup> so that in the exams held there at the end of each learning period, the ability of students to memorise the material taught is the most dominant measure of success.<sup>27</sup> It should also be remembered that the basic character of traditional sciences is different. There are branches of sciences that to master, a student must hone his deductive thinking skills such as the science of Jurisprudence, and there are sciences that require the ability to memorise certain patterns such as *şarf* with an emphasis on the changing variations of the Arabic words.<sup>28</sup>

The memorisation method has a central role in the continuity of education in *pesantren*, which is closely related to the nature of traditional sciences as its core business. It is true that some people now question the value of memorisation in the traditional sciences due to the rapid development of information technology and electronic data storage.<sup>29</sup> Technology can indeed replace the function of memorisation, but it cannot replace the experience of students in interacting with certain books which has become a distinctive feature that distinguishes *Pesantren* institutions from other educational institutions. The tradition of memorisation in *Pesantren* is not only related to how knowledge is remembered and learned. It is a complex system that keeps the experience of intimate contact with traditional sciences from fading away, amidst the onslaught of modernisation and the rapid development of information technology.

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<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Nurcholis et al., 'The Ontology of Arabic Curriculum at Pesantren Attahdzib Jombang', *Arabi: Journal of Arabic Studies* 5, no. 2 (31 December 2020): 153, <https://doi.org/10.24865/ajas.v5i2.247>.

<sup>27</sup> Raihani, 'Curriculum Construction in the Indonesian Pesantren: A Comparative Case Study of Curriculum Development in Two Pesantrens in South Kalimantan' (Thesis, Melbourne, University of Melbourne, 2001), 110-126.

<sup>28</sup> Pay attention to the interview with a pesantren teacher conducted by Raihani, in: Raihani, 211.

<sup>29</sup> One of the articles that tries to carry this idea is an article about whether or not memorisation of the Qur'an and hadith should be part of the requirements of a Qur'anic mufassir.. Read: Mukhamad Saifunnuha, Kusmana Kusmana, and Media Bahri, 'The Discourse of Syurut Al-Mufassir Among Traditional and Modern Scholars: A Content Analysis', in *Proceedings of the Proceedings of the 2nd International Colloquium on Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (ICIIS) in Conjunction with the 3rd International Conference on Quran and Hadith Studies (ICONQUHAS) (Proceedings of the 2nd International Colloquium on Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (ICIIS) in Conjunction with the 3rd International Conference on Quran and Hadith Studies (ICONQUHAS), Jakarta, Indonesia: EAI, 2020), 8, <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.7-11-2019.2294536>.*

Looking at the practice that has been going on until now, I see that technology, no matter how sophisticated, is unable to replace the position of memorisation in this particular Islamic boarding school.

### **The *Tahfiz* House (*Rumah Tahfiz*) And The Devaluing Of Memorising The Qur'an**

As explained in the previous section, memorising the Qur'an has been at the heart of Muslim civilisation for a long time. From an early age, Muslim children in the Medieval Era were required to be able to articulate the Qur'an correctly and memorise it. This obligation was taught alongside the obligation to pray and behave well, as these are all obligations of a servant to his or her God.<sup>30</sup> This concept is well-understood by people who raise the *Tahfiz* houses or the like. The *Rumah Tahfiz* is an institution where children are encouraged and guided as early as possible to memorise the Qur'an. The embryo of these institutions in Indonesia is an academy that was formally established in 2007 in Jakarta, called the Daarul Qur'an Memorisation Nursery Program (PPPA) under the tutelage of a renowned preacher and celebrity, Ustadz Yusuf Mansur. Since then, many foundations in other regions in Indonesia have collaborated with PPPA to establish the similar programs in their respective places. As of March 2020, the number of institutions affiliated with *Rumah Tahfiz* totalled 1,200 units spread across the country.<sup>31</sup> In its official website, *Rumah Tahfiz* was aimed at "Building a civil society based on memorising the Qur'an for economic, social, cultural, and educational independence based on local resources oriented towards the glorification of the Qur'an".<sup>32</sup> In addition to the *Rumah Tahfiz* mentioned above, there are Islamic boarding schools that have long run *Tahfiz* institutions as one of its educational units. On the one hand, the *Tahfiz* House movement's quick growth (regardless of whether it is connected to PPPA

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<sup>30</sup> Günther, 'Be Masters in That You Teach and Continue to Learn: Medieval Muslim Thinkers on Educational Theory', 370.

<sup>31</sup> Helmi Supriyatno, 'Resmikan Rumah Tahfidz Center, Ketua DPD-RI Berharap Indonesia Jadi Negeri Penghafal Qur'an', Bhirawa Online, 22 May 2020, <https://www.harianbhirawa.co.id/resmikan-rumah-tahfidz-center-ketua-dpd-ri-berharap-indonesia-jadi-negeri-penghafal-quran/#:~:text=Menurut%20penuturannya%2C%20hingga%20Maret%202020,Indonesia%20mencapai%20lebih%201.200%20Unit.>

<sup>32</sup> PPPA Daarul Qur'an, 'Rumah Tahfidz', accessed 13 January 2022, [https://pppa.id/program/rumah\\_tahfidz](https://pppa.id/program/rumah_tahfidz).

Daarul Qur'an or not) demonstrates that it is professionally run and managed.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, it also demonstrates how strongly Indonesian Muslims feel that their children should be able to memorize the Qur'an from an early age.<sup>34</sup>

There is nothing wrong with encouraging kids to learn the Qur'an by heart from a young age. Muslim children are frequently urged to memorise the text of the Qur'an, which serves as their sacred text, because it is thought that the Qur'an serves as the cornerstone upon which the entirety of Islamic civilization is based. The urgency of pride in the ensuing memorisation exceeds the concern over the loss of the part of reasoning, even though in many cases, this rote memorization of the Qur'an among children eliminates the spirit of critical inquiry.<sup>35</sup> The devaluing of memorising the Qur'an itself is a problem that results from the growth of *Tahfiz* houses. The topic of whether memorizing the Qur'an is compatible with a Muslim's desire to live in harmony with the holy book is one that frequently comes up. Which is more important—requiring pupils to memorise the entire Qur'an in a set amount of time, or teaching them the Qur'an slowly so they understand its meaning and internalize it in their daily behavior? These complex questions have been addressed in some recent debate.

Buya Arrazi Hasyim, a well-known preacher and scholar, was the one who first outspokenly criticized the Qur'anic memorization model used in the houses of *Tahfiz* that did not have a clear and sound *sanad* of Qur'anic recitation and of Islamic traditional sciences. The preacher, in a Khutbah that went viral on YouTube, began by citing a hadith about the Prophet Muhammad PBUH warning his companions of the coming of Allah's adversaries, but even though they memorised and read the Qur'an with ease and incredible fluency, this message of Allah did not enter their hearts. The

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<sup>33</sup> It is certain that all research, especially at the thesis level tends to appreciate the governance of this Rumah tahfidz institution. See for example: Ahmad Ulin Nasik, 'Strategi Pengembangan Rumah Tahfidz Di Lembaga PPPA Daarul Quran Surabaya' (Skripsi, Surabaya, UIN Sunan Ampel, 2018); Ria Fitria, 'Peran Rumah Tahfidz El-Fajr Dalam Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Di Sako Kenten Palembang' (Skripsi, Palembang, Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> See for instance: Sumarsih Anwar, 'Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Tahfidzul Qur'an Pada Anak Usia Sekolah Dasar Di Pondok Pesantren Nurul Iman Kota Tasikmalaya', *EDUKASI: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama Dan Keagamaan* 15, no. 2 (2017): 263–82.

<sup>35</sup> Eric Hilgendorf, 'Islamic Education: History and Tendency', *Peabody Journal of Education* 78, no. 2 (2003): 64–65.

fact that many *Tahfiz* houses in Indonesia today are run by individuals with ambiguous *sanads*, teachers, and ideas, in Arrazy's opinion, makes it likely that such individuals that are mentioned above will be produced.<sup>36</sup> It is not difficult for those who have followed Arrazy's speeches and teachings over the years to figure out exactly which individuals he is addressing his criticism. The Salafi-Wahhabi organizations that disseminate their ideological doctrines through the guise of *Tahfiz* houses appear to be bothering Arrazy, who himself is a follower of the mainstream Ash'ari-Sunnism. Elsewhere, Arrazy referred to them as the *Khawārij* group who infiltrated *Tahfiz* houses, utilising institutions established by wealthy people who wanted to possess a *pesantren*, even though they did not have sufficient knowledge to become a teacher (a *kiyai*). Arrazy then advised the crowd to send their children to the *Tahfiz pesantren* (such as in Kudus, Krapyak and Pangandaran), instead of to *Tahfiz* houses. At the end of his talk, Arrazy emphasised that the so-called Qur'an experts are those who also have in-depth knowledge of Islamic traditional sciences such as Fiqh, Tafsir and Aqidah, not the Qur'an memorisers who are only able to record the Qur'an in their memory.<sup>37</sup>

As this subject is outside the purview of this article, I won't comment on the dispute between Arrazy and the group he is criticizing. What interests me is the problem raised by Arrazy regarding the phenomena of Qur'an memorisers who lack knowledge of other Islamic sciences and are unable to use the Qur'an as the foundation for morality, making them prone to disbelief others and quick to point the finger at those who disagree with them. I contend that the practice of memorising the Qur'an has been devalued from the standpoint of Islamic educational civilisation, from what was once a process of embodiment of the holy book into the memorisers to just a brain work that keeps the verses of the Qur'an in the memory. To explain this point, it is necessary to mention the results of Helen Boyle's research published in 2006, as follows.

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<sup>36</sup> FRSM TV, 'Hati-Hati Dengan Rumah Tahfidz Yang Disusupi - Khutbah Buya Arrazy Hasyim', Youtube, 25 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sujmh1yha8k>.

<sup>37</sup> Anas Sudiyono, 'Penjelasan Buya Dr. Arrazy Hasyim Tentang Rumah Tahfidz', Youtube, 21 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohBh-S4l-GY>.

Based on months of field studies between 1997-2003 that he conducted in Islamic madrasas in Morocco, Yemen and Nigeria, Boyle, using Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu's embodiment theory, concluded that memorising the Qur'an is a process of embodying the sacred Word of God that is very oriented to the learner's condition and has a much greater meaning than just the memorisation process, as many people have falsely understood.<sup>38</sup> By memorising the Qur'an, Boyle said, students are uniting the word of God with their bodies, which they can then reproduce, share and refer to, over time and as their intelligence and emotional state mature.<sup>39</sup> Boyle believes that the embodied Qur'an will become a moral compass, as well as a part of the children's spirituality, for the rest of their lives.<sup>40</sup>

Boyle also brings up the conflict between memorisation and comprehension, which, in his opinion, does not apply to memorising the Qur'an. Boyle believes that memorisation of the Qur'an is equivalent to knowing the Qur'an itself since memorisation occurs before a student learns the meaning of the Qur'an and comprehends it. The memorisation of the Qur'an is intended to provide pupils with the foundation for understanding current dogmas rather than to supplant that process. Boyle quotes a proverb from Ibn Khaldun that goes, "Only children can study texts that they do not comprehend now, but will understand afterwards," to support this supposition.<sup>41</sup> It is important to recognize Boyle's efforts to defend the Qur'an memorisation from the criticism that modern educational theory has leveled at it. Boyle is cautious enough to define the topics that fall under the purview of memorization and comprehension. In this regard, I applaud Boyle's suggestion that the memorisation of the Qur'an should be placed in its proper place as the first step in sowing the seeds of knowledge that students can later investigate. In other words, his critique of the strict division between the memorisation process and understanding is, in my opinion, legitimate and reasonable.

Boyle's argument about the embodiment of the Qur'an in the student is also interesting to discuss. He imagines that the best approach to instill morality and religious orthodoxy is by verbal memorisation of the sacred

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<sup>38</sup> Boyle, 'Memorization and Learning in Islamic Schools', 480.

<sup>39</sup> Boyle, 491.

<sup>40</sup> Boyle, 492-94.

<sup>41</sup> Boyle, 488.

text in its entirety. The term Qur'anic embodiment in a Muslim is also used in a slightly different connotation by a later writer, Rudolph Ware. For him, Islamic knowledge (including the Qur'an) is transmitted not only through words, but also through bodily practices. This focus on the physical transmission of religious ideas reveals an understanding of knowledge as something inherent to the body. For educational practitioners in the Qur'anic schools he researched, the process of "knowing" is generated by the limbs as much as by the mind. Imitation of the teacher's gestures and behaviour is as much a part of the educational process as the amount of texts that must be read. Memorising the text makes it possible to have the Word of God personally in the body, without needing the help of an external written source.<sup>42</sup>

A more appropriate perspective is to position the process of memorisation of the Qur'an as an attempt by Muslims to savour their religiosity. Learning by rote is the basis of traditional pedagogy associated with many religious movements. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism all place "a strong emphasis on verbatim oral mastery of a collection of important written teachings and rituals". In many communities, learners do not understand the language of the texts they memorise, nor are they expected to understand them. Jews memorise Hebrew texts, Catholics (pre-Vatican II) memorise Latin texts, Muslims memorise Arabic texts, and Hindus and Buddhists memorise Sanskrit texts. The memorisation and recitation of sacred texts are valued as acts of piety, discipline, and cultural preservation, regardless of whether or not individuals understand their literal meaning.<sup>43</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The above discussion has, at the very least, provided some clear theoretical foundations regarding the position of memorisation in Islamic educational institutions and in Qur'anic learning. Firstly, memorisation has been and will always be a method of learning that is integrated into the

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<sup>42</sup> Lihat: Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 83.

<sup>43</sup> Leslie C. Moore, 'Learning by Heart in Qur'anic and Public Schools in Northern Cameroon', *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 50, no. 3 (2006): 110.

curriculum of Islamic education. From the time when Islamic educational institutions began to be established in the Ottoman era, to when it has been so rapidly developed in other parts of the world, such as in Indonesia and in many other Muslim countries, memorisation is one of the most effective and efficient learning methods compared to other learning methods. Secondly, memorisation does not automatically negate the process of understanding. This contradiction arises from the fact that European education ontologically moves from the study of a lot of material at the beginning of the learning phase, to a more specific study at the end. This flow makes rote memorisation unsuitable, as rote memorisation at such an early stage may be too burdensome for students, as it requires them to store a lot of information about a lot of material in their brains that they may not need later on. In contrast, the learning model in the Islamic world starts from the very particular and specific, the Qur'an, which will be the basis for all the knowledge that the student learns in the future. The Islamic education curriculum is also projected to produce Muslim scholars who can internalise a lot of knowledge within themselves so that they become a wise scholar. At this point, memorisation of these various traditional sciences becomes very important.

Third, the embodiment of the Qur'an with a Muslim is a noble goal that has been the trademark of Islamic educational institutions for centuries. In this embodiment process, the Qur'an is not only memorised, but also lived, practised and actually used as a moral compass to direct the memoriser to do or not do something. It is unfortunate, if the process of embodiment of the Qur'an is reduced by the number of institutions that emphasise only the process of memorising the Qur'an, but ignore the embodiment process. This case is an example where memorisation contradicts the fundamental value of Islamic civilisation that has been going on very fascinatingly and has produced many scholars, in many scientific fields, in their respective eras.

When related to the Indonesian context, some of the important findings above become relevant to be studied further, including in the following cases: Firstly, a sustainable level of Islamic education. So far, in the State Islamic Higher Education (PTAIN) that operates religious majors, there is an anomaly when many students who are not alumni of *pesantren* and have never studied religious sciences at all are suddenly accepted as new students at these universities. Of course, these new students do not have enough

memorisation on some basic information to be developed at a higher level. I personally believe that memorisation and mastery of the basic Islamic sciences is an absolute prerequisite for students to be admitted to religious studies programmes at university level. Secondly, the controversy over Nadiem Makarim's idea that memorisation is not important to navigate the complex challenges of the future does not apply to Islamic educational institutions (*pesantren*) whose main vision is to produce Kiyai and Quranic teachers. Even so, a perfect memorisation is accompanied by understanding and honing deductive thinking skills. Only then, the memoriser can say, "I memorise therefore I am"



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