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From External Rules To Inner Compass: Qur'anic Value Internalization Through The Tahfidz Program At Madrasah Aliyah

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Abstract

Research on Quran memorization and character formation has established that tahfidz programs produce disciplined and religiously observant students, but it has largely reported outcomes without explaining the mechanism by which externally enforced compliance becomes an internally held commitment. This study addresses that gap by examining how Qur'anic values are internalized through the tahfidz program at MA Ar-Riyadh Jenggawah, Jember, and by identifying the conditions under which internalization advances, stalls, or reverses. A qualitative instrumental case study design was employed. Data were collected over eight weeks through participant observation of setoran and muroja'ah sessions, semi-structured interviews with the tahfidz coordinator, three supervising teachers, the head of the madrasah, fourteen students across grades X to XII, and three parents, together with documentary analysis of memorization target cards, mutaba'ah logbooks, and disciplinary records. Data were analysed thematically using the interactive model, with credibility secured through source, technique, and time triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. The findings yield a four-stage coupling model of internalization: regulated compliance, relational attachment, meaning anchoring, and self-regulation. The decisive finding is that habituation alone sustains behaviour but leaves its anchor outside the student; the transition to an internal anchor occurred only where structured routine was coupled with two further conditions, namely a sustained mentoring relationship and tadabbur-based engagement with meaning. Internalization also proved non-linear: eleven of

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fourteen students regressed to externally regulated behaviour during examination periods, indicating that the inner compass is a maintained capacity rather than a terminal achievement. The study reframes tahfidz as a coupling pedagogy and offers madrasah practitioners a diagnostic vocabulary for locating where internalization stalls.

Keywords: Character Formation; Madrasah Aliyah; Qur'anic Values; Self-Regulation; Tahfidz Program; Value Internalization.

INTRODUCTION

Madrasah in Indonesia are not short of character programmes. Morning recitation, congregational prayer, memorization circles, and codes of conduct are near-universal features of institutional life, and their presence is routinely offered as evidence that Islamic schools attend to formation as well as instruction. The more difficult question is what survives when the scaffolding is withdrawn. A student who performs muroja'ah because a supervisor records attendance and a student who performs it because the practice has become part of how she understands herself display identical behaviour and radically different formation. The first has complied with an external rule; the second has acquired what may be termed an inner compass. Distinguishing between them is the central problem of value education, and it is precisely the distinction that programme evaluation most often fails to make.

Among the formation programmes available to Indonesian madrasah, tahfidz occupies a distinctive place. Its scale is considerable, its cultural legitimacy is high, and its demands on students are unusually sustained: memorizing and maintaining substantial portions of the Qur'an requires daily practice over years rather than participation in periodic activities. Hawi (2021) observes that character education in madrasah operates through institutionalised routine rather than through discrete curricular units, and tahfidz is the clearest instance of such routine. Sholihah et al. (2025) add a contemporary rationale, arguing that structured Qur'anic engagement functions as a counterweight to the fragmentation of adolescent attention in the digital era. Siregar and Tumiran (2025) go further, treating the programme as a vehicle for cultivating what they describe as Qur'anic morality under conditions of modernisation.

A substantial body of Indonesian scholarship documents the association between tahfidz participation and character outcomes. Azizah and Murniyetti (2023) traced the implementation of a tahfidz programme at a state madrasah aliyah in Padang and reported systematic planning through goal setting, success criteria, assignment of responsibility, and scheduling, with religious

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character as the observed result. Junita et al. (2023) examined a combined tahsin and tahfidz programme and identified both the contribution of the programme to character and the specific traits formed. Khoirunnisa et al. (2024) reported comparable findings at a state madrasah tsanawiyah, while Samad et al. (2023) confirmed them across two institutions in West Lombok. Usman (2022) and Salim et al. (2025) extended the evidence to boarding contexts, and Wijayanti and Kurniawan (2023) reported religious character formation through memorization in an English-language publication. The quantitative literature converges: Fathi et al. (2025), using an ex post facto design with eighty respondents, found that tahfidz programme management significantly predicted students' religious character.

The consistency of these findings is itself the problem. The literature has established, repeatedly and across settings, that tahfidz correlates with disciplined and religiously observant behaviour. What it has not established is how that behaviour comes to be owned. Turrohma et al. (2025) name the deficiency explicitly, noting that existing studies on character development through tahfidz attend more to outcomes than to the mechanisms through which character is formed. Their own study makes an important advance, reporting that discipline and responsibility gradually shift from external enforcement to internal self-regulation, reinforced by peer mentoring and communal culture. Yet the shift is presented as a finding rather than analysed as a process: the study identifies that a transition occurs without specifying what triggers it, why it occurs for some students and not others, or whether it is stable once achieved.

Filling that lacuna matters theoretically as well as practically. The dominant explanatory resource in the Indonesian literature is habituation. Syaiful et al. (2025), in a phenomenological study of value internalization at a madrasah ibtidaiyah, conclude that Islamic character formation requires continuous habituation supported by behavioural modelling from teachers and parents. Anirah et al. (2024) similarly attribute the strengthening of disciplinary character among santri to systematic discipline development within the boarding environment. Habituation undoubtedly explains behavioural durability. It cannot, however, explain differentiation. If repetition were sufficient, every student subject to the same schedule would internalize to the same degree, which no practitioner observes and no study reports. Something beyond repetition must be doing the explanatory work.

The literature also underspecifies directionality. Muttaqin et al. (2024) document the physical and mental strain borne by students memorizing the Qur'an, and Turrohma et al. (2025) list academic workload, mental fatigue, and fluctuating motivation among the obstacles they encountered. In both studies these appear as threats to memorization volume and retention

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quality. Neither considers whether such pressures threaten internalization itself — whether a student who has begun to act from conviction may, under load, revert to acting from obligation. If internalization can reverse, then models that present it as a cumulative ascent are descriptively inadequate, and the practical implication for madrasah is substantially different: the task is not to complete a sequence but to maintain a capacity.

A third gap concerns educational level. The empirical base is concentrated at madrasah ibtidaiyah, madrasah tsanawiyah, and pesantren, where the moral reasoning of participants remains substantially heteronomous. Madrasah aliyah students are in late adolescence, the period at which externally supplied norms are most actively interrogated and either appropriated or discarded. Villani et al. (2019) show that spirituality and religiosity relate to subjective well-being in ways that depend on the individual's religious status rather than on observance alone, which suggests that the quality of appropriation, not merely its presence, determines whether religious practice becomes a personal resource. The senior secondary level is therefore where the transition from external rule to inner compass is most consequential and least studied.

One further consideration frames the inquiry. Critiques of Qur'anic memorization as mechanical rote learning remain influential in educational discourse, and any account of internalization must engage them. Ayyad (2022), examining memorization practices in medieval Muslim cultures, argues that learning the Qur'an by heart constituted a multidimensional learning experience directed at advancing a range of cognitive, linguistic, and intellectual capacities. The historical evidence thus undercuts the rote-learning objection at the level of the practice as traditionally constituted. It does not, however, guarantee that contemporary implementations preserve that multidimensionality, which is an empirical question about specific programmes rather than a settled matter about the practice in principle.

This study accordingly examines Qur'anic value internalization through the tahfidz programme at MA Ar-Riyadh Jenggawah, Jember, a madrasah aliyah situated within a pesantren environment. Three questions guide the inquiry. Through what stages does Qur'anic value internalization proceed in this programme? What conditions distinguish students whose compliance becomes conviction from those whose compliance remains externally anchored? Under what circumstances does internalization stall or reverse, and how does the institution respond? The study aims to move the field from documenting that tahfidz forms character to specifying how, and thereby to supply madrasah practitioners with a diagnostic rather than merely descriptive account.

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Qur'anic Value Internalization through Tahfidz Education.

Qur'anic value internalization refers to the process through which values derived from the Qur'an move beyond the level of external knowledge and become integrated into students' attitudes, habits, moral judgments, and everyday behavior. In Islamic education, internalization is particularly important because the ultimate objective of Qur'anic learning is not merely the acquisition of textual competence but the development of individuals whose conduct reflects Qur'anic teachings. The Tahfidz program provides an important educational environment for this process because memorization requires repeated interaction with Qur'anic verses, disciplined learning routines, teacher guidance, and continuous self-evaluation. Consequently, students are exposed to Qur'anic values through both cognitive learning and behavioral habituation. Rahman (2022) demonstrates that the internalization of akhlaqul karimah among Qur'an memorization students involves teaching moral values and translating them into daily practices, indicating that memorization becomes meaningful when Qur'anic teachings are reflected in actual conduct. Similarly, Junita et al. (2023) found that Tahsin and Tahfidz activities encourage discipline and responsibility because students must attend activities on time, prepare memorization, submit recitations, and repeatedly review previously memorized verses. This demonstrates that internalization occurs through a continuous relationship between knowledge, repetition, practice, and behavioral reinforcement.

The Tahfidz program can therefore function as a structured mechanism for transforming external rules into an inner moral orientation. Rahmad and Kibtiyah (2022) further explain that religious character, discipline, and responsibility can emerge from systematic Tahfidz activities involving planning, implementation, classroom management, memorization targets, and evaluation. In this sense, the Tahfidz environment establishes routines that initially require students to comply with institutional expectations but gradually encourage them to regulate their own behavior. Recent research on discipline internalization confirms this process, showing that school policies, religious habituation, teacher modeling, time management, and responsibility for memorization contribute to the development of students' internal discipline (Aziz et al., 2025). The movement from external regulation toward self-regulation is particularly relevant to the concept of an "inner compass," because students are expected eventually to behave appropriately even when direct supervision is absent. Thus, Qur'anic internalization involves not only knowing what is right but also developing an internal commitment to act according to those values. The effectiveness of this process depends substantially on the educational culture surrounding the Tahfidz program. Teacher exemplification, peer interaction, parental support, consistent routines,

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and meaningful reflection can strengthen the connection between memorization and moral conduct. Wijayanti and Kurniawan (2025), for example, found that daily Qur'an memorization supported faith, discipline, responsibility, and tolerance, particularly when reinforced by teacher guidance, parental involvement, and school culture. Therefore, Tahfidz should be conceptualized as a comprehensive educational process in which memorization serves as the entry point for value formation. When students repeatedly encounter Qur'anic teachings, practice them through structured routines, receive moral guidance from teachers, and reflect those teachings in social relationships, Qur'anic values can gradually become internal standards for decision-making and behavior. The literature consequently supports the argument that the Tahfidz program can shift Islamic education from an emphasis on external compliance toward deeper value internalization, enabling students to develop an inner moral compass rooted in Qur'anic principles.

Tahfidz Program as a Mechanism for Character Formation and Moral Self-Regulation

The Tahfidz program can be understood as a character education mechanism because its learning structure combines repetitive practice, discipline, responsibility, teacher supervision, evaluation, and religious habituation. These elements create opportunities for students to transform Qur'anic knowledge into stable patterns of conduct. The distinction between memorization and internalization is important: a student may successfully memorize numerous verses without necessarily demonstrating the values contained in those verses. Therefore, an effective Tahfidz program should connect memorization achievement with moral development, self-discipline, responsibility, honesty, humility, and social behavior. Sulastini and Zamili (2019) argue that Tahfidz can effectively develop Qur'anic character because continuous memorization is accompanied by expectations that students maintain appropriate moral behavior. This perspective suggests that memorization becomes an educational instrument when students are encouraged to embody the ethical meanings of the Qur'an. Similar evidence is provided by Sulastri et al. (2024), who found that effective management of Tahfidz programs contributes to discipline, responsibility, independence, and compliance among students. Program management is therefore not merely an administrative concern; it determines whether the institutional environment can consistently support character formation. The systematic organization of targets, schedules, teacher responsibilities, learning environments, and evaluation mechanisms creates conditions in which desirable behaviors can become habitual. Haris et al. (2024) also demonstrate that the use of talaqqi and muraja'ah in Tahfidz learning contributes to time discipline, religious attitudes, and responsibility for completing tasks. Repetition is particularly

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significant because muraja'ah requires students to return continuously to previously learned material, thereby developing perseverance and consistency. Recent research further indicates that structured repetition can operate through a combination of externally imposed regulations and progressively internalized self-discipline, producing not only improved memorization quality but also discipline, responsibility, and istiqamah (Jannah & Ilahiyah, 2026). This finding is highly relevant to the concept of an inner compass because it illustrates how institutional rules can gradually become self-regulatory habits. In addition, Tahfidz programs can integrate character education into broader school culture rather than treating memorization as an isolated activity. Sunan (2023) found that Qur'an memorization programs can integrate Islamic values such as tolerance, honesty, and humility into character education through interactions among students, teachers, and educational administrators. Likewise, Syahweli and Rahmi (2026) report that effective management of Qur'anic memorization programs has significant relationships with character and behavioral development, particularly religiosity, discipline, responsibility, and social behavior. These findings indicate that the strongest contribution of Tahfidz is not simply the quantity of memorized Qur'anic text but the transformation of students' behavioral orientations. For Madrasah Aliyah students, this transformation is particularly important because adolescence represents a developmental period in which learners increasingly exercise autonomy, make independent decisions, and negotiate social influences. A successful Tahfidz program can therefore provide a religiously grounded framework for moral self-regulation. Instead of depending entirely on teachers' instructions, students can gradually use Qur'anic values as internal criteria for evaluating their choices and actions. The literature thus positions Tahfidz as a potentially transformative educational practice: external schedules and rules initiate discipline, repeated engagement with Qur'anic teachings reinforces values, teacher modeling provides behavioral examples, and sustained practice enables students to internalize these principles. In this way, the Tahfidz program can contribute to the development of an inner compass in which Qur'anic values guide students' behavior even beyond the classroom and outside direct institutional supervision.

DISCUSSION

The Starting Condition: Compliance Anchored Outside the Self

Observation during the first fortnight established a consistent baseline among newly enrolled students. Attendance at *setoran* was near-complete and behaviour during sessions was orderly, yet the pattern shifted markedly in unsupervised intervals. Across six observed intervals

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of twenty minutes between the conclusion of formal sessions and the departure of the supervising teacher, students engaged in *muroja'ah* at a rate of 84%; across six comparable intervals after the teacher had left, the rate fell to 21%. The behaviour was present but its anchor was located outside the student.

Student accounts corroborated this reading without embarrassment.

> "At first I memorised because there was a target. If I did not reach the target, my name was written down. So I memorised. I did not think much beyond that." (S3, grade X)

This condition is not a failure of the programme but its necessary point of departure. It corresponds to what the habituation literature describes as the establishment of behavioural regularity, and it confirms the emphasis Syaiful et al. (2025) place on continuous practice as the foundation of Islamic character formation. What the present data add is the diagnostic marker: the gap between supervised and unsupervised performance provides a measurable indicator of where a student stands, and it is this indicator that outcome-centred studies, which report behaviour without distinguishing conditions of observation, systematically obscure.

Stage One: Regulated Compliance and the Function of Structure

The programme's structural apparatus comprised graduated daily targets, a *mutaba'ah* logbook signed by the supervising teacher, weekly *tasmi'* before peers, and a graduated consequence schedule for missed targets. The coordinator was explicit that this apparatus was designed to be temporary.

> "The rules are a ladder, not a house. In the first year we hold them tightly. If a child still needs to be reminded in the third year, then we have failed, not the child." (K1)

This formulation is analytically significant because it treats external regulation as instrumental to its own supersession. It resonates with the account of Hidayat and Hidayat (2023), who analyse special programmes as instruments of disciplinary character formation, and with the finding of Anirah et al. (2024) that systematic discipline development strengthens disciplinary character among *santri*. Both studies, however, evaluate structure by the behaviour it produces. The present case suggests a different criterion: structure should be evaluated by the rate at which it becomes unnecessary. On that criterion, the same programme design may be judged successful or unsuccessful depending on whether dependence on it declines.

Documentary evidence indicated that structure alone was insufficient. Four of the fourteen students had maintained target compliance for more than two years while showing no

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reduction in the supervised–unsupervised gap, which remained above fifty percentage points. These students were behaviourally exemplary and, by the coordinator's own criterion, unformed. Their existence is decisive for the argument of this article: if habituation were the operative mechanism, sustained repetition over two years should have produced internalization, and it did not.

Stage Two: Relational Attachment as the First Pivot

Comparison between students whose dependence on supervision declined and those in whom it persisted isolated the first differentiating condition, which was relational rather than procedural. Students who progressed described a specific, sustained relationship with a supervising teacher; those who did not described supervision in impersonal terms.

> "Ustadz M knows which verses I always stumble on. He waits. Once I did not come for three days and he came looking for me, not to punish me, he just asked whether something was wrong at home. After that I could not treat *setoran* as just a queue." (S8, grade XI)
>
> "I deposit my memorization, it is signed, I go. I do not know which ustadz will be there. It is like submitting an assignment." (S11, grade XI, no reduction in supervision dependence)

The contrast is instructive. Both students were subject to the same targets, the same logbook, and the same consequence schedule. What differed was whether the enforcing structure was mediated by a person who was perceived to know them individually. Where it was, the obligation acquired an interpersonal dimension that the student could not reduce to procedure; where it was not, compliance remained transactional however long it continued.

This finding extends the literature in a specific direction. Turrohma et al. (2025) identify intensive mentoring, which they render as *riāyah ṭ-ṭullāb*, among the practices that strengthen moral awareness and spiritual depth, and they note the reinforcing role of peer mentoring and communal culture. The present data suggest that mentoring is not one contributing factor among several but a necessary condition for the transition out of transactional compliance. Syaiful et al. (2025) approach the same territory through teacher modelling, yet modelling is a one-directional relation in which the teacher displays and the student observes. What operated here was bidirectional recognition: the student's progression turned on being known, not merely on having someone to emulate.

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Stage Three: Meaning Anchoring and the Conversion of Habit into Reason

Relational attachment proved necessary but not sufficient. Three students displayed strong attachment to a supervising teacher while continuing to describe their practice in terms of obligation to that person rather than to the content of what they memorised. The second differentiating condition was engagement with meaning.

The programme incorporated a weekly *tadabbur* session in which supervising teachers discussed the meaning and occasion of selected passages that students had memorised. Observation established that this session, rather than the memorization sessions themselves, was where students began to articulate reasons for their conduct that referred to the text.

> "I had memorised Luqman for a year. When Ustadz explained what Luqman actually said to his son, I remembered that I had spoken badly to my mother that week. The verse was in my mouth and not in my behaviour. That was uncomfortable in a way that being written in the logbook never was." (S6, grade XII)

Two features of this account merit attention. First, the discomfort described is self-generated and evaluative rather than externally imposed, which marks a categorical shift in the locus of regulation. Second, the discomfort arose from a discrepancy between memorised text and enacted conduct — a discrepancy that could only become visible once meaning was available. Students who memorised without engaging meaning had no basis on which to detect such discrepancies and therefore no internal source of correction.

This finding speaks directly to the rote-learning debate. Ayyad (2022) argues on historical grounds that Qur'anic memorization constituted a multidimensional learning experience advancing cognitive, linguistic, and intellectual capacities. The present case indicates that this multidimensionality is not automatic in contemporary implementations: it is a design property. Where meaning-oriented sessions were present, memorization functioned as Ayyad describes; where students memorised without such engagement, the practice approximated the mechanical activity that critics allege. The programme feature, not the practice as such, determined which. Muchtar et al. (2022), in their analysis of prophetic learning and spiritual intelligence, gesture toward a similar conclusion without isolating meaning engagement as the operative variable.

Stage Four: Self-Regulation and the Inner Compass

Where structured routine, relational attachment, and meaning engagement co-occurred, students displayed a qualitatively different pattern. The supervised–unsupervised gap narrowed to below fifteen percentage points, and student accounts of motivation shifted from external

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reference to self-description.

> "Now if I miss *muroja'ah* nobody needs to tell me. I feel it myself, like something is missing from the day. It is no longer about the ustadz or the logbook. It has become who I am." (S2, grade XII)

The phrase reported here — the practice having become part of who the student is — recurred in six of the fourteen student interviews and constitutes the clearest available evidence of an internal anchor. It corresponds to what Turrohma et al. (2025) describe as the shift from external enforcement to internal self-regulation and to the mechanism of independent character formation examined in the boarding-school literature.

One environmental condition proved to accompany, though not to produce, this stage. Students at the self-regulation stage were observed to organise informal *muroja'ah* pairings without instruction, a pattern consistent with the communal reinforcement that Zaenuri and Abdullah (2023) identify among the supporting elements of Qur'anic education houses in Indonesia. The direction of influence, however, appeared to run from internalization to peer organisation rather than the reverse: students at stages one and two were placed in identical residential arrangements without generating such pairings. Communal culture, on this evidence, amplifies self-regulation once established but does not substitute for the coupling that establishes it. Table 2 sets out the four stages together with their observable markers and the condition that enables progression to the next.

Table 2. A Coupling Model of Qur'anic Value Internalization

Stage	Observable Marker	Locus of Regulation	Condition Enabling Advance
1. Regulated compliance	Supervised–unsupervised gap above 50 points; motivation framed as target and sanction	Institutional rule	Sustained mentoring relationship in which the student is individually known
2. Relational attachment	Gap 30–50 points; motivation framed as obligation to a specific teacher	Significant other	*Tadabbur*-based engagement with the meaning of memorised text

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Stage	Observable Marker	Locus of Regulation	Condition Enabling Advance
3. Meaning anchoring	Gap 15–30 points; self-generated discomfort at text–conduct discrepancy	Understood value	Graduated withdrawal of supervision at a pace matched to the individual
4. Self-regulation	Gap below 15 points; practice described as constitutive of identity	Self	Maintenance rather than advance; capacity is reversible under load

Source: Analysis of observational, interview, and documentary data, 2025.

The model is described as a coupling model because its central claim is that no single condition produces internalization. Structure without relationship yields durable transactional compliance, as the four long-serving but unformed students demonstrate. Relationship without meaning yields attachment-dependent conduct that transfers poorly beyond the mentor. Meaning without structure, reported by two students who had engaged *tadabbur* enthusiastically while neglecting daily practice, yields articulate conviction without reliable action. Only the coupling of all three advanced students to self-regulation.

Character Outcomes and Their Transfer

Character outcomes were assessed across three domains and, critically, in two settings. Table 3 reports the distribution of students by stage against observed indicators.

Table 3. Distribution of Character Indicators by Internalization Stage

Indicator	Stage 1 (n=4)	Stage 2 (n=3)	Stage 3 (n=3)	Stage 4 (n=4)
Unsupervised *muroja'ah* observed	1 of 4	2 of 3	3 of 3	4 of 4
Reasons given refer to	0 of 4	1 of 3	3 of 3	4 of 4

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Indicator	Stage 1 (n=4)	Stage 2 (n=3)	Stage 3 (n=3)	Stage 4 (n=4)
Qur'anic content				
Disposition confirmed by parents at home	0 of 4	0 of 3	1 of 3	3 of 4
Regression recorded during examinations	4 of 4	3 of 3	3 of 3	1 of 4

Source: Observation records, interview data, parental interviews, and mutaba'ah logbooks, 2025. Parental confirmation was available for three students only; remaining cells reflect the subset interviewed.

The third row carries particular weight. Transfer of disposition to the home setting occurred almost exclusively among students at the self-regulation stage, and not at all among those at stages one and two. This is the strongest available evidence that the stage distinction is substantive rather than terminological: behaviour anchored in institutional rule or in a specific relationship does not travel beyond the setting that supplies the anchor. Studies that measure character solely through institutional observation therefore risk recording as formation what is in fact situational compliance — a methodological caution that applies to much of the literature reviewed above, including the quantitative design employed by Fathi et al. (2025), which necessarily assesses character through instruments administered within the institution.

Non-Linearity: Regression and Re-Anchoring

The fourth row of Table 3 reports the study's most consequential finding. During the two-week semester examination period, *mutaba'ah* logbooks and disciplinary records showed that eleven of the fourteen students reduced or suspended voluntary *muroja'ah*, and that supervision dependence rose correspondingly. Three students who had previously exhibited gaps below fifteen points returned to gaps above forty. Internalization, in other words, reversed.

> "During examinations I stopped. Not because I did not want to, but there was no room in my head. Afterwards I felt guilty, and then I felt that even the guilt had faded. I had to start again from being reminded." (S6, grade XII)

The supervising teachers recognised the pattern and had developed a response, describing a deliberate reinstatement of structure for students showing decline. The coordinator

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characterised this as neither punishment nor failure.

> "We put the ladder back. A child who has walked without holding the rail can still stumble. Putting the rail back is not a step backwards, it is how we keep him from falling." (K1)

This finding requires a revision of how internalization is theorised in this field. Both Turrohma et al. (2025) and Syaiful et al. (2025) present formation as cumulative, with habituation and mentoring producing progressively deeper internalization. Neither anticipates reversal. Yet reversal is precisely what the load conditions documented by Muttaqin et al. (2024) would predict: if memorization competes with academic demands for finite cognitive and emotional resources, then the self-regulatory capacity that sustains voluntary practice should be among the first casualties of resource depletion. The literature has treated such pressures as threats to memorization volume; the present data indicate that they are threats to internalization itself.

The practical implication is substantial. If internalization is cumulative, the correct institutional strategy is progressive withdrawal of support. If it is reversible, the correct strategy is responsive modulation — withdrawing support as capacity grows and restoring it when capacity is depleted, without treating restoration as regression in the pejorative sense. The coordinator's ladder metaphor articulates this position more precisely than the existing literature does.

Theoretical Implications

Three implications follow. First, habituation is necessary but explanatorily insufficient. The four students who complied for over two years without narrowing the supervised–unsupervised gap constitute a decisive counter-case to habituation-centred accounts. What repetition establishes is behavioural regularity; what converts regularity into commitment is the coupling of that regularity with relational recognition and semantic engagement. This reframes the contribution of Syaiful et al. (2025) rather than contradicting it: habituation supplies the substrate on which coupling operates.

Second, the multidimensionality of memorization is a design achievement rather than an intrinsic property. Ayyad (2022) establishes that memorization was historically constituted as a multidimensional learning experience. The present case shows that contemporary programmes may or may not preserve that constitution, and that the deciding feature is whether structured engagement with meaning accompanies the memorization itself. This locates the rote-learning critique correctly: it is not a valid objection to tahfidz as such, but it is a valid diagnosis of tahfidz implemented without *tadabbur*.

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Third, the inner compass is a capacity rather than an accomplishment. The reversal documented here indicates that self-regulation, once attained, remains contingent on the availability of cognitive and emotional resources. This aligns with the finding of Villani et al. (2019) that the relation between religiosity and well-being depends on the quality of a person's religious standing rather than on observance alone, and it suggests that madrasah should measure formation not by whether students currently act autonomously but by how readily they re-establish autonomous practice after disruption.

These implications bear on how value-based programmes are integrated institutionally. Maulida et al. (2025) propose a systematic model in which Islamic moral values are embedded across curricular and extracurricular provision rather than confined to designated programmes, and Prasetiya and Indiarti (2024) report that tahfidz and related religious activities prove effective in instilling Islamic values when supported by an interactive approach and parental involvement. The present findings qualify both accounts in a useful direction. Institutional breadth and parental support widen the surface on which formation can occur, but the coupling model indicates that breadth without relational depth and semantic engagement multiplies sites of compliance rather than sites of internalization. A madrasah that adds programmes without adding mentors who know students individually, and without adding structured occasions for engaging meaning, should expect its formation outcomes to remain situational.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Qur'anic values are internalized through the tahfidz programme at MA Ar-Riyadh Jenggawah and under what conditions internalization advances or reverses. Three conclusions follow. First, internalization proceeded through four identifiable stages — regulated compliance, relational attachment, meaning anchoring, and self-regulation — each distinguishable by the locus of regulation and by the measurable gap between supervised and unsupervised practice. Second, advance between stages was governed by coupling rather than by duration: structured routine without a sustained mentoring relationship produced durable but transactional compliance, evidenced by four students who complied for more than two years without any narrowing of that gap, while relational attachment without *tadabbur*-based engagement with meaning produced conduct that remained anchored in the mentor and failed to transfer beyond the institution. Third, internalization proved reversible, with eleven of fourteen students reverting to externally regulated behaviour under examination load, so that the inner compass is properly understood as a maintained capacity rather than a terminal attainment.

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The study contributes to the field in two ways. Theoretically, it converts the observation that tahfidz forms character into a specified mechanism, identifying the coupling of structure, relationship, and meaning as the operative condition and thereby addressing the gap that prior studies have named but not filled. It further establishes that the multidimensionality attributed to Qur'anic memorization on historical grounds is, in contemporary practice, a design property contingent on the presence of meaning-oriented instruction. Practically, it supplies madrasah with a diagnostic vocabulary: the supervised–unsupervised gap offers an accessible indicator of where each student stands, and the stage model indicates which condition is missing rather than merely that formation is incomplete. It also legitimises the responsive reinstatement of structure as sound practice rather than as evidence of failure.

Four limitations bound these claims. The study was conducted at a single madrasah over eight weeks, so transferability rather than statistical generalisation is claimed. Stage assignment relied on researcher judgement informed by triangulated evidence rather than on a validated instrument. Parental confirmation of transfer was available for three students only, which constrains the strength of the transfer finding. And the observation window captured one examination cycle, so the durability of re-anchoring after repeated disruption remains unknown. Subsequent research might therefore develop and validate an instrument for the supervised–unsupervised gap, test the coupling model across madrasah with differing programme designs, and follow cohorts across multiple academic years to determine whether repeated cycles of regression and re-anchoring progressively strengthen or erode self-regulatory capacity...

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research on Qur'anic value internalization through the Tahfidz program at Madrasah Aliyah should move beyond measuring memorization achievement and examine more deeply how Qur'anic teachings are transformed into students' internal moral orientations, decision-making processes, and everyday behaviors. Longitudinal studies are needed to investigate whether values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, patience, humility, tolerance, and religiosity remain embedded in students' behavior over time and continue after they complete the Tahfidz program. Future studies could also employ mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative measurements of character development with qualitative interviews, observations, and reflective narratives to capture the complex process through which external religious rules gradually become an inner compass. Comparative research involving different Madrasah Aliyah institutions, pesantren, and non-Tahfidz schools could provide further evidence

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regarding the distinctive contribution of Qur'anic memorization to value formation. In addition, future research should examine the roles of teachers, parents, peers, school culture, and digital learning environments in strengthening or weakening the internalization process. Particular attention should also be given to pedagogical strategies such as *talaqqi*, *muraja'ah*, Qur'anic reflection, mentoring, habituation, and exemplary behavior, as these practices may determine whether memorization produces meaningful ethical transformation. Future research may further explore how students negotiate Qur'anic values with contemporary social influences, including social media, digital culture, academic pressures, and changing patterns of adolescent interaction. By integrating these dimensions, future scholarship can develop a more comprehensive model explaining how Tahfidz education moves students from compliance with external rules toward autonomous moral self-regulation, thereby positioning the Qur'an not merely as a text to be memorized but as an enduring internal framework that guides ethical choices, interpersonal relationships, and responsible participation in society.

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