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Effective Strategies to Improve Qur'an Memorization Quality Through Puzzle Media in Grade X Madrasah Aliyah Al-Wardah Tembung

Fitri Wahyuni ✉

Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The Qur'an is the primary source of Islamic teachings, and memorization (tahfidz) is regarded as a noble practice, yet traditional repetition methods often diminish motivation and limit comprehension. This study investigates the effectiveness of Qur'an puzzle media as an innovative strategy to enhance memorization quality, employing a mixed-methods descriptive-analytical approach through field research at MA Al-Wardah, Tembung. Data were collected via observation, interviews, and documentation using structured instruments, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Credibility was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to maintain validity, reliability, and objectivity. The findings reveal that using puzzle media improved students' memorization accuracy, fluency, and understanding of makhraj and tajweed, while also boosting motivation, concentration, and enthusiasm, thereby making tahfidz more interactive and enjoyable. Overall, this research highlights Qur'an puzzle media as an innovative pedagogical model integrating cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic learning aspects, offering practical insights for teachers and policymakers in developing engaging tahfidz programs and laying a foundation for future studies in Islamic education innovation.

Corresponding Author:

✉ fitrileaderhufaadz1507@gmail.com

Introduction

The Qur'an, as the eternal word of Allah (Kalamullah), is not only regarded as the primary source of Islamic teachings but also as a comprehensive and timeless guide that directs every aspect of a Muslim's life, both spiritual and worldly, throughout their entire existence (Tazkirah et al., 2024). Memorizing the Qur'an (tahfidz) is not merely considered a highly virtuous act of worship, but also functions as a profound medium for instilling moral integrity, nurturing spiritual awareness, and developing intellectual capacity, all of which contribute significantly to shaping the identity and character of a truly Qur'anic generation (Agnesicca et al., 2023). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "The best among you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it," highlighting the elevated status and noble character of individuals who not only commit themselves to understanding the Qur'an but also devote their efforts to imparting its guidance to others (Narrated by Bukhari) (Simanjuntak, 2021). This hadith underscores the exalted virtue of tahfidz, portraying it not only as a way to attain closeness to Allah but also as a vital instrument for laying down a firm foundation

upon which the strength and continuity of Islamic civilization can be built (Ramadhani & Aprison, 2022).

However, in the midst of the swift waves of globalization, the advancement of modernization, and the overwhelming penetration of technology, sustaining the quality of Qur'an memorization has turned into a far more intricate challenge, particularly for adolescents who are highly vulnerable to these influences (Juandi Pasaribu et al., 2023). This phenomenon arises mainly because the prevailing patterns of tahfidz instruction continue to be heavily reliant on traditional methods that emphasize rote repetition while lacking innovative, creative, and adaptive strategies (Ika Wardani & Ayu Rohayah, 2023). Although the practice of traditional repetition has historically been regarded as a means of cultivating perseverance, in practice it frequently leads to monotony, reduced motivation, and a weakened emotional bond with the Qur'an, thereby creating the risk of raising a generation that is able to recite its verses from memory yet lacks a true understanding of their meaning and fails to experience a deep spiritual connection (Fatmawati, 2019).

One promising and innovative alternative is the integration of Qur'an puzzle media, which functions not simply as a recreational game but as a thoughtfully designed educational tool that stimulates visual memory, strengthens concentration, and cultivates enthusiasm and joy in the process of memorization, whereby through the activity of arranging fragmented parts of verses into a coherent sequence, students are encouraged not only to commit the text to memory but also to gain a deeper comprehension of its structure, order, and underlying meaning (Huda & Futuh, 2024). According to the findings of research carried out by Muhammad Saepul Ulum, the incorporation of puzzle-based media in tahfidz learning has been shown to be highly effective in strengthening students' ability to retain their memorization as well as enhancing the precision of their recitation, with the application of this method resulting in marked progress in overall performance, encompassing both mastery of the Qur'anic content and improved fluency in delivery (Ulum, 2022).

Al-Wardah in Tembung is recognized as one of the leading Islamic educational institutions that carries a broad and ambitious vision of preparing a generation of Qur'an memorizers (hafidz and hafidzah) who are not only intellectually capable and academically competitive but also deeply rooted in noble character, moral integrity, and spiritual strength, while simultaneously being equipped to face the challenges of global competition; by embedding the Qur'an as the fundamental basis of its entire curriculum, the school possesses remarkable potential to consistently produce memorizers of the highest quality, yet its persistent reliance on traditional, conventional methods of tahfidz instruction often creates obstacles in sustaining student enthusiasm, motivation, and long-term retention of memorization, thus highlighting the pressing need for the adoption of innovative approaches such as Qur'an puzzle media, which can serve as a strategic and practical solution to maximize the realization of its visionary goals in a more effective and sustainable manner.

To this day, the body of scientific research that specifically investigates the effectiveness of Qur'an puzzle media within Islamic schools in Indonesia, and even more so within the distinctive educational and socio-cultural context of Tembung, remains strikingly limited, as there has been an evident lack of comprehensive and systematic analyses that explore in depth the extent to which this innovative medium can contribute to enhancing the quality of Qur'an memorization,

maintaining students' consistency and discipline in preserving their hafalan over time, stimulating stronger motivation and engagement in the learning process, and fostering genuine emotional attachment and enduring love for the Qur'an itself, a situation which consequently highlights the academic gap and practical urgency of conducting the present study, so that it may provide timely, relevant, and empirically grounded insights that respond directly to the pressing needs of contemporary Islamic education in its effort to design tahfidz methodologies that are not only more innovative and creative, but also contextually adaptive, pedagogically effective, and well-supported by evidence-based educational practices.

Through this research, it is expected that a set of comprehensive, valid, and reliable data will be produced which not only offer a rich qualitative portrayal of students' lived experiences, challenges, and strategies in the process of Qur'an memorization, but also quantitatively demonstrate concrete and measurable improvements in the quality, accuracy, and retention of their hafalan, and the findings of this study are projected to serve as highly valuable references and guidelines for teachers in refining their instructional practices, for school administrators in designing institutional programs that are more innovative and sustainable, and for policymakers in formulating evidence-based educational policies that support tahfidz at a broader level, while at the same time making a meaningful contribution to the enrichment of academic scholarship in the field of Islamic education, especially in the area of developing Qur'an learning models that are contextual, responsive to contemporary educational realities, pedagogically engaging, and practically applicable across diverse institutional settings.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative and quantitative (mix methods) approach with a descriptive-analytical design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Qur'an puzzle media in tahfidz learning at MA Al-Wardah, Tembung. The research was conducted as field research, with data collected directly in the school environment through interactions with tahfidz teachers and tenth-grade students participating in puzzle-based learning. Research subjects were selected using purposive sampling based on their readiness to participate in tahfidz activities, active engagement, and direct experience using puzzle media. Research instruments included structured observation guidelines to monitor teacher and student activities during the learning process, in-depth interview protocols to explore experiences, perceptions, motivation, and challenges, as well as systematic field notes and documentation in the form of memorization records, photographs, and videos of learning activities. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, allowing the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the learning process. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's model, consisting of three stages: data reduction to select and focus on relevant information, data display to organize observations, interviews, and documentation into systematic descriptive narratives, and conclusion drawing with continuous verification to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. The validity and reliability of the data were maintained through source and method triangulation, member checking with respondents, peer debriefing with colleagues, and an audit trail by preserving all field notes, interview recordings, and documentation. Ethical considerations were observed

by obtaining permission from the school, parental consent, and ensuring participant data confidentiality. The research procedures were conducted systematically, from instrument preparation and coordination with the school, data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation, to systematic data analysis and report preparation, ensuring that the research process was structured, transparent, and accountable.

Finding

This study demonstrates that the use of puzzle media in Qur'an memorization learning at Al-Wardah Islamic School leads to a significant and observable improvement in memorization quality. Data were collected through in-depth observation, interviews with teachers and students, and classroom documentation, enabling a comprehensive analysis both quantitatively and qualitatively of students' memorization progress, motivation, focus, and social interactions. The findings indicate that every stage of learning with puzzle media was carried out systematically, from planning to implementation and evaluation, resulting in a structured and effective learning process.

During the planning stage, teachers prepared memorization material by dividing Qur'anic verses into fragments and converting them into puzzle pieces. Each piece represented a single verse, making it easier for students to recall the correct sequence. Motivational strategies were applied through verbal reinforcement, recognition, and collaborative approaches to ensure active engagement. Qualitative and quantitative assessment instruments were used to evaluate memorization accuracy, reading fluency, mastery of makhraj and tajweed, as well as students' attitudes and participation, ensuring that the evaluation was comprehensive and multidimensional.

The implementation of puzzle-based learning was carried out in several stages. Initial activities included prayer, recitation of Asmaul Husna, and ice-breaking exercises to prepare students cognitively and affectively. In the first stage, students arranged puzzle pieces according to their initial memorization. Observations showed that out of 30 students, 18 students who initially made 40% errors in verse sequencing were able to arrange the pieces correctly after two sessions. Memorization retention increased on average by 35%. This stage enhanced short-term memory capacity, reinforced recognition of verse order, and increased students' confidence in completing the task accurately.

The second stage involved group work in which students arranged puzzle pieces from different surahs within the same juz. This collaborative activity strengthened social interaction, teamwork, shared responsibility, and collective awareness of memorization quality. Groups that initially required 15 minutes to complete the puzzle were able to finish in 7 minutes on average, with accuracy improving from 60% to 92%. During this stage, students actively reminded each other, provided suggestions, and assisted peers experiencing difficulty, creating a dynamic and supportive learning environment.

The third stage involved group representatives presenting their completed puzzles to the class. The teacher provided direct feedback on sequence accuracy, tajweed, and makhraj. Students responded immediately to feedback and corrected errors, enabling simultaneous reinforcement and improvement of memorization accuracy. This stage also fostered self-awareness and reflection on memorization quality.

Figure 2. Implementation of the Qur'an Puzzle

Evaluation was conducted through classroom observation, field notes, and student interviews. Results showed that tajweed errors decreased from four errors per student to one error, and makhraj errors decreased from four errors per student to one error. Students' ability to arrange verses sequentially improved significantly, with average sequence accuracy increasing from 58% before the use of puzzle media to 95% after several sessions. Memorization retention improved markedly, as students were able to recite verses correctly after one week without additional practice. Students' motivation increased from an average score of 65% to 90% according to observations and interviews. Focus and enthusiasm remained consistently high throughout the learning process.

Individually, each student showed varying levels of progress, but overall, significant improvement was observed. Students who initially struggled to recall verse sequences were able to arrange the puzzle correctly after two to three sessions. Students who previously forgot easily were able to retain verse fragments with accuracy increasing from 50% to 88%. Group progress also showed substantial improvement. Groups that were initially slow and prone to errors became faster and more accurate due to coordination and mutual reinforcement among members. Group puzzle completion accuracy increased from 60% to 92%. Collaborative activities also enhanced communication among students, collective responsibility, and discipline in following instructions, resulting in a more effective, engaging, and sustainable learning process.

Figure 2. Presentation of the Qur'an Puzzle

Discussion

Memorizing the Qur'an, or tahfidz, is a core aspect of Islamic education that requires not only intellectual effort but also sustained motivation, discipline, and spiritual dedication from students. Effective tahfidz learning necessitates methods that balance accuracy, fluency, and long-term retention with a deep understanding of the Qur'anic text, including mastery of makhraj and tajweed rules. In modern educational contexts, conventional rote memorization often fails to fully engage students or address the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions essential for meaningful learning. Consequently, innovative pedagogical strategies, such as the integration of puzzle media, have emerged as promising alternatives to enhance the memorization process while promoting collaboration, critical thinking, and intrinsic motivation. By combining structured learning activities with interactive and cooperative elements, such approaches aim to transform memorization into an engaging and holistic educational practice that aligns with both contemporary teaching demands and the spiritual objectives of Qur'anic education.

The findings of this study emphasize that careful and systematic planning is a fundamental prerequisite in the application of puzzle media to enhance the quality of Qur'an memorization. Such planning encompasses the selection and organization of learning materials aligned with the curriculum, the design of pedagogical strategies that foster active student engagement, and the establishment of relevant evaluation mechanisms to qualitatively assess memorization abilities. A structured arrangement at each stage not only ensures coherence between objectives, materials, methods, and evaluation but also provides clear direction for teachers in managing the learning process. Through this systematic framework, teachers are able to create a learning environment that is conducive, innovative, and oriented toward improving memorization skills as well as fostering a deeper understanding of Qur'anic recitation. This is consistent with the view of Nadlir et al. (2024), who assert that comprehensive and well-prepared planning serves as an essential foundation for achieving an effective, meaningful, and goal-oriented educational process (Nadlir et al., 2024).

The findings of this study demonstrate that puzzle-based learning makes a significant contribution to improving the quality of the Qur'an memorization process. This method has been proven to enhance students' active participation in learning activities, promote the realization of cooperative learning, and create a classroom atmosphere that is more enjoyable, interactive, and motivating. Unlike conventional memorization methods that emphasize verbal repetition, the puzzle-based approach integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects through the practical activity of assembling verse puzzle pieces. This activity not only helps students recite the verses orally but also strengthens their understanding of the order and structure of the verses, thereby improving long-term retention and the overall quality of memorization. The collaborative nature of this method requires students to work in groups, which trains interpersonal communication skills, strengthens social interaction, and fosters attitudes of mutual respect and teamwork. This approach presents a more varied, innovative, and relevant learning process that aligns with the needs of Qur'anic education in the modern era (Abd & Ulil, 2021; Permana & Alfurqan, 2023).

These findings are consistent with the research of Bima Haryani et al. (2023), who found that the integration of Qur'an puzzle-based learning strategies not only produces a notable improvement in students' ability to memorize but also

demonstrates a strong and positive relationship with overall learning achievements. Their study underscores that when puzzle media is systematically applied, it supports cognitive reinforcement, strengthens recall accuracy, and contributes meaningfully to the attainment of better academic performance (Haryani et al., 2023). Furthermore, the study conducted by Muhammad Saepul Ulum (2022) provides additional evidence supporting the effectiveness of the puzzle method as a pedagogical tool in strengthening students' Qur'an memorization abilities. His research highlights that the use of puzzle media not only improves the accuracy and fluency of students' recitation but also enhances their consistency in retaining memorized verses, thereby confirming the method's potential as an innovative and reliable approach in tahfidz learning (Ulum, 2022).

From an evaluation perspective, the implementation of puzzle media in tahfidz learning goes beyond merely counting the number of verses memorized by students and focuses on the quality and depth of memorization. Assessment encompasses the accuracy of recitation, comprehension of verse sequences, and mastery of makhraj and tajweed rules in a comprehensive manner. This approach allows teachers to evaluate students' abilities holistically, including the cognitive aspect of recalling and understanding verses, the affective aspect related to motivation, discipline, and perseverance, and the psychomotor aspect involving coordination of speech and articulation during recitation. This evaluation framework aligns with the holistic assessment model proposed by Ulil Albab Al Jawad et al. (2024), emphasizing that Qur'anic learning assessment should prioritize the attainment of comprehensive competencies, integrating knowledge, attitudes, and practical skills, so that learning outcomes are meaningful and accurately reflect students' capabilities rather than merely quantitative measures (Jawad et al., 2024).

The implications of this study affirm that the application of the Qur'an puzzle as a learning medium has a comprehensive impact on improving students' tahfidz quality across cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, and spiritual dimensions. Cognitively, the puzzle strengthens memorization by enhancing accuracy of recitation, fluency, structural sequencing of verses, and long-term retention, while also helping students internalize the systematic arrangement of verses. Affectively, puzzle-based learning fosters intrinsic motivation through an engaging, interactive, and positively challenging environment that encourages students to consistently engage in murajaah beyond the classroom. Psychomotorically, the activity of assembling verse pieces trains concentration, precision, patience, and problem-solving skills. Socially, the group-oriented nature of the method cultivates cooperation, interpersonal communication, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. On a broader scale, it contributes to the formation of Islamic character by instilling discipline, perseverance, teamwork, strengthened spirituality, and noble conduct in students' daily lives, both within and beyond the school environment. Thus, the Qur'an puzzle functions not merely as a memorization aid but as a pedagogical strategy that integrates knowledge acquisition, moral development, and spiritual growth in alignment with the holistic and sustainable objectives of Islamic education (Sa'diyah et al., 2023).

The Qur'an puzzle media enhances students' memorization abilities through mechanisms that engage spatial memory and textual sequencing, processes closely linked to the central nervous system, particularly the hippocampus, which is responsible for memory consolidation, and the prefrontal

cortex, which governs attention, planning, and executive functions. Each puzzle piece corresponds to a specific fragment of a verse, requiring students to identify, recognize, and place the pieces in their correct sequential order. This process systematically activates neural circuits involved in sequential memory and verbal information processing, thereby reinforcing the structural encoding of verses in long-term memory. Simultaneously reading and assembling the pieces stimulates synaptic potentiation, a physiological process underlying memory consolidation, and strengthens connections between neurons that facilitate recall and retention over time. The activity also demands precise visual-motor coordination, fine motor control, and sustained attention, as students must align puzzle pieces correctly while simultaneously articulating the verses accurately, integrating motor execution with cognitive processing. When implemented in a group setting, the collaborative nature of the activity promotes peer-to-peer interaction, social learning, and mutual correction, which additionally triggers the release of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, enhancing motivation, engagement, and reinforcement of memory consolidation. Over repeated sessions, this structured and interactive approach systematically organizes students' memorization, reduces errors in sequencing, improves fluency, and increases retention of Qur'anic verses. Beyond serving as a simple memorization tool, the Qur'an puzzle functions as an integrated pedagogical strategy, combining neurocognitive stimulation, skillful reinforcement of memory pathways, and social engagement, thereby supporting sustainable improvement in students' tahfidz performance and providing a model for innovative, evidence-based learning in religious education contexts (Syahrudin et al., 2021; Ulfah et al., 2024).

Thus, the integration of puzzle media in the tahfidz learning process may be regarded as an innovative pedagogical strategy that not only introduces variety and creativity into classroom practices but also fosters an interactive and enjoyable atmosphere that strengthens students' engagement with the Qur'an. By transforming memorization from a monotonous task into an intellectually stimulating and emotionally rewarding activity, this approach significantly contributes to improving the quality of students' hafalan, ensuring greater accuracy, fluency, and long-term retention. Moreover, the effectiveness of puzzle-based learning underscores its potential as a sustainable educational model that aligns with contemporary demands for innovative methodologies while remaining firmly rooted in the spiritual and moral objectives of Islamic education.

Conclusion

This study provides comprehensive evidence that the implementation of Qur'an puzzle media constitutes an effective, innovative, and multidimensional pedagogical strategy in tahfidz learning. The findings indicate that the method significantly enhances memorization quality by improving accuracy, fluency, sequencing, and long-term retention of Qur'anic verses, while simultaneously supporting systematic cognitive engagement through spatial and sequential memory activation. The structured and interactive nature of puzzle-based learning encourages precise visual-motor coordination, attention, and memory consolidation via neurophysiological mechanisms, including synaptic potentiation within hippocampal and prefrontal circuits. Beyond cognitive gains, the collaborative design of the activities fosters peer interaction, social learning, mutual correction, and sustained motivation, contributing to holistic skill development and positive behavioral outcomes in students. The study also

emphasizes the necessity of careful planning, alignment of learning materials, and comprehensive evaluation frameworks to ensure pedagogical coherence and the achievement of targeted learning objectives. Practically, these results suggest that educators can apply puzzle media to create more engaging, varied, and sustainable tahfidz programs that integrate neurological, educational, and social principles, ultimately supporting both academic performance and character formation. Furthermore, the findings highlight the potential for broader application of creative, evidence-based learning media in religious education, encouraging future research to explore the scalability, adaptability, and long-term impact of puzzle-based learning across diverse educational contexts.

Acknowledgments

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