Comparing the Effectiveness of Iqro' and Tsaqifa Methods on Elderly Qur'anic Reading Skills at Nurul Iman Karanganyar

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to compare the effectiveness of the Iqro' and Tsaqifa methods in improving the Qur'anic reading ability among elderly women at the Nurul Iman Islamic Boarding School for the Elderly in Karanganyar. The research is grounded in the reality that cognitive decline commonly occurs with advancing age, making the selection of an appropriate instructional method a critical factor in enhancing learning outcomes and spiritual motivation among elderly learners.

Design/methods/approach – A quantitative approach was employed using a quasi-experimental design. The sample consisted of 54 elderly female learners, divided into two groups: the Iqro' method group (n=28) and the Tsaqifa method group (n=26). Data were collected through an oral reading test of Surah Al-Mulk verses 1–5 and analyzed using an independent sample t-test, following tests for normality and homogeneity of variance.

Findings – The results indicate that the Tsaqifa group achieved a higher mean score (59.27) compared to the Iqro' group (53.75). Furthermore, the percentage of participants categorized as "very good" was higher in the Tsaqifa group (34.62%) than in the Iqro' group (21.43%). The t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two methods ($t = 2.253 > t_{0.05} = 2.006$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that the Tsaqifa method is more effective in enhancing Qur'anic reading skills among elderly learners.

Research implications/limitations – The study offers practical insights for Islamic educational institutions and Qur'an instructors in selecting pedagogical methods tailored to elderly learners. It also enriches the discourse on age-sensitive Qur'anic instruction methods. However, the study is limited by its scope, being conducted in a single pesantren and involving only female participants.

Originality/value – This study presents a novel contribution by quantitatively comparing two widely used Qur'anic reading methods among elderly learners—an area that has received limited scholarly attention within Islamic education research. The findings may inform curriculum development and teacher training programs based on andragogical principles and spiritual literacy for aging populations.

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Introduction

The ability to read the Qur'an is a fundamental skill that every Muslim is required to possess. The Qur'an serves not only as a guide to life but also as the primary source of Islamic teachings that must be studied and practiced throughout one's lifetime (Fauzi, 2023; Hasanah, 2022). Learning to read the Qur'an is the initial gateway to understanding, internalizing, and teaching its divine messages. Therefore, Muslims must develop proper Qur'anic reading proficiency in accordance with *tajwid* rules to ensure accurate comprehension of its meaning.

Allah SWT has guaranteed the ease of learning the Qur'an, as stated in Surah Al-Qamar, verse 17: *"And We have certainly made the Qur'an easy for remembrance, so is there any who will remember?"* (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015). This verse serves as motivation that Qur'anic learning is accessible to all people, including the elderly. Such accessibility is universal and unrestricted by age, social status, or educational background. In today's increasingly complex society, the need to understand the Qur'an becomes even more urgent in order to foster strong spiritual, moral, and social awareness.

However, with advancing age, individuals often experience various physiological and psychological declines, such as decreased memory, concentration, and hearing, all of which may impact the effectiveness of learning (Hurlock, 2002; Sarwono, 2019). Cognitive and memory function deterioration among the elderly presents specific challenges in learning to read the Qur'an (Indrayogi et al., 2022; Prameshwari & Ayubi, 2022). Older adults generally have lower endurance for learning compared to younger individuals and require instructional approaches tailored to their developmental characteristics. On the other hand, the elderly's strong spiritual needs make Qur'anic education a strategically meaningful activity to strengthen their relationship with Allah SWT in the later stage of life.

In the context of Qur'anic instruction in Indonesia, the *Iqro'* method is one of the most widely used approaches for helping beginning learners—both children and adults—recognize *hijaiyyah* letters and pronounce them phonetically (Humam, 2002; Mahfud & Ghazal, 2022; Susanto et al., 2024). This method is systematically arranged across six volumes. However, some studies have found that the *Iqro'* method requires a relatively long learning time and may not be effective for elderly learners, as it was not specifically designed with their cognitive characteristics in mind (Ali & Falahi, 2023; Apsah et al., 2024; Aziz et al., 2025). Reported challenges include the extended duration needed to complete the material, boredom due to repetition, and limited emphasis on *tajwid* during the early learning stages.

As a response, educators have begun to explore and implement alternative methods such as *Tsaqifa*, which adopts a concise, step-by-step approach that focuses directly on applied material, including *tajwid* (Taqwim, 2014). This method has been used in community *tahsin* programs and Islamic education tutor training with positive outcomes. *Tsaqifa* is specifically designed for adult learners who have not yet mastered Qur'anic reading or who struggle despite previous exposure. It has proven effective in enabling elderly learners to read and write the Qur'an correctly through strategies adapted to their cognitive and temporal limitations. The method aims to deliver faster and more efficient outcomes (Masrurin, 2021; Muid et al., 2024; Afni & Rahman, 2024).

Several previous studies have examined Qur'anic reading instruction from various perspectives. Mahdali (2020) reviewed Qur'anic reading ability from a sociological standpoint and found that social environment, family support, and personal motivation

influence one's ability to read the Qur'an. However, the study did not explore specific instructional methods, nor did it focus on elderly learners.

Habibbulloh and Arifin (2019) developed a cooperative, visually-based learning model to improve *tajwid* skills among *madrasah* students. They concluded that participatory approaches and visual aids enhanced learning outcomes, though the subjects were school-aged students—a group with different learning characteristics compared to older adults. Similarly, Aziz et al. (2025) emphasized the success of the *Iqro'* method for early childhood learners, yet its effectiveness for adult or elderly populations remains untested.

Kustiawati (2021) found the *Tsaqifa* method effective in improving Qur'anic reading skills among university students. However, the study did not involve a direct comparison with other methods, such as *Iqro'*, and did not focus on older learners. Meanwhile, Prameshwari and Ayubi (2022) concluded that age affects one's ability to learn Qur'anic reading, but their study was descriptive in nature and did not offer a methodological approach to address age-related learning challenges.

These findings indicate that most previous studies have concentrated on children and adolescents, or examined only a single method without comparing alternatives. Thus, a gap remains in the research: experimental studies that compare the effectiveness of two widely used methods—*Iqro'* and *Tsaqifa*—in Qur'anic reading instruction for elderly learners.

Contextually, the Nurul Iman Islamic Boarding School for the Elderly in Karanganyar Regency is one of the Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia that specifically offers Qur'anic learning programs for elderly women. Qur'anic reading instruction at the institution is facilitated by eight instructors, two of whom—Mr. H. Abdul Khamid and Mrs. Hj. Siti Ngaisah—were interviewed by the researcher. According to them, one of the founding purposes of the *pesantren* is to help elderly women learn to read the Qur'an.

Initially, the Qur'anic learning at the institution employed the *Iqro'* method. As a result, many elderly learners were able to read the Qur'an, albeit with frequent errors in pronouncing *hijaiyyah* letters, limited mastery of *tajwid*, and a relatively long learning duration—approximately nine months. Due to this extended period, many learners experienced fatigue and learning boredom. As noted by Siddik and Mahariah (2023), variation in methods and media can reduce such boredom. Consequently, the institution began implementing the *Tsaqifa* method. The use of these two methods offers a unique opportunity to systematically evaluate their effectiveness in the context of elderly Qur'anic education.

The instructional approach used in teaching the Qur'an to the elderly must take into account adult learning theory (andragogy). Knowles (2020) posits that adult learners typically need to understand the reasons behind what they are learning, and they prefer learning methods that focus on real-world problem solving and relevance to their daily lives. In this regard, Qur'anic learning methods should integrate both the spiritual needs and physiological conditions of older adults, so that the learning process becomes not only religiously meaningful but also enjoyable and effective. Therefore, it is essential to adopt an instructional approach that combines practical, adaptive, and contextual elements to enhance the effectiveness of Qur'anic learning for this age group.

Moreover, there is an urgent need to provide inclusive religious education programs for the elderly, especially given the steady increase in the elderly population both nationally and globally. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik,

2023), the number of elderly people in Indonesia continues to rise each year. This reality underscores the importance of developing religious education models, including Qur'anic reading programs, specifically designed for older adults. Such programs can serve as part of a national spiritual literacy initiative and represent a value-based educational service that upholds social justice and the inclusion of marginalized groups.

In light of the above, this study aims to examine and compare the effectiveness of the *Iqro'* and *Tsaqifa* methods in improving Qur'anic reading skills among elderly women at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Iman in Karanganyar. This research adopts a quantitative experimental approach using standardized assessment instruments. It is expected that the findings of this study will serve as a practical reference for Qur'anic educators and administrators of religious institutions in designing adaptive instructional strategies that meet the needs of elderly learners.

Methods

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design. This approach was selected to empirically examine the differences in Qur'anic reading skills between two groups of elderly learners taught using two different methods: Iqro' and Tsaqifa. The quasi-experimental design allows researchers to assess the effect of the treatment on the dependent variable in a controlled manner, despite the absence of full randomization (Creswell, 2012).

2. Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised all elderly female students enrolled in Qur'anic learning programs at the Nurul Iman Elderly Islamic Boarding School in Karanganyar, totaling 63 individuals. The sample was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling, a technique that considers the proportional representation of each group in the population. Based on preliminary data, 33 learners were enrolled in the Iqro' method, while 30 participated in the Tsaqifa method. A sample of 54 participants was selected, consisting of 28 elderly women from the Iqro' group and 26 from the Tsaqifa group.

3. Research Variables

The independent variable was the learning method (Iqro' and Tsaqifa), while the dependent variable was Qur'anic reading ability, measured based on the aspects of tajwid (rules of recitation), makhārij al-ḥurūf (articulation of letters), and reading fluency.

4. Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through an oral reading test of Surah Al-Mulk verses 1–5. The test was conducted in person by instructors from the boarding school in a supportive and comfortable environment. Each participant was asked to read the verses sequentially, and their readings were recorded for further evaluation.

5. Assessment Instrument and Rubric

The Qur'anic reading ability was assessed using a validated rubric reviewed by experts. The rubric comprised three main indicators:

5.1.   Tajwid: Assessment of the correct application of recitation rules such as idgham, ikhfa, iqlab, and mad.

5.2.   Makharijul huruf: Clarity of articulating the Arabic letters from their correct points of origin.

5.3.   Reading fluency: Assessment of the smoothness and coherence of reading with minimal pauses or errors.

Each indicator was scored on a scale of 1 to 5 and then summed to obtain the total score. The instrument's validity was established through expert judgment, while reliability was tested using the inter-rater reliability technique.

6.   Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to portray the reading ability profile in terms of mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. To determine significant differences between the two groups, an independent sample t-test was conducted with a significance level of 5%.

Prior to the t-test, prerequisite tests were conducted, including a normality test using the Chi-square method, to ensure that the data in each group were normally distributed. If the data met the assumptions of normal distribution and homogeneity of variance, the t-test was then applied.

7.   Research Limitations

This study is limited by its scope, as it was conducted at a single Islamic boarding school and only involved elderly female participants. Therefore, caution is advised when generalizing the findings to other populations.This study employed a qualitative approach with a field case study design (Rukin, 2021). The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the management of the Digital Madrasah program based on the use of the Exambro application in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) cluster at MAN 2 Rembang.

Result

1.   Data Description of the Iqro' Method Group

The first group consisted of 28 elderly participants who had undergone Qur'anic reading instruction using the *Iqro'* method. Each participant took an oral reading test of Surah Al-Mulk verses 1–5, which was assessed based on three main aspects: *tajwid* (rules of recitation), *makhārij al-ḥurūf* (articulation of Arabic letters), and reading fluency. The assessment was carried out by an evaluation team from the Islamic boarding school who had been trained and validated to ensure the objectivity of the scoring process.

Before the test began, all elderly participants from both the *Iqro'* and *Tsaqifa* groups were guided collectively by instructors from the boarding school to recite Surah Al-Mulk verses 1–5 as an initial warm-up practice.

Based on the data analysis results, the lowest score was 35 and the highest score was 70. The mean score for this group was 53.75. The median was 49.37, the mode was 50.25, and the standard deviation was 9.26. These statistics indicate a considerable variation in scores among participants, suggesting differences in Qur'anic reading proficiency despite being taught using the same method.

The frequency distribution of the data was grouped into six class intervals with a class width of 7, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

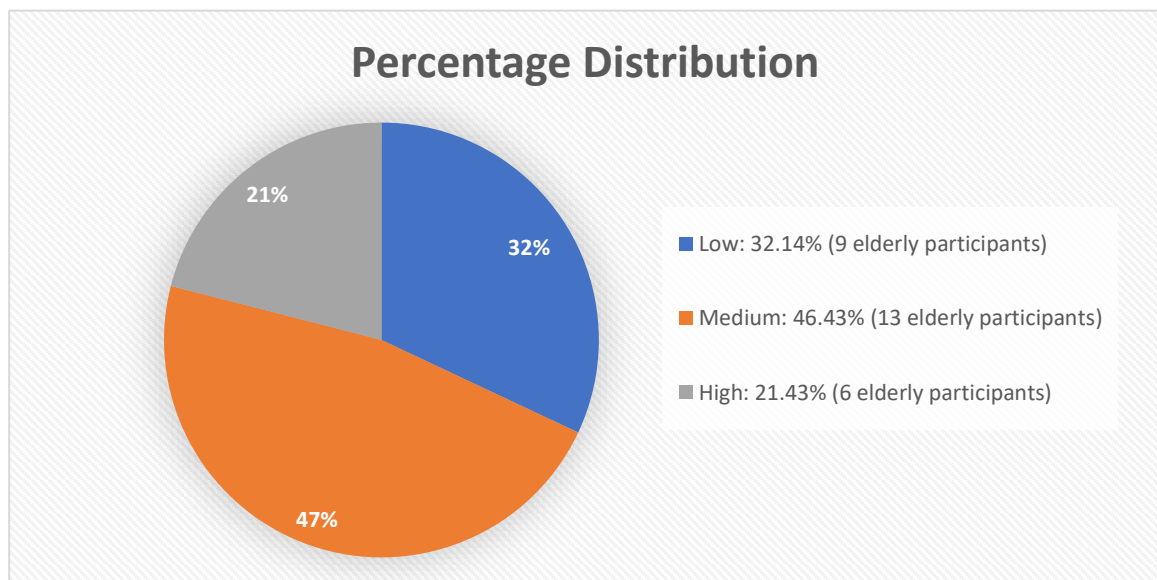*Frequency Distribution of Qur'anic Reading Proficiency – Iqro' Method Group*

No	Interval	Frequency	Percentage	Category
1	35–41	2	7.14%	Below Average
2	42–48	7	25.00%	Below Average
3	49–55	8	28.57%	Good
4	56–62	5	17.86%	Good
5	63–69	5	17.86%	Very Good
6	70–76	1	3.57%	Very Good

Based on this classification, it can be observed that 9 participants (32.14%) fell into the below average category, 13 participants (46.43%) were in the good category, and 6 participants (21.43%) were in the very good category. Thus, the majority of participants in this group demonstrated Qur'anic reading proficiency ranging from moderate to high levels, although a significant portion had not yet achieved optimal competency.

A visual representation of the Iqro' group's performance is shown in the following pie chart:

Figure 1

Pie Chart of Qur'anic Reading Proficiency among Elderly Learners Using the Iqro' Method

Percentage Distribution

- Low: 32.14% (9 elderly participants)
- Medium: 46.43% (13 elderly participants)
- High: 21.43% (6 elderly participants)

2. Data Description of the Tsaqifa Method Group

The second group consisted of 26 elderly participants who received Qur'anic reading instruction using the *Tsaqifa* method. The assessment employed the same rubric and indicators as used in the *Iqro'* group to ensure the validity and reliability of the comparison.

In this group, the lowest score obtained by participants was 40, and the highest score reached 75. The average (mean) score of this group was 59.27, with both the median and mode at 59.70. A standard deviation of 8.73 indicates slightly lower variability compared to the *Iqro'* group. This may suggest that the distribution of participants' scores in this group is more centralized or consistent, although variation in proficiency still exists. The score distribution of participants is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2.

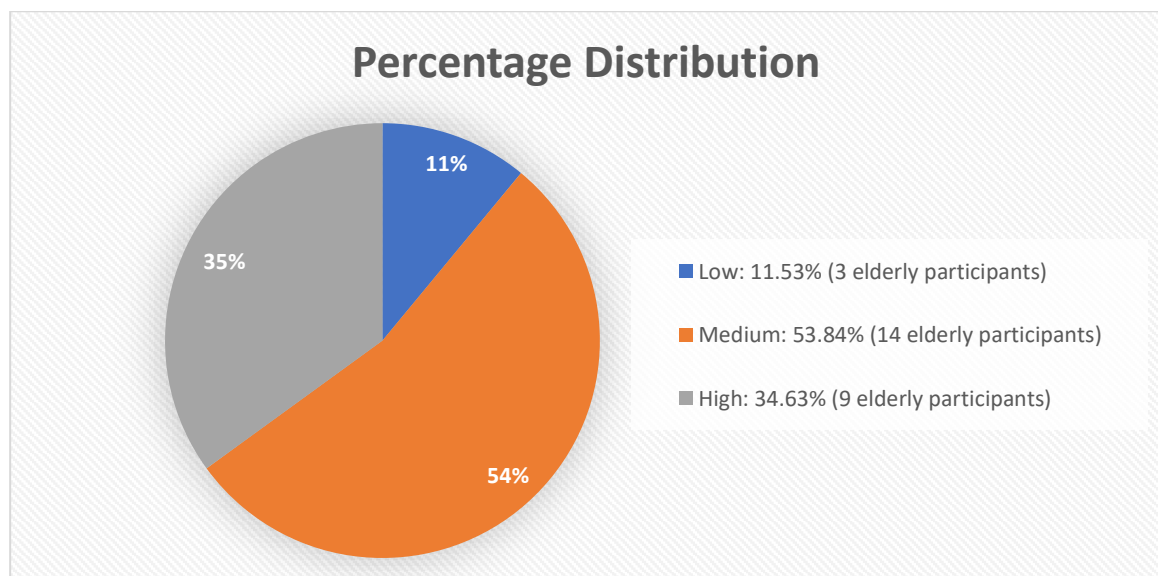*Frequency Distribution of Qur'anic Reading Proficiency – Tsaqifa Method Group*

No	Interval	Frequency	Percentage	Category
1	35−41	1	3.85%	Below Average
2	42−48	2	7.69%	Below Average
3	49−55	4	15.38%	Good
4	56−62	10	38.46%	Good
5	63−69	6	23.08%	Very Good
6	70−76	3	11.54%	Very Good

These results indicate that more participants in the *Tsaqifa* group were in the *Good* and *Very Good* categories, with 14 participants (53.84%) and 9 participants (34.62%) respectively. Meanwhile, only 3 participants (11.54%) remained in the *Below Average* category. This comparison suggests that the score distribution in this group tends to be more favorable than that of the *Iqro'* group. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the effectiveness of the *Tsaqifa* method in significantly improving Qur'anic reading proficiency among adult learners and community groups (Muid et al., 2024; Nashir & Suparman, 2023).

A visual representation of the *Tsaqifa* group's performance is presented in the pie chart below:

Figure 2

Pie Chart of Qur'anic Reading Proficiency among Elderly Learners Taught Using the Tsaqifa Method

Percentage Distribution

- Low: 11.53% (3 elderly participants)
- Medium: 53.84% (14 elderly participants)
- High: 34.63% (9 elderly participants)

3. Normality Test

Before conducting the hypothesis test, a normality test was first performed to ensure that the data distribution in each group met the assumption of normal distribution. The normality test was carried out using the Chi-square test, which yielded the following results:

- Iqro' Group: calculated χ^2 value = 5.388; χ^2 table value (df = 5) = 11.070
- Tsaqifa Group: calculated χ^2 value = 10.221; χ^2 table value (df = 5) = 11.070

Since the calculated χ^2 values for both groups were lower than the critical value from the table, it can be concluded that the data are normally distributed. Therefore, a parametric test (t-test) is appropriate to use.

4. Hypothesis Testing (t-Test)

After confirming that the data were normally distributed, the next step was to conduct an independent sample t-test to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the Qur'anic reading proficiency of elderly participants taught using the *Iqro'* method and those taught using the *Tsaqifa* method.

The calculation resulted in a t-value of 2.253. With 52 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 5%, the critical t-value was 2.006. Since the calculated t-value is greater than the critical value (2.253 > 2.006), the result indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. In other words, the use of the *Tsaqifa* method produced significantly higher Qur'anic reading proficiency compared to the *Iqro'* method.

5. Interpretation of Results

Both descriptive and inferential statistical results demonstrate that the *Tsaqifa* method yielded better outcomes in Qur'anic reading instruction for elderly learners. This is evidenced by the higher average score (59.27 vs. 53.75), the greater number of participants in the "Very Good" category (34.62% vs. 21.43%), and the more symmetric and concentrated score distribution within the "Good" category.

From an instructional approach perspective, the superiority of the *Tsaqifa* method can be attributed to its concise format, direct emphasis on tajwīd practice, and less reliance on cumulative memorization, as required by the *Iqro'* method. Elderly learners, as a group with cognitive and memory limitations, are better able to absorb material that is presented in a direct, applicable, and contextual manner.

Additionally, the *Tsaqifa* approach fosters learners' confidence from the outset, as they are immediately able to read segments of Qur'anic verses—even if imperfectly—and gradually correct their mistakes. This contrasts significantly with the *Iqro'* method, which tends to be linear and accumulative; failure at one stage can hinder success at subsequent stages.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate a significant difference in the Qur'anic reading proficiency of elderly learners taught using the *Iqro'* method compared to those taught using the *Tsaqifa* method. The *Tsaqifa* group achieved a higher average score (59.27) than the *Iqro'* group (53.75) and had a greater proportion of participants in the "Very Good" category. This suggests that the instructional method has a significant effect on the learning outcomes of elderly learners in reading the Qur'an.

The superiority of the *Tsaqifa* method can be explained by its characteristics, which are more adaptive to the needs of adult learners, particularly the elderly. This method is specifically designed for adult learners, presenting concise instructional content, focusing directly on practice, and integrating elements of *tajwīd* from the outset (Taqwim, 2014). The use of this method not only accelerates learning achievement but also fosters learners' self-confidence, as demonstrated by Afni & Rahman (2024) in their community-based *taḥsīn* program. This aligns with the theory of andragogy proposed by Knowles et al. (2020), which emphasizes that adult learners tend to learn from experience, require contextualized approaches, and are more responsive to practical and directly applicable learning strategies. Although the Tsaqifa method is more practical in nature, it tends to require intensive guidance in the initial stages to establish correct reading habits.

In contrast, the *Iqro'* method, while systematic and proven effective for children and beginners (Nurmalia et al., 2020; Izzan & Noviana, 2022), has a tiered structure comprising six volumes, requiring a longer learning period and high persistence. Fundamentally, this method is not tailored for elderly learners, often resulting in obstacles such as boredom, difficulty in memorizing letters, and limited attention to *tajwīd* aspects in the early stages (Saputra et al., 2024). These challenges slow down the learning process and increase the risk of learners losing motivation. Hence, Mahdali (2020) emphasized the importance of social and contextual approaches in Qur'anic instruction, especially for marginalized or vulnerable groups such as the elderly.

From a learning theory perspective, the *Tsaqifa* method aligns more closely with active learning and constructivist principles, wherein learners build understanding through direct practice and meaningful repetition. According to Piaget and Vygotsky, learning becomes more effective when learners are placed in situations that stimulate interaction between new knowledge and their prior experiences (Slavin, 2018). In this case, the *Tsaqifa* method enables elderly learners to immediately recognize the connection between letters, words, and relevant Qur'anic reading practices.

These findings also have practical implications for Islamic educational institutions managing Qur'anic learning programs for the elderly. Using methods that align with the characteristics of elderly learners can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of learning, while also reducing dropout rates due to boredom. Training in the *Tsaqifa* method, whether conducted in universities or *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), has shown consistent results in accelerating the acquisition of basic reading skills (Muid et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2024). Furthermore, these findings lay a foundation for the development of age- and need-based Qur'anic curricula, which remain largely underdeveloped in a systematic way.

The results also highlight the importance of adopting a learner-centered approach in religious education for the elderly. In this approach, the learning process is not solely based on a standardized curriculum but is instead tailored to the conditions, needs, and learning preferences of the participants. Elderly learners tend to prefer a slower, more meaningful learning pace, making methods that encourage direct interaction and practical application—such as *Tsaqifa*—more effective in meeting their needs.

In the context of Islamic education, this study can be viewed as part of the broader development of *Islamic gerontology education*, an effort to integrate Islamic principles into lifelong learning. This concept affirms that religious education does not cease at a certain age but continues throughout life as part of each Muslim's spiritual and social responsibility.

Beyond cognitive aspects, affective and social dimensions must also be considered. The presence of patient instructors, a supportive learning environment, and a motivating learning community can enhance learners' motivation and self-confidence. Thus, the effectiveness of a method is not solely determined by the structure of its content, but also by factors such as social interaction, perceived comfort, and learners' spiritual motivation.

Nevertheless, these findings should be viewed within the context of the study's limitations in terms of sample size and research scope. Further studies involving more diverse locations, cultural backgrounds, and age variations among elderly learners would be valuable for testing the consistency of these results. Additionally, affective aspects such as motivation, comfort, and learners' perceptions of instructional methods should be considered in future research to complement the quantitative data obtained.

In conclusion, the success of Qur'anic reading instruction for the elderly is highly influenced by the selection of an appropriate teaching method. The *Tsaqifa* method, with its practical, simplified, and direct approach, has been shown to produce better outcomes than the more general *Iqro'* method. Therefore, updating methodological approaches in Qur'anic education for elderly learners is an urgent need in the effort to strengthen religious literacy in later life.

Conclusion

This study revealed a significant difference in Qur'anic reading proficiency between elderly learners taught using the *Iqro'* method and those taught using the *Tsaqifa* method at Pondok Pesantren Lansia Nurul Iman Karanganyar. The elderly group taught with the *Tsaqifa* method demonstrated a higher average reading score and a greater proportion of participants falling into the "Good" and "Very Good" categories compared to those taught with the *Iqro'* method.

The superiority of the *Tsaqifa* method can be attributed to its more practical, direct, and contextually adapted approach tailored to the characteristics of adult learners. In contrast, the *Iqro'* method, being more generic and sequential, is generally more suitable for children or beginners. Therefore, the choice of an appropriate instructional method significantly influences learning outcomes, particularly for elderly learners.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that Islamic educational institutions consider adopting or adapting the Tsaqifa method for Qur'anic instruction among elderly learners, given its demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing reading proficiency in a more efficient and learner-friendly manner. Educators and Qur'anic instructors are encouraged to engage in specialized training that equips them with the pedagogical skills necessary to apply contextual, responsive, and age-appropriate teaching strategies tailored to the cognitive and emotional needs of older adults. Furthermore, future research should investigate the affective dimensions of learning—such as learner motivation, perceived comfort, and engagement with instructional methods—as well as expand the demographic and geographical scope of the study to improve generalizability and external validity. Such efforts are essential in supporting the development of inclusive, adaptive, and lifelong Islamic learning models that align with the principles of Islamic gerontology education.

In conclusion, this study is expected to make a practical contribution to the development of age- and need-based Qur'anic teaching methods. It also provides a foundation for the advancement of more inclusive and adaptive Islamic education innovations.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

The first author (Amy Lia Laili) was responsible for the planning, data collection, analysis, methodology, data processing, and manuscript preparation.

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Data availability statement

The research data are stored at the office of Pondok Pesantren Lansia Nurul Iman Karanganyar and have been duplicated by the researcher. These data are available to other researchers upon request to the corresponding author.

Declaration of interests statement

The author declares no financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the outcome of this research.

Additional information

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