Immortalis Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies
ISSN: 3123-3600 https://immortalispub.com/ijis
Vol. 2 Issue 4, October 2026, pp. 266-282

Students' Lived Experiences of Falling Behind in Qur'an Reading and Memorization during Tahsin-Tahfiz Instruction

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Abstract

This study explores students' lived experiences of falling behind and responding to difficulties in Qur'an reading and memorization during tahsin-tahfiz instruction at Muhammadiyah 4 High School in Depok. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study involved 18 twelfth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and learning documents. The analysis involved repeated reading of the data, identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, grouping of codes into categories, development of themes, and interpretation of the structure of students' experiences. The findings reveal interconnected themes concerning perceived gaps in memorization, reading fluency, tajwid, recitation, and learning targets; emotional responses, including sadness, fear, shame, anxiety, and concern about making mistakes; self-regulatory and situational challenges, such as limited review, lack of focus, procrastination, and inconsistent practice; support from teachers, peers, family, and the learning environment; and coping strategies involving repetition, independent practice, time management, goal setting, and motivation. For some students, these strategies were accompanied by increased confidence, personal growth, and spiritual meaning. The study highlights a distinction between experiencing learning difficulties and perceiving oneself as falling behind. Some students reported difficulties without feeling left behind, suggesting that this experience is subjective and shaped by self-comparison, learning practices, and social support. Falling behind may create emotional pressure, yet it may also encourage self-regulation and personal change when students receive appropriate support. These findings suggest that tahsin-tahfiz instruction should respond to differences in students' abilities through realistic learning targets, constructive feedback, regular review, and opportunities for individualized practice.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Lived Experiences, Learning Difficulties, Qur'an Memorization, Tahsin-Tahfiz

IJIS
Immortalis Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies
ISSN: 3123-3600 https://immortalispub.com/ijis
Vol. 2 Issue 4, October 2026, pp. 266-282

1. Introduction

Reading and memorizing the Qur'an are important components of Islamic religious education. These activities involve more than the technical mastery of Arabic letters, their articulation points, tajwid (rules governing Qur'anic pronunciation), and tartil (measured and deliberate recitation). They may also shape students' discipline, learning motivation, character development, and spiritual experiences. In the Indonesian context, Qur'anic reading competence is assessed through mastery of the hijaiyah alphabet, the articulation characteristics of letters, tajwid, tartil, and appropriate recitation practices (Thoifah et al., 2021). Accordingly, the quality of Qur'anic learning should not be measured solely by the number of verses memorized. Recitation accuracy, fluency, memorization retention, and students' experiences throughout the learning process are equally important considerations.

In tahsin-tahfiz instruction, which combines the improvement of Qur'anic recitation (tahsin) with Qur'an memorization (tahfiz), students do not always progress at the same pace. Some are able to meet reading and memorization targets, whereas others experience difficulties with recitation fluency, memorizing verses, retaining previously memorized passages, or achieving expected learning targets. Previous research on tahfiz students has identified time constraints, difficulties in remembering verses, demands for learning discipline, and environmental distractions as common challenges. Self-motivation, teacher support, and parental involvement have also been identified as important factors in sustaining the memorization process (Nik Abdullah et al., 2021). These findings suggest that differences in learning progress cannot be understood solely in terms of individual cognitive ability. They also involve how students organize their learning activities, respond to instructional demands, and interpret their progress in relation to expected achievements.

Self-regulation is particularly relevant to understanding these experiences because Qur'anic learning requires students to manage their time, establish learning goals, maintain concentration, review memorized verses, and sustain consistent practice. A self-regulated learning perspective highlights the interaction between individual learning strategies and the surrounding social environment. Latipah (2022) discusses how Qur'an memorizers employ strategies such as setting goals, selecting appropriate times and places for learning, strengthening their intentions, and maintaining memorized material. The practice of murojaah, or repeatedly reviewing previously memorized verses, is also essential because achievement in tahfiz depends not only on acquiring new memorization but also on retaining what has already been learned (Murniyanto & Siswanto, 2022). These perspectives indicate that students' learning progress is closely connected to their ability to regulate learning activities and maintain consistency over time.

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Immortalis Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies
ISSN: 3123-3600 https://immortalispub.com/ijis
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Beyond learning strategies, the experience of falling behind also has an emotional dimension. Students who perceive themselves as falling behind may experience anxiety, fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, low self-confidence, or pressure when demonstrating their recitation abilities in front of others. Triyono et al. (2023) explain that anxiety associated with Qur'an memorization may involve feelings of pressure, fear, and stress that interfere with the memorization process. Their findings also suggest that strengthening Islamic self-efficacy can help reduce anxiety when students face memorization examinations. These insights indicate that falling behind should not be understood merely as a discrepancy between learning targets and actual achievements. It may also represent a subjective experience shaped by students' emotions, confidence, and perceptions of their own abilities. The way students interpret their learning progress may therefore influence how they respond to difficulties and whether they remain engaged in the learning process.

Students' experiences are also shaped by their social and educational environments. Support from peers, family members, and teachers can strengthen motivation, facilitate emotional adjustment, and encourage persistence in learning (Agung Dewaruci & Hanurawan, 2022; Mufidah & Fadilah, 2023; Shanti et al., 2021). In Qur'anic education, teachers contribute not only through the delivery of instructional material but also through guidance, motivation, assessment, and emotional support. Latifah and Salim (2025) highlight the role of female teachers as mentors and motivators, while Yusuf et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of individualized learning approaches, repetition, assessment, and teacher support in maintaining students' motivation to memorize the Qur'an. Such findings demonstrate that students' responses to learning difficulties cannot be separated from the support and expectations they encounter within their educational environment.

Taken together, previous studies have provided valuable insights into memorization strategies, learning management, motivation, anxiety, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and social support. Nevertheless, the studies discussed above generally examine these dimensions in relation to learning strategies, supporting factors, or educational outcomes. Less attention has been directed toward understanding how students themselves interpret the experience of falling behind, particularly how they compare their progress with that of their peers, identify the sources of their learning difficulties, experience support from their social environment, and develop responses to these challenges. An important distinction remains insufficiently explored: experiencing learning difficulties does not necessarily mean that students perceive themselves as falling behind. Students may encounter obstacles in reading or memorizing the Qur'an while maintaining a sense that their learning progress is appropriate. Conversely, students who compare their achievements with those of their peers may perceive themselves as falling behind even when they continue to make progress. This distinction makes students' subjective interpretations an important focus of investigation.

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ISSN: 3123-3600 https://immortalispub.com/ijis
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This study addresses this gap by exploring students' lived experiences of falling behind in Qur'an reading and memorization during tahsin-tahfiz instruction. Rather than treating falling behind as an objectively measured learning deficit, the study approaches it as a subjective and multidimensional experience shaped by perceived learning progress, social comparison, emotional responses, self-regulatory efforts, and social support. It also examines how students interpret and respond to these experiences, including the ways they may relate to personal development and spiritual meaning-making. Through a phenomenological approach, this study aims to understand how twelfth-grade students at Muhammadiyah 4 High School in Depok experience and interpret perceived learning difficulties and feelings of falling behind in Qur'an reading and memorization.

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, as the research focus is directed toward students' lived experiences when facing difficulties in reading and memorizing the Qur'an. Phenomenology was chosen to position students' subjective experiences as the primary source for understanding how these deficits are recognized, felt, responded to, and interpreted. Thus, the study not only identifies the forms of learning difficulties but also seeks to capture the structure of experience formed by the relationship between learning achievements, emotional responses, self-regulation, social support, and spiritual meaning.

The study was conducted at Muhammadiyah 4 High School in Depok, which offers tahsin and tahfiz courses for the Qur'an. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the relevance of their experiences to the research focus. The data analyzed came from 18 twelfth-grade students, aged approximately 16–18 years, who had participated in tahsin and tahfiz classes and were able to provide information about their experiences with reading, memorization, difficulties, falling behind, and the strategies they used. To maintain confidentiality, the participants' identities were anonymized using the codes I1 through I18.

The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews(Muslim et al., 2023). The interview guidelines covered six areas: experiences with Qur'an instruction, experiences of falling behind, factors perceived as causes of difficulty, psychological experiences, strategies for catching up, and students' meanings and hopes. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain the focus of the questions while giving participants the space to describe their experiences more freely and reflectively.

The interviews were supported by nonparticipatory observations of tahsin-tahfiz instruction and relevant documentation. The observations focused on student engagement, reading and memorization skills, responses to the teacher, social interactions, emotional expressions, and efforts to improve. Observation notes indicate

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ISSN: 3123-3600 https://immortalispub.com/ijis
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that some students still appeared hesitant or lacked confidence when asked to read in front of the class, while the teacher provided guidance slowly and repeatedly. The observational data were used to enrich and compare the information obtained through the interviews.

The analysis was conducted in stages using a phenomenological approach. First, the interview data were read thoroughly to gain an understanding of each participant's experience. Second, statements directly related to the experience of being left behind were identified as meaningful statements. Third, these statements were coded and their meanings were formulated. Fourth, codes with similar meanings were grouped into categories. Fifth, the categories were synthesized into main themes. Finally, the relationships between themes were interpreted to explain the structure of the students' experiences, ranging from perceptions of being left behind, emotional responses, self-regulatory and situational factors, and socio-pedagogical support, to coping strategies, self-transformation, and spiritual meaning-making.

Data validity was strengthened through technical triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. This process was used to assess the consistency of the findings and avoid reliance on a single type of data. Participant anonymity was maintained through the use of codes I1–I18 in the presentation of results. The source manuscript does not include an ethics approval number, an informed consent procedure, or parental/guardian consent for participants under the age of 18; this information must be included in the final version, if available, in accordance with the requirements of the target journal.

3. Result

An analysis of the experiences of 18 participants yielded five interrelated main themes: (1) the experience of falling behind as a gap in reading and memorization achievement; (2) emotional stress and the experience of comparing oneself to others; (3) self-regulatory and situational barriers; (4) socio-pedagogical support as a resource; and (5) coping, self-transformation, and spiritual meaning-making. These five themes indicate that falling behind is not only related to academic performance but also to how students assess themselves, experience emotions, develop strategies, and make sense of the process of learning the Qur'an.

3.1. The Experience of Falling Behind as a Gap in Reading and Memorization Achievement

The learning gaps experienced by students are not limited to a single aspect. Participants described them through several indicators, particularly the quantity and fluency of memorization, recitation targets, reading fluency, and mastery of tajwid. I14,

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ISSN: 3123-3600 https://immortalispub.com/ijis
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for example, stated that learning gaps were experienced in "reading, tajwid, and recitation." This experience became more pronounced when he observed classmates who read more fluently and had completed more recitation assignments. Thus, the gap stems not only from formal learning objectives but also from the perceived disparity between one's own achievements and those of peers.

An important finding emerged from participants who acknowledged experiencing difficulties but did not identify themselves as students who were falling behind. I8 and I12 stated that they never felt left behind, even though they had experienced difficulties memorizing or needed to repeat material. I17 also did not feel left behind but acknowledged difficulties with unfamiliar verses. This pattern demonstrates that learning difficulty and perceived learning lag are not identical concepts. Difficulty can manifest as a technical aspect of the learning experience, whereas the feeling of being left behind is a subjective construct that arises when students assess their position relative to others' goals or achievements.

3.2. Emotional Pressure and the Experience of Self-Comparison

For students who perceive themselves as falling behind, this experience is often accompanied by complex emotional responses. Participants described feeling sad, afraid, stressed, ashamed, nervous, worried, and afraid of making mistakes. I11 stated that they felt "stressed and worried about their grades," while I9 felt "sad about falling behind." I16 briefly mentioned feeling "afraid" when falling behind. These responses indicate that the achievement gap extends beyond academic aspects into the realm of students' self-evaluation and psychological well-being.

This pressure becomes more pronounced when students must demonstrate their abilities in front of the class. I9 described experiencing "tremors," I13 stated, "I get nervous, and sometimes I mispronounce letters," while I14 explained that nervousness caused them to misread and speak more softly. These data indicate the presence of embodied anxiety—pressure that is not merely thought about but also felt and expressed through the body, voice, and reading performance. However, emotional responses do not always result in decreased motivation; some students actually use these experiences as motivation to study harder.

3.3. Self-Regulation Barriers and Situational Factors

Many participants linked their struggles to study habits and self-management skills. A lack of review was one of the most frequently cited factors. I13 mentioned "a lack of review," while I12 explained that what has been memorized can be forgotten if it is not reviewed. I15 identified the habit of "putting off memorization," I10 mentioned difficulty

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focusing and feeling sleepy, I11 cited a lack of motivation and focus, while I16 felt they were not yet accustomed to the demands of memorization.

These findings indicate that academic underachievement cannot be accurately understood solely as a lack of ability. Students' experiences are shaped by the interplay of prior ability, the frequency of review, consistency, focus, time management, procrastination habits, and the demands of learning objectives. In other words, personal and situational factors interact with one another. At this point, self-regulation becomes a crucial mechanism that determines how students respond to the gap between their actual abilities and the targets they must achieve.

3.4. Social-Pedagogical Support as a Resource

Social support consistently emerged as a resource that helped students persevere and improve their academic performance. I9 stated that memorizing with friends was very influential; I11 cited friends as the most helpful source; I14 emphasized the encouragement and support from friends; while I18 cited family, friends, and the environment as sources of support. This support does not always take the form of technical assistance; it can involve accompanying students while they memorize, reminding them, teaching verses, offering encouragement, or creating a learning environment that makes students feel they are not alone.

Teachers play a very important role in students' experiences. I9 stated that the most memorable experience was when the tahsin teacher did not get angry but continued to encourage and motivate the students. I12 cited the asatidz and asatidzah as the most helpful figures, while several other participants cited the tahfiz teachers as their primary source of support. These findings indicate that non-punitive pedagogical support can serve as both emotional protection and a motivator. When students fall behind, the quality of the teacher's response becomes an integral part of the learning experience itself.

3.5. Coping, Self-Transformation, and Spiritual Meaning-Making

Students developed various strategies to catch up, particularly through repeated memorization, review, independent study, time management, and setting goals. I14 stated that he was trying to "catch up and do better." I15 chose to memorize more diligently and improve his recitation, while I16 prioritized the surah currently being studied before catching up on the material he had fallen behind on. These strategies demonstrate that students do not always accept falling behind as a permanent condition but strive to change it through more focused learning efforts.

For some students, coping evolved into personal transformation. I14 stated that this experience made him "more enthusiastic and more likely to review and memorize," while

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I15 felt more confident speaking in front of others. I13 used his initial struggles as motivation to keep trying. However, I16 offered a critical note that students who are just beginning to memorize should not be immediately grouped with those who are already proficient, as this situation can create pressure. This statement underscores that transformation depends not only on individual will but also on a learning design that is sensitive to heterogeneity in ability.

The spiritual dimension is also part of the process of making meaning. I15 interprets the experience of memorization as "a struggle to memorize, and a blessing"; I17 feels happy to be able to memorize the Qur'an; I18 associates the process with becoming more diligent, disciplined, and resilient; while I14 states that learning tahfiz brings peace to the heart. For I18, expectations regarding the Qur'an even extend beyond the ability to read and memorize, as they are directed toward applying the values of the Qur'an in daily life. Thus, the experience of falling behind can shift from a source of pressure to a process of meaning-making when students have adequate learning strategies and support.

4. Discussion

The findings reveal that students' experiences of falling behind in Qur'an reading and memorization are multidimensional and cannot be explained solely by differences in learning achievement. The five themes demonstrate how perceived learning gaps, emotional responses, self-regulatory challenges, social support, and coping strategies are interconnected in students' everyday learning experiences. Importantly, these dimensions do not necessarily develop in a fixed sequence or affect all students in the same way. Some participants experienced difficulties without considering themselves left behind, whereas others interpreted differences in achievement as a source of emotional pressure. This variation provides an important basis for understanding falling behind as a subjective experience shaped by students' perceptions of their progress and learning environment.

4.1. Falling Behind as a Subjective Interpretation of Learning Progress

One important finding is that students perceive learning gaps through several dimensions, including memorization quantity, reading fluency, mastery of tajwid, recitation performance, and the achievement of learning targets. This finding suggests that progress in tahsin-tahfiz cannot be evaluated exclusively through the number of verses memorized. Qur'anic reading competence also involves the accuracy of articulation, application of tajwid, tartil, and appropriate reading practices (Thoifah et al., 2021). Consequently, students may perceive themselves as progressing adequately in memorization while still experiencing difficulties in reading fluently or applying the rules of recitation.

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The findings also reveal a distinction between experiencing learning difficulties and perceiving oneself as falling behind. Participants I8, I12, and I17 acknowledged certain difficulties in memorization but did not identify themselves as falling behind. This distinction is important because it demonstrates that learning difficulties do not automatically produce a sense of being left behind. The latter emerges through students' interpretations of their achievements in relation to learning expectations and, in some cases, comparisons with their peers.

This interpretation is consistent with the observation that students' Qur'anic reading abilities may differ according to their educational backgrounds and previous learning experiences (M, 2023). Students entering the same instructional program may therefore begin with different levels of reading proficiency and memorization experience. When identical targets are applied without sufficient consideration of these differences, some students may interpret their progress as inadequate even when they are making meaningful improvements.

The findings extend this discussion by showing that perceived falling behind is not simply an objective difference in learning performance. It is also a relational experience shaped by how students understand their own progress and position within the learning environment. This distinction provides a conceptual contribution to the study of Qur'anic education because it highlights the importance of examining students' interpretations rather than relying exclusively on externally defined achievement indicators.

4.2. Emotional Pressure and the Social Context of Learning

The second theme concerns the emotional experiences associated with perceived learning difficulties and falling behind. Participants described sadness, fear, embarrassment, anxiety, nervousness, and concern about making mistakes. These experiences became particularly noticeable when students were expected to demonstrate their reading abilities in front of classmates. The accounts of I9, I13, and I14 illustrate how nervousness could be expressed through trembling, incorrect pronunciation, and reduced vocal confidence. These findings suggest that emotional pressure is not limited to students' private feelings about their learning achievements. It may also emerge in situations where their abilities become visible to others. Reading aloud and reciting memorized verses can expose students to evaluation, correction, and comparison. The possibility of making mistakes in front of peers may therefore intensify feelings of embarrassment and uncertainty.

This interpretation is consistent with Triyono et al. (2023), who discuss anxiety associated with Qur'an memorization examinations and the potential role of Islamic self-efficacy in helping students manage such anxiety. The present findings add a contextual dimension by showing that emotional pressure may also arise during ordinary classroom activities, particularly when students are required to demonstrate their abilities publicly.

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Thus, anxiety in tahsin-tahfiz learning should not be understood only in relation to formal examinations but also in connection with everyday instructional interactions.

Nevertheless, emotional pressure does not necessarily lead to disengagement. Some participants described using uncomfortable experiences as motivation to improve their reading and memorization. This variation indicates that students respond differently to similar learning demands. The meaning attached to an experience, their confidence in their abilities, and the support available to them may influence whether emotional pressure becomes a barrier or an impetus for further effort.

4.3. Self-Regulation and the Challenges of Maintaining Learning Consistency

The third theme highlights the relationship between self-regulation and students' difficulties in maintaining consistent learning practices. Participants identified insufficient review, procrastination, lack of concentration, sleepiness, limited motivation, and unfamiliarity with memorization demands as factors affecting their progress. These accounts suggest that learning difficulties cannot be attributed solely to a lack of ability. They also reflect challenges in managing learning activities and responding to the demands of sustained memorization. The findings are consistent with Hanafi et al. (2021), who emphasize the importance of self-regulation and the social environment in Qur'anic learning. Latipah (2022) similarly identifies goal setting, time management, learning intentions, and strategies for retaining memorized material as important dimensions of the experiences of Qur'an memorizers. The present study supports these perspectives through participants' accounts of how inconsistent review and delayed memorization affected their ability to maintain progress.

The role of murojaah, or repeated review of previously memorized verses, is particularly important. Participants recognized that memorized material could be forgotten when it was not reviewed regularly. This finding reinforces the view that memorization involves two related demands: acquiring new material and maintaining previously acquired knowledge. Research on tahfiz learning management also emphasizes the importance of organizing memorization and review activities as part of a sustainable learning process (Murniyanto & Siswanto, 2022).

An important consideration is that self-regulation should not be interpreted merely as an individual responsibility. Students' learning consistency is also influenced by their schedules, concentration, learning environment, and familiarity with the demands of memorization. The difficulties reported by participants therefore reflect an interaction between personal learning habits and situational conditions. This perspective avoids attributing learning difficulties exclusively to students' lack of discipline or motivation.

The findings further suggest that self-regulation can help students regain a sense of direction when they perceive themselves as falling behind. Repetition, prioritization of current learning material, time management, and realistic goal setting provide practical

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ways to respond to learning difficulties. These strategies do not necessarily eliminate all difficulties, but they can help students organize their efforts and recognize gradual progress.

4.4. Social and Pedagogical Support in Students' Learning Experiences

The fourth theme demonstrates the importance of social and pedagogical support in helping students manage learning difficulties. Participants identified friends, family members, teachers, and the surrounding learning environment as sources of encouragement. Support was expressed through accompanying students during memorization, reminding them to review, helping them learn verses, providing encouragement, and creating opportunities for shared learning. These findings are consistent with research identifying relationships between social support and learning motivation (Agung Dewaruci & Hanurawan, 2022; Mufidah & Fadilah, 2023). Shanti et al. (2021) also highlight the role of peer support in students' emotional adjustment and academic experiences. In the present study, peer support appears particularly meaningful because students can share learning activities with classmates who understand the challenges of memorization and recitation.

Teachers occupy a distinct position within this support system. Participants described positive experiences when teachers provided encouragement, remained patient, and avoided responding to difficulties with anger or reprimands. The experience reported by I9, for example, illustrates how a supportive teacher response can help students feel more comfortable continuing their learning efforts. This finding suggests that the manner in which teachers respond to mistakes is an important part of the learning environment.

The importance of teacher encouragement and guidance is also reflected in studies concerning the role of tahfiz teachers in maintaining students' motivation (Latifah & Salim, 2025; Salma et al., 2022; Yusuf et al., 2025). The present findings extend this discussion by emphasizing that support is not limited to providing instructional guidance. It also involves creating an environment in which students can acknowledge difficulties without feeling humiliated or discouraged.

A supportive learning environment does not mean eliminating academic expectations or avoiding correction. Students still require appropriate feedback to improve their reading and memorization. The distinction lies in how feedback is delivered. Constructive correction can help students recognize errors and improve their abilities, whereas responses that create embarrassment or excessive pressure may make them reluctant to demonstrate their progress. Supportive teaching therefore requires a balance between maintaining learning standards and respecting differences in students' readiness and confidence.

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4.5. Coping Strategies, Personal Development, and Spiritual Meaning

The fifth theme concerns the ways students respond to learning difficulties and interpret their experiences. Participants described several coping strategies, including repeated memorization, regular review, independent practice, time management, and setting learning priorities. I14 expressed a desire to catch up and improve, while I15 emphasized the importance of more diligent memorization and better recitation. I16, meanwhile, described prioritizing the surah currently being studied before addressing previously unfinished material.

These accounts demonstrate that students do not respond to learning difficulties in a uniform manner. Their strategies reflect different assessments of their immediate needs and learning capacities. I16's suggestion that beginning memorizers should not immediately be grouped with students who are already proficient is particularly noteworthy. This perspective indicates that students themselves recognize the importance of instructional arrangements that take differences in learning readiness into account. For some participants, coping strategies were accompanied by changes in confidence, motivation, and learning discipline. I14 described becoming more enthusiastic about reviewing and memorizing, while I15 reported greater confidence when speaking in front of others. I13 also interpreted initial difficulties as a reason to continue making efforts. These experiences suggest that perceived learning difficulties may become an opportunity for personal development, although such changes should not be assumed to occur for every student.

The spiritual dimension adds another layer to students' interpretations. I15 described memorization as both a struggle and a blessing, while I17 expressed happiness in being able to memorize the Qur'an. I18 associated the learning process with greater diligence, discipline, and resilience, and I14 described tahfiz learning as bringing peace to the heart. These accounts indicate that, for some participants, Qur'anic learning extends beyond the achievement of instructional targets and becomes connected to personal values and spiritual experiences.

This interpretation is consistent with Latipah (2022), whose study examines the relationship between motives, self-regulation, and spiritual experiences among Qur'an memorizers. Research on tahfiz programs has also discussed the contribution of structured Qur'anic memorization activities to emotional and spiritual development (Aji, 2024; Riki et al., 2024). The present findings add students' own accounts of how the process of memorization may be understood as a source of perseverance, gratitude, inner peace, and personal responsibility.

Nevertheless, spiritual meaning-making should be understood as an experience reported by particular participants rather than a universal outcome of learning difficulties. The findings do not suggest that every student who experiences pressure will necessarily develop greater confidence, discipline, or spiritual awareness. Personal

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development appears to depend on how students interpret their experiences and the resources available to them throughout the learning process. Taken together, the five themes indicate that the experience of falling behind is better understood as a dynamic interaction between perceived learning progress, emotional responses, self-regulatory practices, social and pedagogical support, and individual meaning-making. These dimensions may reinforce one another, but they do not necessarily form a linear sequence. Some students may experience technical difficulties without feeling left behind, while others may experience emotional pressure when comparing their progress with that of their peers. Some may respond through individual learning strategies, whereas others may rely more heavily on support from teachers, family, or friends.

This interpretation constitutes the central contribution of the study: falling behind in tahsin-tahfiz learning is not simply a condition of low achievement but a subjective experience through which students interpret their progress, respond to learning demands, and construct meaning from their educational experiences. Understanding this distinction can help educators recognize that the same instructional target may be experienced differently by students with different backgrounds, abilities, and support systems.

4.6. Pedagogical Implications

The findings have several implications for the design and implementation of tahsin-tahfiz instruction. First, teachers should identify students' initial levels of reading proficiency, tajwid mastery, and memorization ability before establishing learning targets. This assessment can help ensure that expectations are appropriate to students' readiness and reduce unnecessary pressure arising from comparisons among classmates.

Second, memorization targets should be balanced with opportunities for murojaah. The ability to retain previously memorized verses requires consistent review, not merely the acquisition of new material. The importance of repeated review is also supported by Murniyanto and Siswanto (2022) and Sucia et al. (2025). Learning schedules should therefore provide sufficient time for both new memorization and the maintenance of existing material.

Third, teachers should provide constructive feedback and gradual opportunities for students to demonstrate their reading and memorization abilities. Particular attention should be given to students who experience embarrassment or anxiety when reading in front of others. A supportive approach can maintain instructional standards while allowing students to improve without unnecessary stigma or public comparison.

Finally, schools can strengthen peer learning, mentoring, and family involvement. Group review and peer assistance may provide additional opportunities for students to practice and maintain motivation. Such activities should be organized with attention to differences in ability so that peer interaction becomes a source of support rather than a

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means of reinforcing feelings of inadequacy. The evaluation of tahsin-tahfiz learning should also consider reading quality, memorization retention, learning consistency, and students' understanding of the values they seek to develop through Qur'anic education.

4.7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study was conducted at a single school and involved 18 twelfth-grade students. Accordingly, its findings are not intended for statistical generalization to all students participating in tahsin-tahfiz programs. The contribution of this phenomenological study lies in providing an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and identifying insights that may be transferable to educational settings with comparable characteristics.

Another limitation concerns the variation in the depth of participants' responses. Some accounts were relatively brief, and not all interview questions received equally detailed answers. The analysis therefore remains grounded in the information provided by participants and does not extend interpretations beyond the available data. Furthermore, the study primarily examines students' perspectives. Teachers' and parents' experiences have not been explored in sufficient depth to provide a broader account of how institutional and family practices shape students' learning experiences. Future research could include interviews with tahsin-tahfiz teachers and parents to examine how instructional expectations, feedback practices, and family support influence students' perceptions of their progress. Comparative studies involving students with different initial levels of reading and memorization ability may also provide a more detailed understanding of how learning backgrounds shape the experience of falling behind. Longitudinal research could further examine how perceived learning difficulties, self-regulation, social support, and memorization consistency develop over time.

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5. Conclusion

This study reveals that students' experiences of falling behind in Qur'an reading and memorization during tahsin-tahfiz instruction are multidimensional, involving learning progress, emotional responses, self-regulation, social support, and personal meaning-making. Students perceived differences in their learning progress through memorization achievement, reading fluency, tajwid, recitation, and the attainment of learning targets. An important finding is that experiencing learning difficulties does not necessarily mean that students perceive themselves as falling behind. For some participants, difficulties remained part of their learning process, whereas others interpreted differences in achievement through comparisons with their peers and learning expectations.

The findings further demonstrate that perceived falling behind may be accompanied by sadness, fear, embarrassment, and anxiety, particularly when students are required to demonstrate their abilities in front of others. Students responded to these experiences

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through repeated memorization, murojaah, independent practice, time management, and the prioritization of learning targets. Support from teachers, peers, and family also emerged as an important resource. For some participants, the learning process was associated with increased confidence, discipline, perseverance, and spiritual meaning. These experiences, however, were not uniform across all participants, indicating that students interpret and respond to learning difficulties in different ways.

The central contribution of this study is its distinction between learning difficulties and the subjective perception of falling behind in Qur'anic learning. This finding highlights the importance of understanding students' individual experiences rather than assessing their progress solely through memorization targets or comparisons with peers. Accordingly, tahsin-tahfiz instruction should consider differences in students' initial abilities, balance new memorization with regular review, provide constructive feedback, and create a supportive learning environment. Such an approach may help students develop their reading and memorization abilities while maintaining confidence and meaningful engagement in the learning process.

6. Acknowledgments

The author would like to express gratitude to the administration of SMA Muhammadiyah 4 Depok, the tahsin and tahfiz teachers, and all the students who participated in this study. Appreciation is also extended to those who provided academic guidance and feedback during the research process and the writing of this article.

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ISSN: 3123-3600 https://immortalispub.com/ijis
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