

Quranic mushaf use and religious character: A meta-analysis

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Abstract: This meta-analysis examines the association between use of the Qur'anic mushaf and the development of religious character and Qur'anic literacy. Studies were identified through Google searches and screened against a priori inclusion criteria. Following data extraction, pooled effects were estimated with a random-effects model. The analytic workflow comprised tests of heterogeneity, calculation of the summary effect size, assessment of publication bias, and moderator analyses. Across 33 studies (N = 2,209), the pooled correlation was $r = 0.53$, indicating a moderate-to-strong association between mushaf reading intensity (including memorization and habitual practice) and positive religious character outcomes, namely religiosity, student character traits, emotional intelligence, and learning behavior. These findings suggest that character-education initiatives should integrate structured Qur'anic literacy within both formal and non-formal settings, supported by equitable access to printed and digital mushaf and sustained guidance from teachers, religious instructors, and parents. These findings have strategic implications for character education policy in Muslim-majority societies.

Keywords: Qur'anic mushaf; religious character; Qur'anic literacy; character education; meta-analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, approximately 245.97 million people, or 87.08% of the total population in the first half of 2024 (Katadata, 2024). This scale is not only demographically salient; it also underpins religious-policy priorities, including the provision and distribution of Qur'anic mushaf (printed copies of the Qur'an). Given this vast population, access to mushaf, both printed and digital, constitutes a fundamental spiritual need.

The Qur'an is the sacred scripture of Islam and, for Indonesian Muslims, the primary foundation of Islamic education that shapes character, ethics, and the internalization of religious values in daily life. Culturally, the tradition of Qur'an reading functions as a vehicle for moral internalization and the strengthening of religious identity. In this context, the mushaf serves not only as an instrument of worship but also as a cultural symbol, a marker of religious identity, and even an aesthetic element in domestic spaces.

Indonesia's Qur'anic Literacy Index in 2023 was reported at 66.038, categorized as "high" (Kementerian Agama RI, 2023). Nevertheless, technical indicators such as the ability to read

Arabic script still exhibit substantial disparities. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS, 2022) show, for example, that in the Special Capital Region of Jakarta only about 58% of residents aged 15 and above can read Arabic script. The figures are lower in several other areas, Semarang City (22.32%), Magelang City (30.07%), Purworejo Regency (27.11%), and markedly low in parts of Southeast Sulawesi, including East Kolaka Regency (15.08%) and Kendari Regency (14.49%). Qur'anic literacy among Indonesian pupils and university students likewise remains low (Syafei et al., 2023). These disparities present a distinct challenge, particularly in rural areas and 3T regions (disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost).

To meet public needs, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama RI), through the Qur'an Printing Unit (UPQ), prints and distributes mushaf annually. The printing target for 2025 is set at 1,000,000 copies, while as of March 2024, 34,000 mushaf and Surah Yasin booklets had been distributed across 34 provinces (Kementerian Agama RI, 2024). Even so, these figures indicate a gap between available mushaf and actual needs in the field, given that yearly demand is estimated to reach several million copies (Aji et al., 2022).

Beyond meeting demand, wider availability of the Qur'an expands opportunities for communities to learn and read. As a scripture replete with moral guidance, increased reading and understanding of the Qur'an can shape how people think and act. Much of the published research to date has examined, in a partial and fragmented manner, how mushaf availability and use relate to character and behavior, yielding varied indices and conclusions.

A comprehensive synthesis is therefore needed to summarize the association between mushaf use and positive character outcomes. Such a synthesis can inform policy on Qur'an production and distribution in Indonesia. Accordingly, this study systematically reviews and meta-analyzes prior research on activities involving mushaf use and their association with positive characteristics in society. A meta-analytic approach enables an objective, scientifically defensible conclusion by integrating effect sizes across studies and evaluating heterogeneity, publication bias, and potential moderators.

Unlike prior narrative studies, this meta-analysis quantifies the magnitude of association between Qur'anic literacy and moral-psychological traits. By statistically synthesizing empirical evidence across diverse cultural and educational settings, it provides the first quantitative estimate of how Qur'anic literacy contributes to moral reasoning, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior. This approach moves beyond descriptive interpretations and offers a data-driven understanding of Qur'anic education's psychological outcomes.

METHODS

This study employed a meta-analytic design. Its primary aim was to integrate prior empirical findings examining the association between activities involving use of the Qur'anic mushaf (reading intensity, habitual reading, and memorization) and multiple domains of character and behavior (religious character, individual/student character traits, emotional intelligence, and learning behavior). The meta-analysis adopted a correlational approach to compute and synthesize effect sizes as Pearson correlation coefficients (r).

Data collection procedure

We conducted a systematic search of credible academic sources. Secondary data were identified through structured online searches using Google with the following Boolean query: ("intensitas membaca al quran" OR "kebiasaan membaca al quran" OR "hafalan al quran") AND ("religiusitas" OR "karakter" OR "perilaku"). The search strategy followed PRISMA (Preferred

Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines as recommended by Moher et al. (2009) to ensure transparency and traceability.

The search focused on scholarly articles and research reports published in nationally accredited journals, as well as documents from Indonesian university repositories. The initial search yielded hundreds of records; after screening by title, abstract, and availability of statistical data, 33 studies met the eligibility criteria consisting of 5 articles published in scientific journals, 26 final research reports for undergraduate projects, and 2 final research reports for postgraduate projects. Included studies were quantitative and reported sufficient numerical information to allow effect-size computation. All included studies were conducted in educational institutions; therefore, to characterize evidence from community settings, we additionally performed a complementary systematic literature review.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure validity, prespecified inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to all Google-identified records.

Inclusion criteria

Studies were included in this research based on several predefined inclusion criteria. First, the studies had to report an association between at least one independent variable, namely the intensity of Qur'an reading, habitual reading, or memorization, and the dependent variable of religious character. In this context, religious character was not limited to ritual practices alone but encompassed broader psychosocial domains, including religiosity, individual or student character traits, emotional intelligence, and learning behavior. Second, the studies were required to provide sufficient statistical information to allow effect-size computation, such as a correlation coefficient (r), a t value with its degrees of freedom, an F value with between- and within-groups degrees of freedom, and/or sample size(s) (n), either by group or in total. Third, only quantitative studies employing survey or correlational research designs were considered. Finally, only studies with full-text documents that were publicly accessible were included in the analysis.

Exclusion criteria

Studies were excluded based on the following exclusion criteria. Articles or studies that did not report the required statistical information, such as purely descriptive reports without correlation coefficients (r) or other inferential statistics, were excluded. In addition, opinion pieces, purely theoretical works, and narrative reviews that were not based on empirical data were not included. Finally, duplicate articles or multiple publications derived from the same underlying study were excluded to prevent redundancy in the analysis.

This approach aligns with Cooper et al. (2019), emphasizing rigorous inclusion criteria so that only relevant, high-quality studies are analyzed and the resulting conclusions are defensible.

Data Analysis Techniques

Analyses used a random-effects model, appropriate given heterogeneity across studies in participants, instruments, and geographic contexts. This model assumes that true effect sizes vary between studies, yielding more realistic estimates than a fixed-effect model (Borenstein et al., 2009).

Effect-size computation. Associations were expressed as Pearson's r and transformed to Fisher's z for synthesis (with back-transformation for presentation). Rules: (1) if a study reported

r , it was used directly; (2) if only t , F , or χ^2 were available, these were converted to r using standard formulas (Borenstein et al., 2009). Effect-size interpretation followed Cohen (1988): small, $r = 0.10$ – 0.29 ; medium, $r = 0.30$ – 0.49 ; large, $r \geq 0.50$.

Heterogeneity was assessed using several complementary statistics. First, the Q statistic was employed to test whether the variability between studies exceeded the variability expected within studies, with a significance level of $p < .05$ indicating the presence of significant heterogeneity. Second, the I^2 statistic was used to estimate the proportion of total variability attributable to true heterogeneity rather than sampling error, following the classification proposed by Higgins et al. (2003), where values of 0–25% indicate low heterogeneity, 26–50% moderate heterogeneity, 51–75% high heterogeneity, and values of 75% or higher indicate very high heterogeneity. Finally, τ^2 (tau-squared) was calculated as an estimate of between-study variance, with larger values reflecting greater dispersion in the true effect sizes across studies.

Publication bias assessment used (1) a funnel plot to visualize symmetry of effect sizes against study precision and (2) Egger's regression intercept test to evaluate funnel-plot asymmetry (decision rule: $p < .05$ suggests potential publication bias).

Visualization and reporting employed forest plots to present study-specific effect sizes and the pooled estimate, and funnel plots to visualize potential publication bias. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals (95% CI) were reported for all estimates.

Moderator Analysis

Moderator analyses were conducted to identify factors that might explain variations in effect sizes across studies. Several categorical moderators were examined, including the type of independent variable (Qur'an reading intensity, habitual reading, or memorization), the type of dependent variable (religious character, individual or student character traits, emotional Intelligence, or learning behavior), and the educational level of participants (early childhood education/PAUD, primary school/SD, junior secondary school/SMP, senior secondary school/SMA, and university students). In addition, regional differences were considered by distinguishing studies conducted in Java and non-Java areas, as well as differences in publication type (accredited journals versus university repositories). Subgroup analyses were then performed to test whether variations in effect sizes could be explained by these study characteristics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Meta-analysis is a powerful approach for examining the association between Qur'anic mushaf use and the development of positive social and behavioral outcomes. By synthesizing quantitative data across primary studies, it yields pooled effect sizes and reveals consistent relational patterns in dispersed findings. Crucially, aggregating effect sizes increases the precision of correlation estimates, producing results that are more stable and reliable than narrative reviews of individual studies.

Test of Heterogeneity Assumptions

Across 33 studies assessing links between Qur'an-related activities and character or psychological development, there is clear evidence of between-study heterogeneity. The estimated τ^2 (tau-squared), the true between-study variance, was 0.0228 (95% CI [0.0086, 0.0521]), indicating variation in true effects beyond sampling error. Its square root, τ (tau), was

0.1510 (95% CI [0.0925, 0.2284]), representing the standard deviation of true effects on the Fisher's z scale.

The I^2 statistic was 58.5% (95% CI [39.0%, 71.7%]), meaning that roughly 58.5% of total variability reflects real heterogeneity rather than random fluctuation, classified as moderate to high heterogeneity (Higgins et al., 2003). The H statistic was 1.55 (95% CI [1.28, 1.88]), likewise indicating greater dispersion than expected under homogeneity. Cochran's Q test yielded $Q(32) = 77.08$, $p < .0001$, confirming that between-study variability cannot be attributed to chance alone. Taken together, these indicators justify moderator analyses and support the use of a random-effects model for synthesis.

Publication Bias Analysis

Initial assessment relied on visual inspection of the funnel plot (Figure 1).

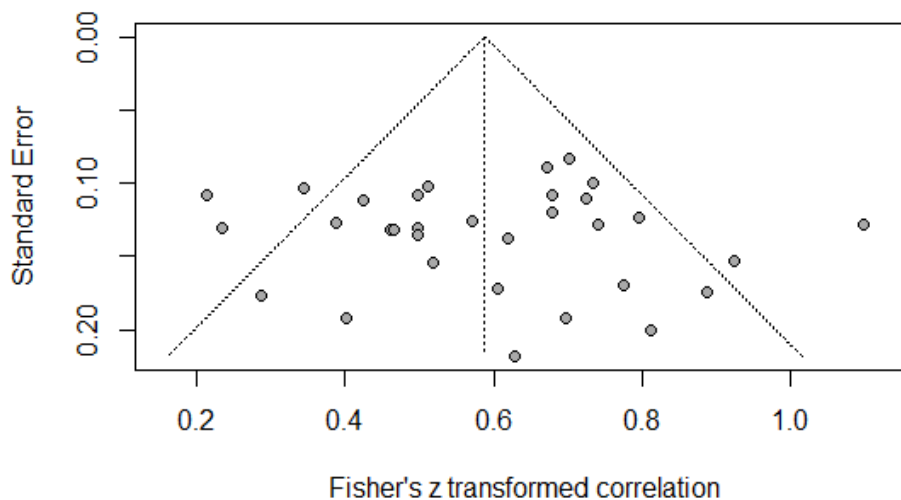


Figure 1. Funnel Plot

The distribution of points appears symmetric. To corroborate this, Egger's regression intercept test (Egger et al., 1997) yielded $t = 0.34$, $df = 31$, $p = .7324$, a non-significant result indicating no meaningful asymmetry. As a complement, Rosenthal's fail-safe N indicated that 8,423 additional null-result studies would be required to raise the overall meta-analytic p-value from $< .0001$ to .05—far exceeding the common benchmark of $5k + 10$ (here, $5 \times 33 + 10 = 175$). Both diagnostics therefore suggest a low risk of publication bias, allowing the results to be interpreted with high confidence.

Effect Size

The synthesis of 33 studies involving 2,209 participants indicates a positive, statistically significant association between activities related to the Qur'anic mushaf and multiple forms of character and psychological development. A summary of these results is presented in the forest plot (Figure 2).

Under the random-effects model, the pooled correlation (summary effect size) is $r = 0.53$ with a 95% CI [0.48, 0.58]. This indicates an overall moderate-to-strong association between the intensity/habitual practice of Qur'an reading and memorization and positive character and psychological outcomes, namely religiosity, individual/student character traits, emotional intelligence, and learning behavior, and the result is statistically significant. The forest plot shows that most studies report positive effects, only a few are near zero, and none report negative correlations. Effect sizes range from $r = 0.21$ to $r = 0.80$, with several studies (e.g., S05, S17, S03) exhibiting very high correlations (≥ 0.70).

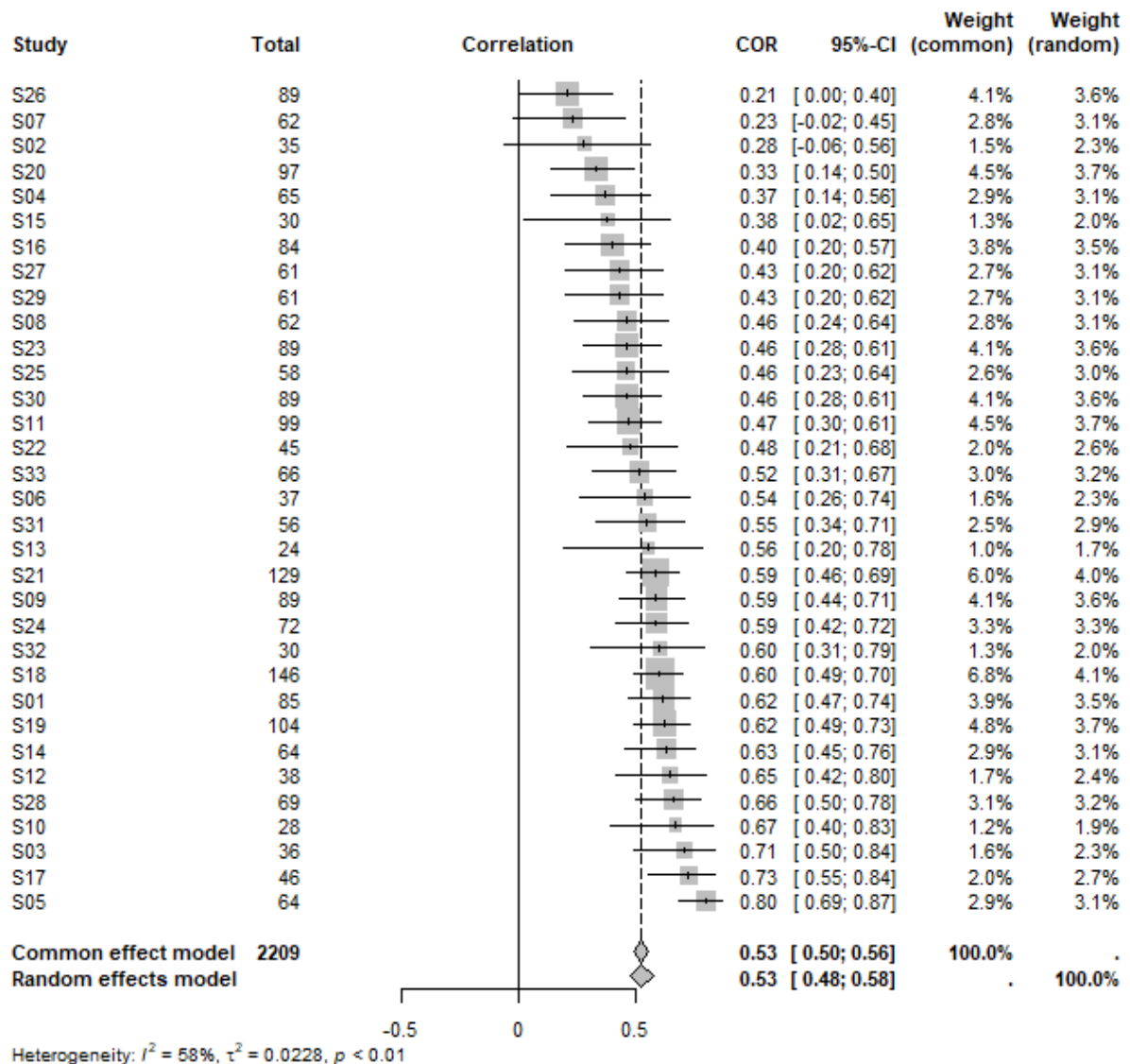


Figure 2. Forest plot

It should be noted that the evidence synthesized here comes predominantly from student populations within formal educational settings. This leaves a gap regarding how similar patterns manifest in broader communities, parents, non-formal pesantren communities, mosque congregations, and rural residents, with greater social, cultural, and economic diversity. To address this, the discussion extends the analysis with a systematic literature review, exploring community perspectives, challenges in mushaf distribution, strategies for cultivating reading habits, and other non-technical factors not captured by student-based quantitative studies. In this way, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive, actionable, and context-relevant foundation for Qur'anic literacy programs across society.

The ultimate impact of strong Qur'anic literacy is not merely technical proficiency in recitation but also the formation of character and social conduct. Communities with a culture of Qur'an reading tend to demonstrate higher levels of honesty, patience, compassion, and social responsibility, foundations of a just and civilized society. Sule and Mainiyo (2024) report that Qur'anic teachings significantly shape Muslim character and behavior by promoting honesty, compassion, justice, patience, and social responsibility. Similarly, Jariah (2019) finds that routine morning Qur'an reading before classes trains persistence, discipline in correct

recitation, and inner calm; students who read regularly show gains in emotional functioning, spiritual motivation, and fluent, accurate reading.

Moderator Analyses

To explore sources of between-study variation, moderator analyses were conducted across five categories: type of Qur'an-related activity, type of outcome measured, educational level of respondents, regional zone, and publication type.

Type of Qur'an-related activity

Three activity types were examined: reading intensity ($r = 0.55$), habitual reading ($r = 0.48$), and memorization ($r = 0.57$). Although point estimates differ, the interaction test shows no significant between-group differences ($p = .23$); thus, activity type does not significantly moderate the associations under study. Qur'anic literacy should be understood not only as technical proficiency in reading Arabic script but also as grasp of verse structure, tajwīd, meaning, and the application of Qur'anic values in daily life. In educational contexts, it spans technical (fluency, articulation), cognitive (textual understanding), and affective (value internalization) domains, serving as an entry point for religious character formation and a base for advanced competencies such as memorization and exegesis. Literacy development is progressive, built through habit, repeated reading, and intensive guidance (e.g., morning tadarus, tajwīd instruction, and verse drilling) that foster accurate, tartil recitation and readiness for memorization and interpretation. A strong literacy ecosystem requires facilities (printed/digital mushaf), supportive environments (teachers and parents), and appropriate reinforcement strategies.

Type of outcome

Four outcome domains were analyzed: religiosity ($r = 0.55$), student character ($r = 0.50$), emotional intelligence ($r = 0.52$), and learning behavior ($r = 0.52$). The omnibus test indicates no significant differences across domains ($p = .95$), implying broadly uniform benefits. Evidence suggests strengthened faith and worship discipline (religiosity), orderliness, study discipline, and responsibility (student character), improved emotion regulation, empathy, and social harmony (emotional intelligence), and higher motivation, consistency, and focus (learning behavior). Parallel findings include reports that routine Qur'an reading correlates with higher religiosity and self-control (Alghamdi, 2022) and that Qur'an engagement relates to better psychological health, reduced anxiety and greater happiness (Abdel-Khalek, 2019). These results support framing Qur'anic literacy as a multifunctional character-education strategy that cultivates technical recitation skills while establishing moral, social, and academic foundations. Related literature likewise highlights the influence of Qur'anic values, honesty, perseverance, compassion, justice, on how students think, feel, and act (Konrath, Siddiqui, & Pervez, 2021), and links regular listening/reading/memorization to reduced anxiety/stress and improved socio-emotional quality (Moulaei et al., 2023). School-based programs integrating Qur'anic values and routines (e.g., tadarus) have been found to bolster empathy, discipline, and responsibility (May, 2019).

Educational level

Subgroup estimates were broadly consistent: university $r = 0.58$; junior secondary (SMP) $r = 0.51$; senior secondary (SMA) $r = 0.51$; primary (SD) $r = 0.52$; early childhood (PAUD) $r = 0.56$. Differences were not significant ($p = .82$), indicating relative stability of effects across schooling stages. This aligns with the view of Qur'an learning as lifelong, relevant from early childhood

through adulthood (e.g., Ta'lim al-Muta'allim), and argues for age-adaptive literacy strategies that extend beyond schools and pesantren to community programs (Razali, 2024; Firdaus, 2023).

Regional zone

Data were available for Western Indonesia (WIB) and Central Indonesia (WITA) only: WIB $r = 0.54$, WITA $r = 0.47$. The difference was not significant ($p = .15$), suggesting broadly pervasive practices across regions despite socio-cultural variation. Literature notes potential constraints in WITA (facilities, mushaf distribution, instructor access), underscoring the need to address infrastructure and human-resource gaps so Qur'anic literacy can advance equitably across zones.

Publication type

Data sources comprised student theses/dissertations ($n = 27$) and peer-reviewed journal articles ($n = 6$). Pooled correlations were $r = 0.53$ and $r = 0.51$, respectively; the difference was not significant ($p = .67$), indicating consistent findings across university-repository documents and journal publications. This supports combining theses and journal articles in meta-analysis to improve representativeness when quality is rigorously controlled (Rosenthal, 1991). It also highlights the policy value of student research, which often contains rich, context-specific field data relevant to Qur'anic-literacy initiatives across schools/universities, pesantren, and communities. Additionally, studies such as Sule & Mainiyo (2024) emphasize Qur'anic moral teachings, honesty, compassion, justice, patience, forgiveness, as a comprehensive ethical framework shaping behavior and social harmony.

CONCLUSION

A meta-analysis of 33 studies ($N = 2,209$) found a pooled correlation of $r = 0.53$ (95% CI [0.48, 0.58]), indicating a moderate-to-strong positive association between engagement with the Qur'anic mushaf (reading intensity, habitual reading, and memorization) and positive character development, namely religiosity, student character traits, emotional intelligence, and learning behavior. Moderator analyses showed no significant differences by activity type, outcome domain, educational level, region, or publication type, underscoring the robustness of the findings. The implications are that community-based character-education programs should integrate structured Qur'anic literacy (daily tadarus, tajwid instruction, and spaced memorization cycles) across formal and non-formal pathways, supported by adequate and equitable access to Qur'anic mushaf, especially in rural and 3T regions (disadvantaged, frontier, outermost), and by sustained guidance from teachers, religious leaders, and parents.

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