

Mobile Phone Rewards to Improve Qur'anic Memorization at Ma'had Aly IHBS

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of a reward system, in the form of granting mobile phone access, as a strategy to enhance motivation and memorization outcomes among students in the tahfiz program at Ma'had Aly Ibnu Hajar Boarding School (IHBS). The policy was introduced in a limited and regulated format during the 2024-2025 academic year, marking a significant shift in the pesantren tradition, which typically restricts mobile phone use. Employing a descriptive quantitative approach enriched with qualitative insights, data were collected through open-ended questionnaires administered to 21 students from the third and fourth semesters who had experienced the tahfiz process both before and after the reward system was introduced. The findings indicate that 80% of the respondents experienced an increase in motivation and memorization output, reporting improved consistency and enthusiasm in achieving targets. Nonetheless, a few students raised concerns regarding the sincerity and purity of their intentions, suggesting that extrinsic rewards may affect spiritual focus if not properly managed. The study concludes that mobile phone-based rewards, when implemented under strict supervision and embedded within a spiritually grounded educational environment, can serve as an effective motivational tool in tahfiz institutions. These findings offer practical insights for pesantren seeking culturally sensitive and innovative strategies to support students' long-term commitment to Quranic memorization.

Keywords: Reward, Learning Motivation, Handphone, Ibnu Hajar Boarding School, Qur'anic Memorization.

1. Introduction

Memorizing the Qur'an holds profound spiritual significance within Islamic education, particularly in *pesantren*, or Islamic boarding schools. This practice not only requires the rote recall of verses but also demands sincerity, strong discipline, effective time management, and consistent internal motivation (Khoirunnisa et al., 2024). Tahfiz programs have long served as the cornerstone of character formation, integrating cognitive, spiritual, and moral development in *santri* (Suryana et al., 2024). Nevertheless, maintaining high levels of student motivation in memorization remains a persistent challenge, often hindered by fatigue, lack of time discipline, and diminished intrinsic motivation (Arafah, ID, and Afifuddin, 2022).

In response to these obstacles, *pesantren* have introduced a range of strategies to enhance motivation. One such strategy is the use of reward systems, designed to stimulate a more engaging, competitive, and goal-oriented learning atmosphere (Sari, 2018). In educational psychology, particularly through B. F. Skinner's behaviorist perspective, rewards function as positive reinforcements that increase the likelihood of repeating desired behaviors (Syafir, Mahmud, and Ediaman, 2011). Within tahfiz education, rewards are often used to encourage persistence, regular memorization submissions, and target achievement.

Historically, the concept of reward is not foreign to Islamic education. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, praise, special tasks, and supplicatory blessings were given to companions who demonstrated excellence and dedication in learning (Wahdaniya, 2023). This affirms that Islam acknowledges the psychological dimensions of the learning process. Today, such motivational strategies continue to evolve within *pesantren* settings.

Recent studies indicate that various forms of rewards, such as verbal praise, small tokens, and gifts, can enhance students' enthusiasm and engagement in Qur'anic learning activities (Zahara and Ichsan, 2022). Mei (2024), writing in Jurnal ZAHRA, reported that reward systems significantly improved both the cognitive and affective outcomes of tahfiz learners. In a similar vein, (Kalimatusyaro, 2024) highlighted the role of rewards in fostering a competitive spirit and disciplined learning. However, these studies primarily emphasize conventional approaches to reward systems. Despite the widespread use of rewards, few studies have examined the implications of digital-based incentives. In today's digital age, mobile phones are central to students' lives yet often restricted in *pesantren*. This tension creates both an educational challenge and a potential opportunity. To date, no known research has specifically explored the use of mobile phones as a reward system within tahfiz education, particularly in the unique socio-religious context of *pesantren*. Given that mobile phone use is typically restricted in *pesantren* due to its potential as a distraction, such a reward model presents both pedagogical promise and controversy. This marks a crucial gap in current scholarly discussions on Islamic educational innovation.

In the 2024-2025 academic year, Mahad Aly Ibnu Hajar Boarding School implemented a distinct policy that granted limited mobile phone access to students as a reward for achieving memorization milestones. Under this policy, only students who passed a memorization test (one *juz*) with a minimum score of 61 were eligible to receive mobile phone access. Those who scored between 61 and 80 were allowed to use their phones for one hour, while those scoring between 81 and 100 received two hours of usage time.

This access was provided on weekends and always under staff supervision. The initiative applied to students from the first through fourth semesters under structured guidelines, ensuring time-bound and supervised use. This system represents a significant cultural shift in *pesantren* learning environments, blending digital incentives with traditional tahfiz values.

This study focuses on third and fourth semester students who have experienced both the pre- and post-policy phases, thus providing a more reliable basis for comparison. A total of 21 students out of 42 active participants were purposively selected as the sample and surveyed on February 21, 2025, using a structured questionnaire aimed at exploring their perceptions, motivational changes, and the socio-educational impact of the mobile phone reward system. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the implementation of a mobile phone-based reward system in the tahfiz program at Mahad Aly IHBS, assessing its effectiveness in enhancing student motivation and discipline. In doing so, the study addresses a novel area of Islamic educational practice and offers insights into how *pesantren* can adapt motivational strategies in ways that are contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and pedagogically sound.

2. Methods

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach aimed at describing and analyzing students' perceptions of the effectiveness of mobile phone rewards in enhancing their motivation and Qur'anic memorization achievement. This approach was chosen because it allows for the systematic and objective presentation of data, enabling the researcher to map respondents' perspectives on a real phenomenon occurring within the *pesantren* environment. The primary data for this study were obtained through a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions distributed to students who had experienced the *tahfiz* program both before and after the implementation of the reward system (Candra Susanto et al., 2024). Thus, this quantitative approach, enriched with qualitative data through open responses, provides a broader interpretative space for the findings.

This research was conducted at Ma'had Aly Ibnu Hajar Boarding School (IHBS), located in Kampung Tonggoh, RT 03/RW 02, Puraseda Village, Leuwiliang District, Bogor Regency, West Java. This location was selected as the direct site of the mobile phone reward program's implementation, allowing the researcher to access relevant subjects directly. The study was carried out on February 21, 2025, coinciding with the end of the second month of the even semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. This timing was considered appropriate since the students had already undergone a sufficient number of memorization activities, allowing for more mature and data-rich reflections on their experiences.

The population of this study included all active students at Ma'had Aly IHBS, totaling 42 individuals from the first to the fourth semesters. However, the researcher focused the sample selection on students in the third and fourth semesters only, totaling 21 individuals. This group was chosen because they had experienced the *tahfiz* program both before and after the implementation of the reward system, making it possible to conduct a more objective comparison of the program's impact. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. According to (Sugiyono, 2016), a sample is a subset of the population in terms of

number and characteristics and is not necessarily determined by quantity but rather by theoretical strength, research design, and accuracy in data processing. In this case, purposive sampling was deemed appropriate to optimize the research results. This aligns with Jama's view (Jama, 1990), which emphasizes that research quality is influenced more by its theoretical foundation, design, and execution accuracy than merely by sample size.

The data collection technique used in this study was an open-ended questionnaire consisting of eleven questions. The instrument was distributed directly in printed form on HVS paper. The open-ended format was intended to provide respondents with the freedom to express their views more deeply, without being limited by fixed answer choices. Furthermore, to ensure comfort and honesty in responding, participants were not required to disclose their personal identities. This approach was expected to yield more authentic and reflective data based on individual experiences.

The data analysis process was carried out in two main stages: thematic content analysis and open categorization. In the initial stage, manual categorization of the responses was conducted by grouping them according to common themes or keywords (Turunen, Vaismoradi, and Bondas, 2013). These groupings were then presented in tables and charts to highlight the trends in responses to each question. Subsequently, the researcher conducted a descriptive interpretation of the summarized quantitative findings by linking them to the context of the reward program's implementation in the *pesantren*. This interpretation was essential for comprehensively understanding the extent to which mobile phone rewards could enhance student motivation and improve their Qur'anic memorization achievements (Naeem et al., 2023). Although this study applied a descriptive quantitative approach, it did not employ inferential statistical tools such as the t-test, since the primary objective was to explore perceptual and behavioral trends rather than to test for significant differences. The focus was on understanding the motivational impact of the reward program through thematic and pattern-based analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Result

This study involved 21 respondents consisting of third- and fourth-semester students of Ma'had Aly IHBS. However, one respondent did not complete the questionnaire properly, resulting in 20 valid responses that were analyzed. The following section presents the analysis results based on two key questions from the questionnaire.

3.1.1. Perception of the Mobile Phone Reward System in Increasing Motivation

Question: "*Does the mobile phone reward system motivate you to be more diligent in memorizing?*"

Table 1. Respondents' Answers on Motivation Increase.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Quite motivating	14	70%
Very motivating	2	10%
Not motivating	3	15%

Not very motivating	1	5%
Total	20	100%

The majority of respondents (80%) reported that the mobile phone reward served as a source of motivation, although the level of motivation experienced varied among individuals. This finding indicates that the mobile phone reward was generally well received by most students, albeit not universally.

3.1.2. The Impact of the Reward on Memorization Progress

Question: *"In your opinion, does the mobile phone reward rule significantly affect the number of memorized verses you submit?"*

Table 2. Respondents' Answers to Memorization Progress.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Quite influential	10	50%
Not influential	6	30%
Yes	1	5%
Very influential	1	5%
Sometimes yes, sometimes no (sincerity issue)	1	5%
No Answer	1	5%
Total	20	100%

A total of 60% of respondents stated that the reward influenced their memorization improvement, although the intensity of this influence varied. Meanwhile, 30% reported that it had no effect, and one respondent provided a reflective answer, expressing concern that the reward might shift one's intention away from sincerity. Furthermore, based on the qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses, some participants indicated that the reward functioned as a temporary booster but still needed to be accompanied by internal motivation. Others noted that the presence of a mobile phone does not necessarily guarantee better memorization due to its potential for misuse or fostering excessive competition.

3.1.3. Comparative Analysis of Memorization Submissions Before and After the Implementation of the Reward

Table 3. Summary of Changes.

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Increased	9	45%
Remained the same	9	45%
Decreased	1	5%
Unstable	1	5%
Total	20	100%

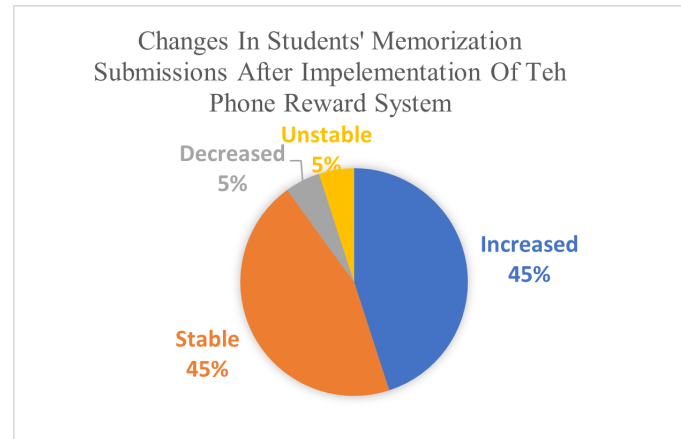


Figure 1. Pie Chart of Student Memorization Submission Changes After the Implementation of the Reward System

The mobile phone reward system had a positive impact on increasing memorization submissions for nearly half of the respondents, while the other half remained stable, an outcome that cannot be considered negative. Only a few respondents showed a decline or inconsistency in their memorization progress. Specifically, 45% of the students reported an increase in the number of verses memorized after the implementation of the reward system, while another 45% remained stable. This stability may suggest that the reward was not a major factor influencing their performance or that they had already established a strong memorization rhythm beforehand. Meanwhile, 5% experienced a decrease, and another 5% mentioned fluctuations rather than a consistent trend.

3.1.4. Classification of Time Ranges

Table 4. Classification of Time Ranges

Category	Definition
Very Fast	≤ 1 Day
Fast	$> 1 - \leq 3$ Days
Moderate	$> 3 - \leq 7$ Days
Long	> 7 days or half a semester
Inconsistent	No clear or stable preparation time given

After the implementation of the mobile phone reward system, a notable shift was observed in students' memorization exam preparation patterns. The "fast" category increased from 30% to 40%, indicating that more students were able to prepare their memorization more efficiently. Meanwhile, the "moderate" category declined considerably from 45% to 30%, suggesting a transition from standard preparation toward quicker readiness. In contrast, the "inconsistent" category rose from 5% to 10%, showing that a small portion of students had not yet developed a stable preparation routine despite the reward system. The "very fast" and "long" categories showed no change and remained constant at their previous proportions. Overall, these findings indicate that the reward system did not influence all groups equally but had a generally positive effect on most students by accelerating their memorization preparation process.

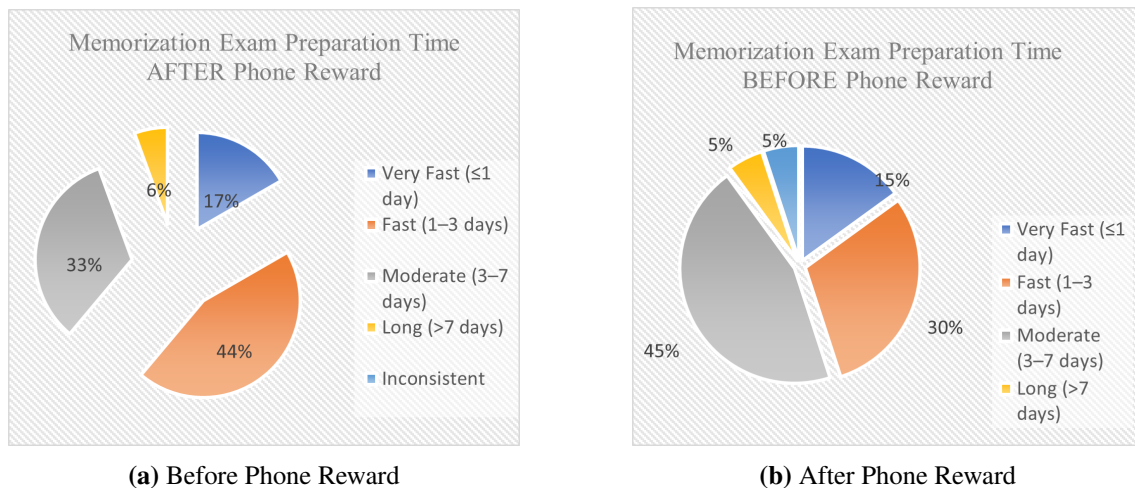


Figure 2. Pie Chart of Memorization Exam Preparation Time Before and After the Mobile Phone Reward

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Profile of Ma'had Aly Ibnu Hajar Boarding School (IHBS)

To contextualize the implementation of the reward system, this section provides an institutional profile of Ma'had Aly IHBS. Understanding the school's vision, educational culture, and values helps explain both the rationale and the process behind the adoption of the mobile phone policy. Ma'had Aly Ibnu Hajar Boarding School (IHBS) is an integrated Islamic educational institution operating under the auspices of Yayasan Dakwah Islam Cahaya Ilmu. Established with a noble vision to nurture an Islamic generation that excels in knowledge, embodies Qur'anic character, and possesses global competitiveness in accordance with the Manhaj Salaf, IHBS integrates the classical *pesantren* educational tradition with a modern learning system grounded in the values of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Since its establishment, IHBS has affirmed its identity as an institution dedicated to nurturing future scholars, preachers, and Muslim leaders who not only comprehend Islamic teachings textually but are also able to apply these values within social, cultural, and intellectual contexts. This aligns with the spirit of the Living Qur'an, which serves as the cornerstone of the institution's educational model (Nurani, Maulana, and Purwati, 2022).

The educational programs at IHBS span multiple levels, ranging from early childhood education (KBTK) to Ma'had Aly. The Ma'had Aly program focuses on I'dad Du'at, an intensive two-year academic program followed by one year of practical preaching experience. This structure aims to produce preachers who possess strong scholarly and spiritual competence, as well as solid social skills to serve the global community all grounded in the *pesantren* tradition. The main strength of IHBS lies in its integrative program known as TAB, which stands for Tahfiz (Qur'an memorization), Adab/Akhlak (manners and character), and Arabic Language. These three elements constitute the core pillars of student development. The *tahfiz* program emphasizes not only the quantity of memorization but also the comprehension and deep reflection upon the meanings of Qur'anic verses. Adab and akhlak serve as the foundation of character formation, while Arabic proficiency is developed as a key instrument for accessing primary Islamic sources.

In practice, IHBS cultivates an educational culture that nurtures a Qur'anic environment. Students are trained through consistent congregational worship, daily Qur'an recitation, study circles (*halaqah*), and continuous guidance in manners toward teachers, peers, and the surrounding environment. The entire educational system is designed to cultivate internal awareness among students that the Qur'an is not merely to be memorized but to be embodied in every aspect of life.

IHBS's commitment to integrating religious education with a modern curriculum is reflected in the implementation of the Religious-Based General School System (SUBA), which aims to balance mastery of religious sciences and modern disciplines. This educational framework is supported by structured institutional management, the adoption of a *diniyah* curriculum aligned with Middle Eastern standards, and the consistent inculcation of Islamic values in all aspects of student life. Beyond academic and spiritual development, IHBS also promotes economic independence through various *pesantren*-based business units such as a minimarket, catering service, laundry, and garment production, each managed professionally and transparently. This model illustrates that the enhancement of educational quality depends not only on curriculum and pedagogy but also on visionary, collaborative, and sustainability-oriented institutional management (Sulastri, 2024). This contextual background provides a foundation for understanding the unique socio-religious considerations underlying the implementation of a digital reward strategy within a *pesantren* environment.



Figure 3. Halaqah Al-Qur'an

3.2.2. Analysis of the Effectiveness of Mobile Phone Rewards on the Tahfiz Program

The policy of granting access to mobile phones as a reward for students who achieve specific memorization targets represents an innovative breakthrough within the

traditional *pesantren* context. Based on the analyzed questionnaire results, it can be concluded that this reward system generally exerts a positive influence on enhancing students' motivation and discipline in Qur'anic memorization. The following points summarize the key findings regarding its effectiveness:

1. Intrinsic Motivation Triggered by Extrinsic Stimuli

The questionnaire results indicate that most respondents reported being moderately to highly motivated by the mobile phone reward. This suggests that appropriately structured external motivation can foster the development of internal motivation to achieve memorization targets. These findings are consistent with Skinner's theory of positive reinforcement, which posits that behavior is likely to be repeated when it is followed by favorable consequences (Arifin and Humaedah, 2021).

2. Tendency Toward Increased Memorization Submissions

In the open-ended responses concerning changes in memorization patterns, many respondents reported that the reward encouraged them to submit their memorization more regularly and to set higher personal targets. Although not all participants experienced a substantial increase in daily memorization volume, the competitive environment and heightened awareness of the reward fostered a consistent commitment to memorization (Miendlarzewska, Bavelier, and Schwartz, 2016).

3. Flexibility in Reward Implementation

The mobile phone reward policy was implemented with specific supervision and restrictions, such as granting access only during holidays to students who achieved designated memorization milestones and within a limited usage time. This approach ensured that the reward remained controlled and functioned as a measured tool to reinforce the *tahfiz* program. Respondents further noted that the reward did not lead to negligence, as clear usage guidelines were consistently enforced (Hosseinpour and Terlutter, 2019).

4. Aspects of Fairness and Discipline

Most students perceived the reward system as fair, as it was based on objective achievement criteria. Some respondents noted that this policy encouraged greater discipline, not only in memorization but also in time management and study habits. However, several participants suggested that rewards should not be limited to mobile phones and could take other forms as a means to diversify motivation (Chen et al., 2025).

5. Awareness of Forgetfulness and Dependency Risks

Although the mobile phone reward was effective in enhancing motivation, some students consciously noted that memorized material could be quickly forgotten without consistent revision (*murojaah*). They suggested that rewards should be granted not only for the quantity of memorization but also for the quality of its retention. This indicates a critical awareness among certain students regarding the importance of sustaining long-term motivation that is not solely dependent on material incentives (Hamel et al., 2019).

6. The Value of Uniqueness and Potential for Replication

The mobile phone reward policy in a *pesantren* setting such as IHBS is rarely found in other *pesantren*, making it an innovative practice worthy of further attention. If consistently proven effective, this system could serve as a model for other *tahfiz* institutions or modern *pesantren* seeking novel motivational approaches for their students without compromising traditional *pesantren* values (Member et al., 2020).

3.2.3. The Relevance of Reward Strategies in the Modern Pesantren Context

The findings of this study provide important insights that a technology-based reward system, in this case, mobile phones holds a distinct role in motivation management strategies within the *pesantren* environment. The mobile phone reward policy, implemented in a limited manner at Ma'had Aly IHBS, represents an uncommon form of innovation but has demonstrated a significant impact on enhancing motivation, memorization achievement, and study time efficiency. In the digital era, students' need for technology cannot be overlooked. Many students face a dilemma between the desire to access the outside world and the obligation to maintain focus on their studies. A reward system of this kind offers a convergence between *pesantren* idealism and the psychological dynamics of the younger generation. When mobile phone use is framed as a reward for memorization achievement, its technological value becomes not merely a form of entertainment but a symbol of success and accomplishment (Usman et al., 2025). While the findings do not introduce a radically new model, they represent a grounded, practice-based innovation that has rarely been studied in *pesantren* education. These results provide valuable starting points for further empirical research on technology-based rewards within traditional Islamic educational contexts.

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the mobile phone reward system, implemented selectively and in a limited manner at Ma'had Aly Ibnu Hajar Boarding School, has a positive impact on students' motivation and discipline within the tahfiz program. The majority of respondents from the third and fourth semesters reported increased enthusiasm, greater memorization volume, and improved efficiency in preparing for memorization examinations following the introduction of the reward policy. These findings suggest that extrinsic motivation, when derived from a valuable yet regulated resource, can serve as an effective driving force in student development, provided it remains aligned with *pesantren* values. The mobile phone reward was not only positively received by most students but also contributed to accelerating memorization and promoting more disciplined time management. Nevertheless, the study also notes that not all students were significantly affected, and some expressed concerns regarding a potential shift in motivation from religious sincerity to material gain. Therefore, strict supervision, regular evaluation, and continuous guidance on intention are essential to ensure that this reward program aligns with the spirit of sincere and consistent Qur'anic memorization. Based on these findings, the author recommends that *pesantren* intending to adopt modern reward systems consider several key aspects. First, rewards should be granted selectively and based on measurable and transparent achievements. Second, the use of mobile phones must be accompanied by clear regulations and integrated with character development programs. Third, rewards should not be limited to material forms but should also include symbolic and spiritual elements, ensuring the continued cultivation of value-based awareness among students. In this way, a technology-based reward system can function as an alternative educational strategy that is both adaptive and responsive to contemporary developments, without compromising the noble values of *pesantren* and Islamic education.

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