

FROM HABIT TO SYSTEM: A POAC-BASED MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY IN AN INDONESIAN QUR'ANIC EDUCATION CENTRE (TPQ)

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain penelitian tindakan partisipatif untuk menelaah penerapan strategi manajemen berbasis POAC pada sebuah Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an (TPQ) berbasis masyarakat di Jakarta Selatan, Indonesia. Kajian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kesenjangan yang terus berlangsung antara praktik pembelajaran ideal dan pelaksanaannya di kelas pada pendidikan Islam nonformal, khususnya pada strategi pembelajaran, keterlibatan santri, dan efektivitas belajar. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan kepala TPQ, guru, orang tua, dan santri yang dipilih secara purposif, melalui satu prasiklus diagnostik dan dua siklus tindakan. Analisis data mengikuti model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, dengan kredibilitas dijaga melalui triangulasi sumber dan metode, *member checking*, *peer debriefing*, serta keterlibatan yang berkelanjutan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi *Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling* (POAC) yang terintegrasi, diwujudkan dalam kurikulum internal berjenjang, pengelompokan santri berbasis kemampuan, perangkat administrasi pembelajaran yang terstandar, diversifikasi metode, dan evaluasi berkelanjutan, berkontribusi positif terhadap keterlibatan belajar, interaksi kelas, dan mutu pembelajaran. Indeks mutu kelembagaan meningkat dari 52,5 persen pada prasiklus menjadi 74,0 persen pada siklus I dan 92,0 persen pada siklus II, sedangkan proporsi santri yang mencapai target kelompok meningkat dari 36,9 menjadi 92,3 persen. Kemampuan awal yang heterogen, rasio guru-santri yang timpang, kehadiran yang tidak teratur, dan keterbatasan waktu pembelajaran tetap membatasi optimalisasi implementasi.

Kata kunci: Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, Mutu Pendidikan, Pendidikan Nonformal, Penelitian Tindakan Partisipatif, POAC

Abstract

This study employs a qualitative approach with a participatory action research design to explore the implementation of a POAC-based management strategy in a community-run Qur'anic education centre (Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an, TPQ) in South Jakarta, Indonesia. The research responds to the persistent gap between ideal pedagogical expectations and actual classroom implementation in non-formal Islamic education, particularly in relation to instructional strategies, learner engagement, and learning effectiveness. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving the centre's director, teachers, parents, and learners selected through purposive sampling, across a diagnostic pre-cycle and two participatory action cycles. Analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, with credibility secured through source and method triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement. The findings indicate that an integrated Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling (POAC) strategy, operationalised as an internal tiered curriculum, ability-based learner grouping, a standardised instructional administration set, methodological diversification, and continuous evaluation, contributes positively to learning engagement, classroom interaction, and instructional quality. The composite institutional quality index moved from 52.5 per cent before intervention to 74.0 per cent after the first cycle and 92.0 per cent after the second, while the proportion of learners meeting group-specific learning targets rose from 36.9 to 92.3 per cent. Heterogeneous entry ability, an unfavourable teacher-learner ratio, irregular attendance, and limited instructional time continued to shape optimal implementation.

Keywords: Educational Quality, Islamic Education Management, Non-Formal Education, Participatory Action Research, POAC

INTRODUCTION

This study is grounded in a specific educational phenomenon that requires in-depth exploration to understand the dynamics of teaching and learning practices within a particular context. In many educational settings there remains a gap between ideal instructional practices and actual classroom implementation, particularly in terms of pedagogy, student engagement, and contextual adaptability. Nowhere in the Indonesian educational landscape is that gap more consequential, or less examined, than in the *Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an* (TPQ), the community-based Qur'anic education centre that constitutes the country's most widespread form of Islamic learning provision.

TPQ are non-formal institutions, typically mosque- or neighbourhood-based, that teach Qur'anic recitation literacy, memorisation of short chapters, daily supplications, and foundational Islamic practice to children between early childhood and adolescence, generally in one- to two-hour sessions scheduled around formal schooling. Their legal standing derives from Article 30 of Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System and Government Regulation No. 55/2007 on Religious and Religious-Based Education, which recognise religious education organised by communities as a legitimate component of the national system, a recognition arrived at through a long and contested policy trajectory (Kosim et al., 2023). Their social function, however, exceeds their legal description. Research on non-formal Islamic education has consistently shown that these centres do more than transmit recitation skill: they build social capital through sustained interaction among learners, instructors, and neighbourhood networks, and they operate as a primary site of early religious and moral formation (Ismail et al., 2024; Islamic et al., 2024). Comparable community-embedded provision elsewhere in Southeast Asia has moved towards accreditation and tiered curricula, indicating that the sector's institutional maturity is an active policy question rather than a settled one (Ihsan et al., 2024).

Yet the sector's scale is not matched by its managerial capacity. Ministry of Religious Affairs statistics record tens of thousands of registered centres nationally, of which a substantial proportion do not meet optimal quality standards, particularly in the managerial and curriculum-development domains (Direktorat Pendidikan Diniyah dan Pondok Pesantren, 2023). The recurring weaknesses reported in the literature are strikingly consistent across sites: the absence of a written internal curriculum, undocumented and non-cumulative sequencing of material, teacher assignment driven by availability rather than competence, assessment conducted informally and without instruments, and instructional method reduced to a single routine of read-and-listen. These are not pedagogical failures in the narrow sense. They are governance failures whose symptoms appear in the classroom.

Recent literature within the last ten years has shown increasing attention to qualitative investigations in Islamic education, especially in understanding classroom interaction, teacher strategies, and learner behaviour. Studies of Qur'anic learning management have documented the effectiveness of structured method systems such as Qiroati, attributing their durability to rigorous teacher recruitment, deliberate preparation of facilities, quality-controlled instructional strategy, and measurable evaluation and supervision (Subki, 2025). Work on madrasah reform has shown that management strategies operating simultaneously on leadership, curriculum, and human-resource dimensions produce institutional gains that single-dimension interventions do not (Haddade et al., 2024; El Widdah, 2022). Studies of

pesantren governance have demonstrated the mediating role of leadership behaviour and organisational culture in translating managerial intention into instructional practice (Karim et al., 2022; Karim et al., 2025; Rodliyah et al., 2024), and have shown that leadership capacity becomes decisive precisely when institutions face disruption and must reorganise instruction rapidly (Hanafi et al., 2021). Parallel work has catalogued the managerial challenges confronting the pesantren-based sector as it professionalises (Fatmawati, 2023), while systematic reviews of pesantren learning models trace a long movement from individually-paced traditional formats such as *sorogan* towards structured and increasingly digitally mediated arrangements (Suresman et al., 2025; Wedi et al., 2025). At the systemic level, empirical work outside Indonesia has confirmed that the quality of educational management is a direct determinant of educational quality at the school level, not merely an administrative precondition for it (Donkoh et al., 2023).

However, three limitations circumscribe this body of work. First, the great majority of Indonesian Islamic-education management research concentrates on formal or semi-formal institutions, madrasah, pesantren, and Islamic higher education, where a bureaucratic infrastructure, a salaried teaching corps, and an externally mandated curriculum already exist. The TPQ has none of these. Findings generated in resource-rich institutional settings do not transfer unproblematically to a five-person organisation operating four afternoons a week on volunteer labour. Second, existing studies of Qur'anic learning are predominantly descriptive: they characterise what a well-run institution looks like at a single point in time, without documenting the process by which a poorly-run institution becomes a well-run one. The literature is rich in portraits and poor in trajectories. Third, many studies focus on general patterns without deeply exploring contextual uniqueness and lived classroom experience, the specific negotiations, adaptations, and reversals through which a management design meets an actual classroom and is changed by it.

This limitation creates a research gap that necessitates a more interpretive and context-sensitive approach, and one capable of capturing change over time rather than state at a moment. The present study addresses that gap by examining a single TPQ through a participatory action design in which the researcher functioned simultaneously as observer and as participant in the institution's management, across a diagnostic pre-cycle and two intervention cycles. The analytic frame is the classical management cycle of Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling (POAC), selected not for its novelty but for its accessibility: it is the framework most likely to be intelligible and usable by the volunteer administrators who actually run these institutions, and its four functions map cleanly onto the four failure modes identified above. Accordingly, this study aims to explore and describe in depth the implementation of a POAC-based management strategy in a community Qur'anic education centre, focusing on its meaning, process, and impact within the learning environment. Three questions guide the inquiry: how is a POAC-based management strategy implemented in a community Qur'anic education centre, across the dimensions of planning, organising, actuating, and controlling; how does the implementation of that strategy affect the quality of Qur'anic learning, in terms of learner engagement, recitation competence, and memorisation attainment; and what contextual factors support and inhibit the implementation of the strategy.

The study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of more responsive and context-based educational practices. Theoretically, it extends educational management scholarship into a non-formal, community-governed setting that the

field has largely bypassed, and it specifies a mechanism, the coupling of managerial function to instructional differentiation, by which governance reform reaches the learner. Practically, it offers a documented, low-cost, and replicable sequence of managerial actions for the very large population of Indonesian community institutions currently operating without one.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive design aimed at understanding educational phenomena in their natural settings. Within that approach, the study adopts a participatory action research (PAR) design, in which the investigator acts not only as an observer of practice but as a co-participant in its improvement, working alongside the institution's staff through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Acharya et al., 2022). The combination is deliberate. A purely observational qualitative design would have documented the institution's deficiencies without generating evidence about whether, how, or under what conditions they could be remedied; a purely interventionist design would have produced outcome figures stripped of the interpretive detail needed to explain them. The PAR structure preserves both: each cycle generates outcome evidence, and the reflection phase generates the participants' own account of why the outcome took the shape it did. Two cycles were conducted, each comprising four phases. The pre-cycle established baseline conditions through observation, interview, and document review. Cycle I introduced the core managerial architecture. Cycle II refined that architecture in response to the reflection findings of Cycle I. The decision to terminate after Cycle II was made against pre-specified success criteria rather than by default.

The research setting is a single non-formal Islamic educational institution: TPQ Al-Muttaqin, located on Jalan Radio IV, Kramat Pela, Kebayoran Baru, South Jakarta. The centre was founded in 2021 and is embedded in a densely populated residential neighbourhood; proximity and community trust, rather than formal marketing, account for its enrolment. At the time of the study it served 65 learners (*santri*) aged 3 to 15, taught by a staff of five: a director, a secretary who also carries administrative management duties, and three active teaching staff. Instruction runs Monday to Thursday in two sessions, 16.00–17.30 and 18.30–19.00, timed around the learners' formal school day. Facilities are modest but functional: a learning room, whiteboard, educational wall charts for supplications and *tajwid* rules, copies of the Qur'an and *Iqra'* primers, and prayer equipment. The site was selected purposively for two reasons. It is typical, in that its scale, staffing ratio, resource base, and governance informality closely resemble the modal Indonesian TPQ, which strengthens the transferability of findings. And it is accessible, in that the researcher's existing relationship with the institution enabled the prolonged, embedded engagement that a participatory design requires and that an external investigator could not have secured.

Participants consist of the staff, learners, and parents most relevant to the focus of the study, selected through purposive sampling. Ten individuals took part in in-depth interviews: the centre director, the three teaching staff, the administrative secretary, three parents, and two learners from the senior groups able to articulate their learning experience. Observation encompassed all four learning groups and all 65 enrolled learners. Parents were included deliberately rather than incidentally; in a non-formal setting where attendance is voluntary and unenforced, the household is a functional part of the institution's operating environment, and

prior research has established parental engagement as a substantive determinant of learner outcomes rather than a peripheral courtesy (Kim, 2022).

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to obtain comprehensive and triangulated information. In-depth interviews followed a semi-structured guide organised around the four POAC functions and the three research questions. Interviews with staff explored their experience of the institution's prior working practices, their response to each managerial change, and their assessment of what helped or obstructed implementation. Parent interviews addressed home reinforcement, communication with the centre, and perceived change in their child's competence. Learner interviews were kept short, concrete, and age-appropriate. Participant observation was conducted across both cycles during teaching sessions, staff meetings, and evaluation activities. The researcher's role was participant-as-observer: engaged in the managerial work under study while systematically recording classroom interaction, teacher behaviour, learner response, time use, and the operation of newly introduced instruments.

Document analysis covered the centre's annual activity plan, the internal curriculum and syllabus developed during the study, timetables, attendance registers, teaching journals, learner progress books, reading and memorisation assessment records, staff meeting minutes, and evaluation notes. Instruments comprised an interview guide, structured observation sheets, and a documentation checklist, each developed from the conceptual and theoretical frameworks relevant to the study focus. Observation sheets used binary implementation indicators, implemented or not yet implemented, grouped by managerial domain, with a free-text field for descriptive evidence. The numerical percentages reported below are the proportion of indicators observed as implemented within a domain, and are used descriptively to display patterns in the qualitative record rather than as inferential statistics.

Data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Byrne, 2022). Condensation involved selecting, focusing, and abstracting field notes, interview transcripts, and documents into thematic categories aligned with the POAC functions and with the emergent themes of learner engagement, teacher practice, and contextual constraint. Display arranged condensed data into matrices comparing pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II conditions across each domain, alongside narrative accounts of process. Conclusion drawing identified recurring patterns and tested them against disconfirming instances in the record; conclusions were held provisionally and verified in the subsequent cycle. Thematic coding followed established procedures for generating, reviewing, and defining themes, and for documenting the audit trail through which they were derived (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022).

Permission was obtained from the centre's director prior to fieldwork. Staff and parents gave informed consent; parental consent was secured for all learner participation, and learners' own assent was sought before any interview. Participants were informed of their right to decline or withdraw without consequence. Individual learners are not identifiable in any reported data, and staff are referred to by role rather than name. Because the researcher held a managerial role within the institution, the potential for participants to feel obliged to report favourably was addressed by conducting staff interviews privately, by explicitly inviting critical assessment, and by weighting observational and documentary evidence over self-report wherever the two diverged.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Baseline: Instruction Organised by Habit

Pre-cycle observation, interviews, and document review converged on a single characterisation: the centre operated on habit rather than on system. No written curriculum existed. Material was sequenced according to each teacher's memory of what a given child had last covered, with the consequence that progression was neither cumulative nor comparable across groups. A timetable existed on paper but was revised frequently enough that neither staff nor parents treated it as binding. Teaching assignments had been distributed by availability; two teachers taught across multiple groups without a defined role in either. Assessment was conducted informally, in the teacher's judgement at the moment of hearing a child recite, and left no record. Instructional method had contracted to a single dominant routine of read-and-listen, with little variation across ability levels or session types.

These structural conditions had legible correlates in learner behaviour. Punctual arrival was observed for 23 of 65 learners (35 per cent); 42 (65 per cent) arrived late, with late arrival concentrated in the afternoon session immediately following the formal school day. Fifty learners (77 per cent) followed the lesson as delivered, but only 25 (38 per cent) were observed to participate actively, whether by initiating a question, responding to one, or volunteering to recite. Average weekly attendance stood at 80 per cent, with the remaining fifth attending irregularly. Entry recitation competence was heterogeneous: 15 learners (23 per cent) were assessed as good, 28 (43 per cent) as adequate, and 22 (34 per cent) as weak, with weakness concentrated in articulation points (*makharijul huruf*), vowel length (*mad*), and basic *tajwid* application.

The interview record links these figures to the structural absence rather than to learner disposition. Teachers described teaching to the group's midpoint because there was no basis for doing otherwise: without a record of where each child stood, differentiation had no input to work from. The stronger learners were unchallenged, the weaker ones were carried along, and the observable result was the low active-participation figure. What the baseline demonstrates is not a motivational deficit but an informational one.

Cycle I: Installing the Architecture

In the planning dimension, an internal curriculum was drafted, specifying material, competence targets, and evaluation points for each ability tier, and a daily and weekly timetable was fixed and circulated to staff and parents. In the organising dimension, learners were regrouped by assessed ability into four tiers, Pra Tahsin, Tahsin, Pra Tahfidz, and Tahfidz, on the basis of a recitation and memorisation test administered during the pre-cycle, and teaching assignments were redistributed against the new structure so that each teacher held a defined tier. In the actuating dimension, instructional method was diversified beyond read-and-listen to include *talaqqi* (direct reception from the teacher), *murajaah* (structured review), demonstration, and small-group work, with method selected by tier rather than applied uniformly. In the controlling dimension, a ten-item instructional administration set was introduced, comprising timetable, attendance register, learner progress book, recitation assessment form, memorisation assessment form, teaching journal, mark recapitulation, semester programme, syllabus, and standard operating procedure, and daily and weekly evaluation was instituted.

Observation at the close of Cycle I showed the architecture partly, not fully, in place. Seven of the ten administration items were in active use; the semester programme, syllabus, and

standard operating procedure remained undeveloped, giving an implementation rate of 70 per cent. Grouping was substantially accurate: 58 learners (89.23 per cent) were placed in a tier matching their demonstrated ability, while 7 (10.77 per cent) required reassignment once their rate of progress diverged from the entry test's prediction. The instructional effects were visible within four sessions. Attendance across the four observed meetings averaged 90.00 per cent (87.69, 90.77, 89.23, and 92.31 per cent), against the 80 per cent baseline. Fifty-three learners (81.54 per cent) were observed participating actively, against 25 (38 per cent) at baseline; 48 (73.85 per cent) asked or answered questions; 60 (92.31 per cent) took part in *murajaah*; and 55 (84.62 per cent) completed assigned tasks. Periodic assessment recorded 49 learners (75.38 per cent) reaching the recitation competence threshold and 51 (78.46 per cent) meeting their memorisation target.

The reflection phase identified where the architecture was not yet holding. Administrative completion was inconsistent across staff: the instruments existed and were understood, but not all teachers updated progress books and evaluation records after every session. Sixteen learners had not reached recitation competence, with difficulty concentrated in articulation, vowel length, and *tajwid* application; fourteen had not met memorisation targets. Twelve learners remained passive. Six learners maintained low attendance. And time allocation within sessions was not yet matched to the new method mix, so planned material was not always completed. Each of these became a specified action in Cycle II rather than a general aspiration.

Cycle II: Consolidation

Cycle II did not introduce new architecture; it closed the gaps in the existing one. Grouping was re-evaluated and the seven mismatched learners reassigned. Individual and small-group mentoring was targeted at learners below threshold. The *murajaah* programme was extended, with home review tracked through parental communication. Administrative instruments were refined and their completion supervised by the director. Assessment instruments were standardised with explicit rubrics and scoring criteria covering articulation, *tajwid*, fluency, and accuracy for recitation, and accuracy, fluency, and completion for memorisation. Classroom management was strengthened through seating arranged by tier, consistent rule application, and a fixed session structure of opening, core instruction, *murajaah*, evaluation, and closing.

Observation across the five domains assessed in Cycle II recorded full implementation. Instructional administration reached 7 of 7 indicators, classroom management 7 of 7, teacher role 7 of 7, evaluation instrument development 7 of 7, and the learning-implementation domain 6 of 6, that is, 100 per cent in each and in the very good category. The qualitative record behind these figures describes teachers arriving prepared with complete instruments, delivering material through a varied method mix, correcting articulation and memorisation errors immediately and specifically, mentoring below-threshold learners individually, and completing documentation promptly enough that the progress record was usable for the following session's planning rather than retrospective. Against the four pre-specified success criteria, Cycle II met all four, and the action research was therefore terminated rather than extended to a third cycle.

The Trajectory of Learning Quality

Table 1 displays the composite quality index across the ten indicators assessed at each phase.

Tabel 1. Educational quality indicators across pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II

No.	Quality indicator	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II
1	Internal curriculum	50%	75%	95%

No.	Quality indicator	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II
2	Timetable regularity	55%	78%	95%
3	Learner grouping	45%	80%	95%
4	Teacher performance	60%	76%	92%
5	Instructional administration	50%	72%	94%
6	Learner attendance	58%	75%	90%
7	Qur'anic reading competence	55%	74%	90%
8	Memorisation attainment	52%	70%	88%
9	Evaluation implementation	48%	72%	92%
10	Achievement of learning targets	52%	68%	89%
Mean		52.5%	74.0%	92.0%
Gain		-	+21.5	+18.0

Sumber: Data lapangan diolah peneliti (2025)

The composite index rose 21.5 percentage points across Cycle I and a further 18.0 across Cycle II, moving the institution from an adequate to a very good category. The distribution of gain is informative. The largest single-cycle movement occurred in learner grouping, at 35 points in Cycle I, the change that most directly restructured the instructional encounter. The indicators registering the smallest Cycle I gain, memorisation attainment at 18 points and achievement of learning targets at 16 points, are those furthest downstream from managerial action, which is consistent with a lag between structural change and learning outcome rather than with an absence of effect.

Tabel 2. Learners meeting group-specific learning targets, by tier

Tier	Learners	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II	Gain
Pra Tahsin	20	8 (40.0%)	15 (75.0%)	19 (95.0%)	+11
Tahsin	18	7 (38.9%)	14 (77.8%)	17 (94.4%)	+10
Pra Tahfidz	15	5 (33.3%)	11 (73.3%)	14 (93.3%)	+9
Tahfidz	12	4 (33.3%)	8 (66.7%)	10 (83.3%)	+6
Total	65	24 (36.9%)	48 (73.8%)	60 (92.3%)	+36

Sumber: Data lapangan diolah peneliti (2025)

Overall attainment rose from 24 learners (36.9 per cent) to 60 (92.3 per cent), with five learners remaining below target at the close of Cycle II. The gradient across tiers is the most analytically significant feature of the table: gains diminish monotonically as tier difficulty increases, from 11 learners in Pra Tahsin to 6 in Tahfidz, and the Tahfidz tier's final attainment of 83.3 per cent sits more than ten points below the other three. Managerial restructuring produced its largest returns where the task was most amenable to systematisation, namely establishing correct articulation and basic *tajwid* through frequent, structured, corrected practice, and its smallest where the task depends on sustained individual rehearsal over time. Memorisation cannot be scheduled into existence; it requires accumulated hours that the centre's four-afternoon week does not supply and that home review supplies unevenly.

Enabling and Constraining Factors

Four factors were identified as enabling implementation. The first is the director's sustained commitment: programme planning, task coordination, staff direction, and evaluation were performed consistently rather than episodically, which staff interviews identified as the reason the new instruments were adopted rather than ignored. The second is collaboration between the centre and parents, who not only permitted attendance but supervised home *murajaah* and maintained communication about progress, support that interviews and progress records both associate with the attendance and memorisation gains. The third is the structured programme itself: tiered grouping, explicit targets, the *murajaah* schedule, standardised administration, and periodic evaluation together gave teachers a working basis for systematic instruction. The fourth is continuous evaluation, with the director supervising instruction and teachers assessing recitation and memorisation at the close of each session, generating the information on which each subsequent cycle's adjustments were built.

Five factors constrained implementation. Heterogeneous entry ability required differentiated approaches within as well as between tiers, consuming time and attention. The teacher-learner ratio, three teaching staff for 65 learners, limited individual mentoring precisely for the learners who needed it most, and is the most plausible structural explanation for the residual five below target. Irregular attendance slowed progress for the affected learners and forced repetition that reduced instructional time for the rest. Limited session time constrained completion of planned material. And administrative practice was initially weak, though this constraint was substantially resolved by the close of Cycle II. Notably, three of the five constraints are resource constraints that management can mitigate but not remove; the intervention's effect was to reduce their impact, not to eliminate them.

Management as an Instructional Variable

The central finding is that contextualised managerial practice significantly influences learner engagement and learning effectiveness, and that governance is not a precondition for instruction but a component of it. The baseline data make this concrete. Active participation stood at 38 per cent not because learners were disengaged by temperament but because instruction was pitched at a group midpoint that suited few of them, and it was pitched there because no record existed from which differentiation could be constructed. The managerial deficit and the pedagogical deficit were the same deficit, observed at two levels.

This reading is consistent with cross-national evidence that the quality of educational management operates as a direct determinant of educational quality rather than a background condition (Donkoh et al., 2023), and with the leadership literature's finding that the leadership practices most strongly associated with learner outcomes are those closest to instruction, namely planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and curriculum, and participating in teacher learning, rather than those concerned with general organisational maintenance (Tan et al., 2022; Karadağ & Sertel, 2025), including the specific finding that instructional leadership raises teachers' sense of professional efficacy (Alanoglu, 2022). The present case supplies an unusually clean illustration, because the institution began with essentially no managerial infrastructure at all. Where formal-sector studies observe variation in the quality of existing systems, this study observed the installation of a first system, and the resulting 21.5-point first-cycle gain suggests that the marginal return on basic managerial structure is highest precisely where it has been absent.

The finding aligns with, and extends, work on Islamic education management showing that multi-dimensional strategies produce institutional gains that single-dimension interventions do not (Haddade et al., 2024; El Widdah, 2022; Rodliyah et al., 2024). Studies of Qur'anic learning management have identified structured recruitment, deliberate facility preparation, quality-controlled instructional strategy, and measurable evaluation as the elements underpinning durable method systems (Subki, 2025). Three of those four elements were present in this intervention; the exception, recruitment, was unavailable, since the teaching staff were fixed volunteers who could be developed but not selected. That the intervention nonetheless succeeded suggests that the recruitment element, while advantageous, is not strictly necessary where supervision and in-service development are sustained.

Grouping, Differentiation, and the Limits of Structural Remedy

The tier-differentiated attainment gradient in Table 2 warrants closer interpretation than a summary of overall gain permits. Ability-based grouping is a contested practice in the international literature: meta-analytic evidence indicates that within-class grouping and cross-grade grouping by skill produce modest positive effects on achievement, whereas between-class tracking produces effects near zero, with the difference attributable to whether grouping is accompanied by genuine adjustment of instruction and remains permeable to reassignment (Asriadi AM et al., 2023). The present case satisfies both conditions. Grouping was coupled to differentiated method selection by tier rather than to identical instruction delivered in separate rooms, and permeability was demonstrated in practice: the seven learners initially misplaced were reassigned in Cycle II on the evidence of their progress records rather than left in place. It is plausible that the grouping intervention succeeded here for exactly the reasons the meta-analytic literature specifies, and that a version implemented without differentiated instruction or without reassignment would not have.

The gradient also marks a boundary condition. Managerial systematisation produced its largest returns on the tasks most responsive to structured, corrected practice, namely articulation and basic *tajwid*, and its smallest on memorisation, which depends on accumulated individual rehearsal. Research linking Qur'anic memorisation to broader academic performance treats memorisation as a sustained practice discipline rather than a taught competence (Tarmuji et al., 2022), and the classical transmission traditions of *talaqqi* and *halaqa* are grounded in extended, relational, high-frequency contact between teacher and learner (Ismail et al., 2024). A four-afternoon week does not supply that frequency. This is a resource ceiling, not a design flaw, and it identifies the point at which further managerial refinement would yield diminishing returns relative to increases in contact time or teaching staff.

Feedback, Evaluation, and the Mechanism of the Second Cycle

The movement from Cycle I to Cycle II is best understood as the maturation of the control function. In Cycle I, evaluation instruments existed and were used inconsistently; in Cycle II, they were standardised with explicit rubrics, applied uniformly across staff, and, critically, their output was used to determine subsequent instruction, including the assignment of mentoring and the reassignment of learners between tiers. This is the condition under which assessment becomes formative rather than merely recorded. The formative assessment literature holds that assessment influences learning only when the information it generates is used to adapt

subsequent teaching, and that feedback is most effective when it is specific, timely, and directed at the task rather than the person (Xuan et al., 2022). The observational record in Cycle II describes precisely this pattern: articulation and memorisation errors corrected immediately and specifically, with the learner told which element required repair. The 18-point second-cycle gain, achieved without new architecture, is attributable to this closing of the feedback loop rather than to any additional structure.

The same interpretation applies to the change in teacher practice. Teachers did not receive formal external training; they received supervision, standardised instruments, and role clarity, sustained across two cycles. Evidence on teacher professional development indicates that sustained, content-focused, coherent, and collectively participated activity produces change in instructional practice, while brief or fragmented input does not (Zhou et al., 2023), and evidence on instructional coaching shows meaningful effects on both practice and achievement (Zhou et al., 2023; Pozas et al., 2023). The present case suggests that embedded supervision with concrete instruments can function as a low-cost substitute for formal development in settings where the latter is financially unavailable, a finding of practical significance for a sector in which teacher training and compensation are the most persistent systemic weaknesses.

The Household as Part of the Institution

Parental involvement functioned here as a component of the instructional system rather than as goodwill surrounding it. Home *murajaah* supervision and routine communication about progress were associated in both the interview record and the attendance data with the improvement in attendance regularity and memorisation attainment. This is consistent with meta-analytic evidence that parental involvement programmes are associated with improved outcomes, with the strongest effects for programmes emphasising shared reading and consistent communication rather than generalised encouragement (Kim, 2022). The finding carries particular weight in the non-formal context. A TPQ cannot compel attendance; it has no truancy mechanism and no consequence to impose. Attendance is therefore a household decision, taken daily, and any managerial strategy that treats the household as external to the institution has excluded from its scope the single variable most determinative of instructional time. The pre-cycle attendance figure of 80 per cent, rising to 90 per cent, represents roughly six additional learner-sessions per meeting, an instructional gain achieved through communication rather than through pedagogy.

Comparison with Previous Studies and Theoretical Contribution

Comparisons with previous studies reveal both similarities and contextual differences, particularly in how teachers adapt instructional strategies in diverse classroom environments. The similarity is that the managerial elements found effective here, namely structured planning, role-differentiated organisation, method diversification, and evaluative control, correspond closely to those identified in madrasah and pesantren settings (Haddade et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2025; Rodliyah et al., 2024). The difference lies in what those elements had to be built from. Formal institutions adapt existing systems; this institution constructed a first one, using volunteer labour, without budget, and within an eight-week window. That the same managerial functions proved operative at radically different levels of institutional resource is evidence for their generality, and it suggests that the barrier to quality improvement in the non-formal sector

is not the unavailability of appropriate frameworks but the absence of a documented pathway for applying them at very small scale.

The findings support constructivist and socio-cultural readings of learning in a specific sense. What changed for learners was not the content of instruction but the conditions of their participation in it: appropriately pitched material, more varied interactional formats, immediate and specific feedback, and a stable structure within which participation was expected. Engagement rose because the conditions for meaningful participation were established, which is the socio-cultural account of learning as participation in structured activity rather than as reception of transmitted content. The discussion also highlights that successful learning processes are not solely determined by instructional design but also by contextual readiness, teacher competence, and learner participation. All three were operative here, and none was sufficient alone: teacher competence without structure produced the baseline condition; structure without sustained supervision produced Cycle I's inconsistent administration; and both together, with parental engagement, produced Cycle II.

The study's theoretical contribution is threefold. It extends educational management research into a governance context, the volunteer-staffed, community-financed, legally non-formal institution, that the field has largely bypassed despite its scale in Muslim-majority education systems. It specifies the mechanism by which managerial reform reaches the learner: not diffusely, through improved organisational climate, but through the concrete coupling of the control function (assessment records) to the organising function (ability tiering) to the actuating function (differentiated method), such that each managerial act has a determinate instructional consequence. And it identifies the boundary of that mechanism, in the diminishing returns observed on memorisation, where the binding constraint is contact time rather than organisation. Practically, the study offers a sequenced and costed-at-zero template: draft an internal tiered curriculum; assess and group by ability; assign teachers to defined tiers; diversify method by tier; install a standard administrative instrument set; supervise its completion; standardise assessment rubrics; and route assessment output back into grouping and mentoring decisions. These findings strengthen the argument that qualitative exploration is essential for capturing the complexity of educational processes and improving instructional quality in a meaningful and sustainable way.

CONCLUSION

The POAC-based strategy was implemented as an integrated architecture rather than as discrete measures, comprising an internal tiered curriculum and fixed timetable in the planning dimension, ability-based grouping into four tiers with matched teaching assignments in the organising dimension, method diversification by tier encompassing *talaqqi*, *murajaah*, demonstration, and small-group work in the actuating dimension, and a ten-item administrative instrument set with standardised assessment rubrics and continuous supervision in the controlling dimension; implementation was partial in Cycle I, at 70 per cent administrative completion and 89.23 per cent grouping accuracy, and complete across all observed domains in Cycle II, with the composite quality index rising from 52.5 to 74.0 and then to 92.0 per cent, active participation from 38 to 81.54 per cent, average attendance from 80 to 90 per cent, and the proportion of learners meeting group-specific targets from 36.9 to 92.3 per cent, the gains being largest for foundational recitation competence and smallest for advanced memorisation, so that managerial systematisation proves most powerful where learning tasks

respond to structured and corrected practice and least powerful where they depend on accumulated individual rehearsal; implementation was supported by the director's sustained commitment, collaboration with parents, programme structure, and continuous evaluation, and constrained by heterogeneous entry ability, an unfavourable teacher–learner ratio, irregular attendance, limited instructional time, and initially weak administration, three of which are resource-based and were mitigated rather than removed, so that the study's contribution lies in an integrated model coupling the four POAC functions to ability-based tiering, an internal curriculum, and continuous evaluation, documented as a trajectory rather than a state, in a governance context that educational management research has largely overlooked, offered as transferable rather than generalisable given its single-site design, its researcher's dual role, its descriptive rather than psychometric percentages, and an observation window too short to establish whether the gains persist after the participatory researcher withdraws, which is where future research across multiple centres, with independent observers, longitudinal follow-up, varied contact time, and digitally supported record-keeping should now be directed.

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