Implementation of the Marking Method in Enhancing Qur'anic Memorization Accuracy among Santri: A Case Study at Buq Yasinat Islamic Boarding School, Jember

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of the marking method in the Qur'anic memorization practices of students at the Chuffadh Dormitory of Buq Yasinat Islamic Boarding School, Jember, and to analyze its role as a cognitive learning strategy from the perspective of information-processing theory. The research seeks to explain how naturally emerging visual marking practices support students' attention, encoding, and retrieval processes during tahfidz activities. This study employed a qualitative field research design with a descriptive analytical and case study approach. Data were collected through non-participant observations of memorization activities, semi-structured interviews with students and tahfidz mentors, and documentation of marked mushaf pages. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct experience with the marking method. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, complemented by thematic analysis and triangulation to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. The findings reveal that the marking method develops naturally as a student-initiated learning strategy rather than as a formally institutionalized technique. Students selectively use visual signs such as circles and underlines to identify verses that are difficult, similar, or prone to confusion. The method functions in three principal ways: directing attention toward critical verses, strengthening encoding through focused and repeated rehearsal, and facilitating retrieval by serving as visual memory cues during revision and recitation. As a result, students who marking demonstrates improved concentration, memorization stability, and faster recall. Unlike prior studies that primarily emphasize formal teacher-directed memorization methods such as talaqqi and tasmi', this research highlights an informal, learner-generated strategy and interprets it systematically within a cognitive learning framework. The study offers an original perspective by conceptualizing marking as an integrated attention-encoding-retrieval mechanism rather than merely a technical habit. The study contributes theoretically by extending cognitive learning theory into the context of Qur'anic memorization, empirically by documenting authentic learning practices within a pesantren environment, and practically by providing insights for educators to recognize and optimize students' self-regulated strategies. The findings encourage the development of pedagogically effective and ethically appropriate marking aids to support sustainable tahfidz learning.

Keywords: marking method, Qur'anic memorization, tahfidz education, cognitive learning strategies, attention-encoding-retrieval, pesantren learning, self-regulated learning

Introduction

Memorizing the Qur'an (tahfidz) constitutes one of the core practices in Islamic education that requires not only spiritual perseverance but also higher order cognitive processes such as focused attention, information processing, memory encoding, and accurate retrieval. From a psychological perspective, memorization cannot be understood merely as verbal repetition. Rather, it represents a process of knowledge construction that requires systematic learning strategies so that information can be stored effectively in long term memory (Ulfah et al., 2024; Nuruddaroini & Zubaidillah, 2022). Therefore, tahfidz is essentially a cognitively based learning activity that positions students as active agents in managing their own thinking processes.

Within the information processing theory, learning is viewed as a sequence of mental stages that include attention, perception, rehearsal, encoding, storage, and retrieval (Gagné in Noer & Muhid, 2023). Information that does not receive adequate attention tends to be processed superficially and is unlikely to be stored stably in memory. In contrast, strategies that focus attention and enrich both visual and semantic encoding have been shown to enhance retention and memory accuracy. Consequently, learners are not passive recipients of information but cognitive agents who actively develop personal strategies to facilitate learning (Noer & Muhid, 2023). This perspective aligns with contemporary studies emphasizing the importance of cognitive learning strategies in improving the quality of religious education and character formation within pesantren settings (Fauzi, 2018; Fauzi, 2020).

In the practice of tahfidz learning in Islamic boarding schools, students often develop various independent learning strategies derived from their own experiences. One common phenomenon is the use of visual markings in the mushaf, such as underlining, circling, or adding specific symbols to verses considered difficult, lengthy, or easily confused. This practice is known as the marking method (Aini, 2026). At first glance, marking appears to be a simple technical habit. However, from a cognitive standpoint, it potentially functions as a visual cue that strengthens attention, deepens encoding, and facilitates memory retrieval. These visual signs may serve as memory triggers when students perform revision or recitation assessments, thereby helping maintain memorization continuity (Saputra & Muhid, 2022). Research in educational psychology also demonstrates that the use of visual cues and information annotation strategies can improve cognitive organization and long term memory accuracy (Dunlosky et al., 2013).

Despite the widespread use of marking among students, scholarly investigation of this strategy remains limited. Most studies on Qur'anic memorization focus on formal and instructional methods such as talaqqi, tasmi', or structured muraja'ah (Ilmi et al., 2021; Rizqiyah & Partono, 2022; Oktavia et al., 2024). These studies emphasize teacher designed methods rather than naturally emerging learning strategies developed by students themselves. Even studies that examine memorization from a psychological perspective tend to be conceptual and rarely explore empirical practices of personal learning strategies (Saputra & Muhid, 2022; Sunarya et al., 2025).

As a result, the internal cognitive processes of students, including how they independently manage attention, encode information, and trigger memory recall, have not been sufficiently explored.

This gap becomes more significant when considered within the context of pesantren as distinctive educational institutions characterized by adaptive, contextual, and experience based learning cultures. Recent research indicates that learning practices in pesantren are strongly influenced by students' personal initiatives in developing their own strategies (Fauzi, 2020; Fauzi et al., 2023). In this environment, informal strategies such as marking may represent forms of pedagogical innovation grounded in authentic learning experiences. However, without a strong theoretical foundation, such practices tend to be regarded merely as technical habits rather than legitimate cognitive learning strategies.

Based on this review of the literature, three major research gaps can be identified. First, there is a lack of empirical studies examining cognitive learning strategies that naturally emerge from students' experiences. Second, there is limited theoretical analysis connecting the marking practice with the attention, encoding, and retrieval framework of cognitive learning theory. Third, there is a scarcity of in depth case studies within pesantren contexts that explain how personal learning strategies contribute to memorization accuracy. The absence of such investigations results in a partial understanding of Qur'anic memorization processes that focuses more on outcomes than on learning mechanisms.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap between students' empirical practices and cognitive theoretical perspectives by analyzing the implementation of the marking method at the Chuffadh Dormitory of Buq Yasinat Islamic Boarding School, Jember. Specifically, the study seeks to describe how marking is applied in memorization activities and to explain its role as a cognitive strategy at the stages of attention, encoding, and retrieval. Through a qualitative case study approach, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions by strengthening the conceptual framework of cognitive learning strategies in tahfidz education, as well as practical contributions for pesantren educators in understanding and optimizing students' personal learning strategies. Accordingly, the marking method should not be viewed merely as a technical habit but as a cognitively grounded pedagogical strategy with clear scientific legitimacy in Qur'anic learning.

Method

This study employed a qualitative field research design with a descriptive analytical approach aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of how the marking method is implemented in the Qur'anic memorization process of students at the Chuffadh dormitory of Buq Yasinat Islamic Boarding School, Jember. A qualitative design was selected because the focus of the study was not to measure the effectiveness of the method statistically, but to explore naturally occurring learning practices, meanings, experiences,

and cognitive strategies developed by students within their authentic educational setting. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to capture participants' perspectives, contextual interactions, and the complexity of learning behaviors that cannot be adequately explained through experimental or survey methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the field-based approach allowed direct engagement with the pesantren environment so that the implementation of the marking method could be examined in its real pedagogical and cultural context.

This research adopted a case study orientation, as it concentrated on a bounded system, namely one specific dormitory community that consistently practices Qur'anic memorization. The case study design is appropriate for investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts and for answering "how" and "why" questions related to educational practices (Yin, 2018). Through this approach, the marking method was analyzed as a contextualized learning strategy embedded within the daily routines of tahfidz activities, including memorization sessions, revision (muroja'ah), and recitation assessments (setoran).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the data were obtained from individuals who had direct experience with the marking method. The participants consisted of santri who actively applied marking in their personal mushaf, tahfidz mentors or teachers (ustadzah), and dormitory administrators who understood the learning culture of the pesantren. The inclusion criteria required that participants had been involved in the tahfidz program for at least one semester and regularly engaged in memorization practices. This strategy ensured the relevance, richness, and credibility of the information collected, as qualitative sampling prioritizes depth of understanding rather than representativeness (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected through three primary techniques, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. First, non-participant observations were conducted during memorization, muroja'ah, and setoran sessions to record how students applied visual signs such as underlining, circling, and symbolic marks in their mushaf. Field notes focused on students' behaviors, the timing of marking use, and interactions between students and teachers. Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore participants' experiences, motivations, and perceived cognitive benefits of marking. This format allowed flexibility for probing while maintaining consistency across participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Third, documentation analysis included photographs of marked mushaf pages, learning schedules, and institutional records that supported contextual understanding. The combination of these techniques enabled methodological triangulation and enriched the comprehensiveness of the data.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman as cited in Sugiyono (2013), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the reduction stage, interview transcripts and field notes were coded to identify patterns related to attention, encoding, retrieval cues, and personal learning strategies. In the display stage,

categories and themes were organized into matrices and conceptual mappings to clarify relationships among findings. Finally, conclusions were drawn through iterative interpretation and constant comparison between data sources. To strengthen analytical rigor, thematic analysis procedures were also employed to systematically generate themes grounded in participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This combination of techniques ensured that interpretations were data-driven and theoretically informed.

To enhance trustworthiness and research quality, several validation strategies were applied. Credibility was ensured through triangulation of data sources and methods, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checking in which participants reviewed interview summaries to confirm accuracy. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the pesantren context and learning practices. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting research decisions, procedures, and analytical steps. Confirmability was strengthened by reflexive notes to minimize researcher bias. These criteria align with established standards of qualitative rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, were informed about the voluntary nature of their involvement, and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. All data were used solely for academic purposes. Respect for the sanctity of the Qur'an was also maintained during documentation, and any visual recording of mushaf pages was conducted with permission and handled respectfully in accordance with Islamic educational ethics.

Through this comprehensive methodological framework, the study provides a systematic and credible account of how the marking method functions as a naturally emerging cognitive learning strategy within the tahfidz process. The qualitative case study design thus allows for a deeper exploration of the interaction between students' personal learning practices and cognitive learning theory in the authentic context of pesantren education.

Results and Discussion

Description of the Implementation of the Marking Method at the Chuffadh Dormitory of Buq Yasinat Islamic Boarding School

The findings of this study reveal that the marking method in the Qur'anic memorization process at the Chuffadh Dormitory of Buq Yasinat Islamic Boarding School, Jember, has developed as a naturally emerging learning practice among students rather than as an officially mandated instructional technique. The method is not formally prescribed by the institution as part of the tahfidz curriculum. Instead, it arises organically from students' personal learning experiences when they encounter difficulties in memorizing certain verses (Aini, 2026). This indicates that students are not merely passive recipients of teacher-directed methods but active learners who construct their own cognitive strategies in response to the demands of

memorization tasks. Such a pattern reflects the adaptive and experiential learning culture typical of pesantren education, where informal practices often evolve into meaningful pedagogical tools.
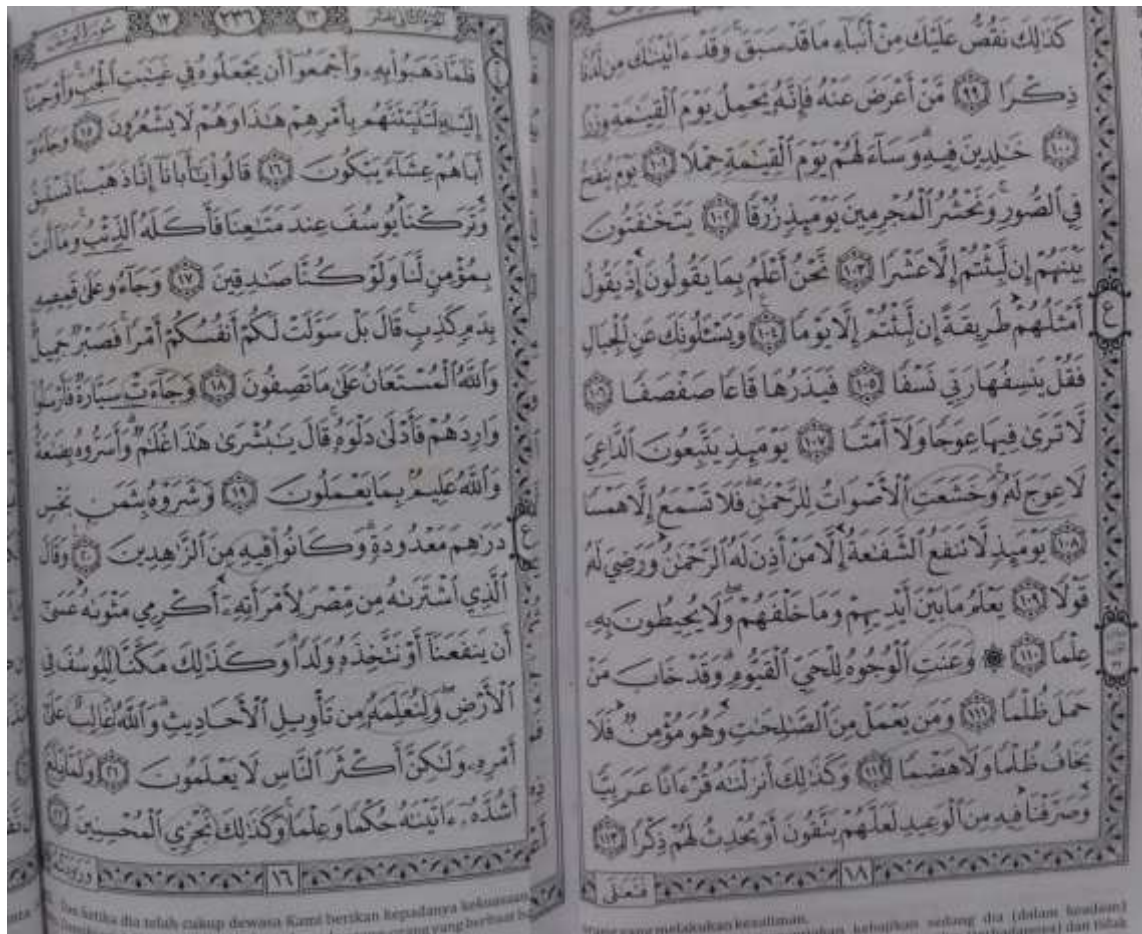
In practice, the marking method is implemented through the addition of visual signs in the mushaf to indicate verses that require special attention. These signs include circles around specific words or phrases and underlines beneath parts of the text (Putri, 2026). Importantly, these markings are applied directly to the students' personal copies of the Qur'an and are used consistently throughout various stages of memorization, including initial learning, revision sessions, and formal recitation assessments. The selective nature of marking is particularly noteworthy. Students do not mark every verse indiscriminately; rather, they identify only those segments that they perceive as cognitively demanding, easily confused, or structurally similar to other verses (Elzahra, 2026). This selective behavior suggests an evaluative process in which students actively assess the relative difficulty of the material before deciding where to focus their attention.

Furthermore, observations and interviews indicate that marking is most frequently applied to mutasyabihat verses, namely verses that share similar lexical or structural patterns and therefore pose a higher risk of confusion during recall (Haniyah, 2026). Students also tend to mark short verses with similar continuations or verses that they personally perceive as difficult to remember (Naila, 2026). By visually highlighting these critical points, students create a cognitive map of potential error zones within their memorization. As a result, their rehearsal becomes more focused and strategic rather than repetitive and unfocused. This practice demonstrates that memorization is not merely mechanical repetition but involves deliberate cognitive management of attention and effort.

The timing of marking use further supports its functional role in learning. The method is typically employed after students engage in repeated reading (bil-nadzhar) and begin committing the verses to memory. When a particular segment proves challenging, the student immediately marks it to ensure greater concentration during subsequent practice (Aini, 2026). The same visual cues remain useful during revision and recitation submission sessions, where they serve as reminders of sections that require extra caution. Consequently, marking operates not only as an initial encoding aid but also as a long-term support system that stabilizes memorization over time.

From the teacher's perspective, the marking practice is neither prohibited nor discouraged. On the contrary, teachers acknowledge its usefulness and observe that students who apply marking tend to be more focused and fluent in their memorization (Aini, 2026). These students appear better able to recover when they momentarily forget a verse, as the visual cues help them quickly reorient themselves. This institutional acceptance indicates that marking has gradually become embedded within the learning culture of the dormitory. Although it remains informal, it is functionally integrated into the tahfidz process.

Interview excerpts reinforce these observations. Students consistently describe marking as a tool that strengthens memory and simplifies memorization. They emphasize that the visual signs help them remember the continuation of verses and reduce confusion during recitation. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the marking method functions as a practical and context-sensitive learning strategy that aligns closely with students' cognitive needs. It is therefore best understood not as a trivial habit but as a meaningful pedagogical practice grounded in lived learning experience.

Figure 1. Student's Qur'an showing the use of the marking method

Figure 2. Student completing the interview form

These figures illustrate both the practical implementation of the marking method and the data collection process conducted in this study. Figure 1 presents a student's personal copy of the Qur'an containing various visual markings, such as circles and underlines, which indicate verses identified as difficult, similar, or prone to confusion during memorization. These markings function as visual cues that help focus attention, strengthen encoding, and facilitate memory retrieval during revision and recitation sessions. Figure 2 shows a student completing the interview form as part of the qualitative data collection process, reflecting the use of firsthand participant narratives to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to the marking practice. Together, these visual evidences support the authenticity of the field observations and demonstrate how the marking method operates within the natural learning context of the tahfidz environment.

Findings on the Implementation Patterns of the Marking Method

Based on systematic analysis of interviews and observations, this study identified several recurring patterns in students' use of the marking method. These patterns were organized into a typology to clarify the specific roles and functions of marking within the memorization process. Developing this typology enabled a more structured understanding of how the practice

operates at both behavioral and cognitive levels rather than remaining at the level of anecdotal description.

The first pattern indicates that marking functions as an identifier of critical verses. Students deliberately mark segments that they anticipate as potential sources of error, especially mutasyabihat passages and structurally similar sequences. In doing so, they create visible indicators of high-risk sections within the text. This process effectively transforms the mushaf into a personalized learning map, where attention is directed toward areas requiring deeper processing. The identification of critical points suggests that marking operates as an anticipatory strategy that helps prevent mistakes before they occur.

The second pattern shows that marking serves as a memory trigger and reinforcement mechanism. The visual signs facilitate rapid recognition and help students recall information that might otherwise be forgotten. Students report that they are able to retrieve memorized verses more quickly when guided by these cues, particularly during revision or assessment sessions. This indicates that marking supports not only memorization but also the stability and accessibility of stored information.

The third pattern demonstrates that marking represents a personal and self-initiated learning strategy. It emerges from students' own reflections on their memorization challenges rather than from formal instruction. This autonomy highlights the role of self-regulated learning within tahfidz practices. Students actively diagnose their weaknesses, select appropriate strategies, and evaluate their effectiveness. Such behavior reflects a higher level of metacognitive awareness and learning independence.

Marking as an Indicator of Critical Verses in Memorization

From a cognitive learning perspective, attention is the first and most essential stage of information processing. Without focused attention, information cannot be effectively encoded into memory (Noer & Muhid, 2023). The findings of this study demonstrate that marking acts as a visual stimulus that directs students' attention toward specific segments of the Qur'anic text. By highlighting difficult verses, students concentrate their mental resources more efficiently rather than distributing attention evenly across the entire page.

This selective focus enhances the encoding process. Research in cognitive psychology shows that information encoded through multiple channels, especially visual and verbal channels, tends to be stored more deeply and retained longer. Thus, the combination of reading, reciting, and visually marking creates a multimodal encoding experience that strengthens memory formation. In this sense, marking serves not merely as a sign but as an active cognitive organizer that structures how information is processed and stored.

Marking as a Retrieval Cue and Memory Reinforcement Tool

Retrieval is a critical stage in memorization because the ability to recall information determines whether learning is functionally successful. Retrieval cues play a central role in facilitating access to stored memories. The visual signs created through marking operate as such cues. When students encounter a marked verse, the visual stimulus activates associated memory traces and helps reconstruct the memorized sequence more efficiently.

This mechanism explains why students who use marking often demonstrate greater fluency and faster recovery from forgetting. Rather than experiencing complete memory blocks, they rely on cues that guide recall step by step. Consequently, marking contributes to the continuity and resilience of memorization performance, particularly during high-pressure recitation sessions.

Marking as an Effective Personal Learning Strategy

Finally, the marking method reflects the development of personal learning strategies and metacognitive awareness. Students independently evaluate which verses are difficult and decide how to address these challenges. Such decision-making processes illustrate self-regulated learning, where learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their own cognitive activities.

By adopting marking voluntarily, students demonstrate ownership of their learning process. This autonomy enhances motivation and responsibility, both of which are crucial for sustained memorization. Therefore, marking should be understood not only as a technical tool but also as evidence of learners' active engagement and cognitive maturity. It represents a shift from teacher-dependent memorization toward strategic, self-directed learning.

The primary novelty of this study lies in its focus on the marking method as a naturally emerging cognitive learning strategy within the Qur'anic memorization process. Previous research on tahfidz education has predominantly emphasized formal, teacher-directed approaches such as talaqqi, tasmi', and structured muraja'ah, with the main objective of improving memorization outcomes or institutional effectiveness. In contrast, this study shifts the analytical lens from institutional methods to students' internally developed learning behaviors. By examining marking as a spontaneous and student-initiated practice, this research highlights an often-overlooked dimension of tahfidz learning, namely the role of personal cognitive regulation in shaping memorization success. Furthermore, while earlier studies have discussed memorization techniques descriptively, few have theoretically grounded these practices within a cognitive information-processing framework. This study addresses that gap by systematically interpreting marking through the interrelated mechanisms of attention, encoding, and retrieval, thereby offering a more explanatory and theory-driven understanding of how memorization strategies operate at the cognitive level.

Beyond its conceptual contribution, this research also provides significant empirical and practical implications for Islamic boarding school

education. Empirically, it documents authentic learning practices directly observed in the pesantren environment, thus enriching the limited body of qualitative evidence on students' lived experiences in tahfidz settings. Practically, the findings suggest that informal strategies developed by students can function as effective pedagogical resources rather than mere technical habits, encouraging educators to recognize, accommodate, and optimize such learner-generated techniques in instructional design. Theoretically, the study expands the discourse on cognitive learning strategies by demonstrating their relevance within religious and memorization-based education, a context that has rarely been explored in mainstream educational psychology. Consequently, this research contributes to bridging the gap between cognitive learning theory and Islamic educational practice, offering a more integrative model that connects psychological processes, learner autonomy, and the cultural realities of pesantren-based Qur'anic learning.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and analysis of this study, the implementation of the marking method in the Qur'anic memorization practices of students at the Chuffadh Dormitory of Buq Yasinat Islamic Boarding School demonstrates that marking emerges as a natural, contextual, and learner-initiated strategy rather than a formally institutionalized technique. Students selectively apply visual signs to verses perceived as difficult, similar, or prone to confusion during memorization, and these markings are consistently used throughout the stages of initial memorization, revision, and recitation assessment. As a result, marking has evolved into an embedded learning habit that supports the stability and continuity of memorization within the authentic tahfidz environment. This pattern confirms that effective memorization is not solely dependent on structured instructional methods but is also shaped by students' adaptive and self-developed cognitive strategies.

From a cognitive learning perspective, this study identifies three principal functions of the marking method. First, marking directs attention and strengthens encoding by focusing students' mental resources on critical verses. Second, marking serves as an effective retrieval cue that facilitates faster and more accurate recall during revision and recitation. Third, marking operates as a personal and self-regulated learning strategy that reflects students' metacognitive awareness and autonomy in managing their memorization processes. These findings contribute theoretically by extending the application of information-processing theory to the context of Qur'anic memorization and by positioning informal learner-generated strategies as legitimate cognitive tools within Islamic education.

Practically, the study suggests that tahfidz teachers and mentors should recognize marking not merely as a technical habit but as a meaningful cognitive strategy that can enhance memorization quality. Educators are encouraged to provide appropriate guidance regarding the selective and proportional use of marking, particularly for mutasyabihat verses or segments that frequently cause confusion, so that visual cues can effectively support

attention and memory without distracting learners or overloading the text. By acknowledging and integrating such learner-generated strategies, pesantren-based instruction can become more responsive to students' cognitive needs and learning experiences.

For future research, ethical considerations concerning the sanctity of the Qur'an should be taken into account when developing marking practices. Since some Islamic perspectives discourage writing directly on the mushaf, alternative visual aids that preserve respect for the sacred text should be explored, such as removable stickers, bookmarks, or detachable markers. Further studies may adopt research and development approaches to design innovative, pedagogically effective, and ethically appropriate learning tools that support Qur'anic memorization. Such efforts would not only refine the practical application of marking but also broaden the integration of cognitive learning theory, educational technology, and Islamic values in tahfidz education.

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