



THE ROLE OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TAHFIDZ AL-QUR'AN LEARNING AT MIN 2 JEPARA

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Abstract:

This study aims to describe and analyse the role of teachers' professional competence in improving the quality of Tahfidz Al-Qur'an (Qur'an memorization) learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 2 Jepara, Central Java, during the 2025/2026 academic year, including its supporting and inhibiting factors and the resulting improvements. Although tahfidz programs have expanded rapidly within Indonesia's formal madrasahs, many tahfidz teachers possess strong memorization but limited pedagogical and professional competence, which weakens the consistency, accuracy, and durability of students' memorization. The research uses a qualitative descriptive (case-study) design. Data were collected through non-participant observation, structured interviews with the madrasah principal, the deputy head of curriculum, and tahfidz teachers, and documentation. Source triangulation was used to establish data validity, and the data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model (data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification). The findings indicate that teachers' professional competence operates through four interrelated functions: mastery of Qur'anic material (mutqin memorization, tajwid, makharij al-huruf), command of tahfidz methods (talaqqi, tiktirar, tasmi', and scheduled muroja'ah), design of developmentally appropriate learning strategies, and continuous, criterion-based evaluation of memorization. Supporting factors include a structured curriculum, a Qur'anic school climate, and parental involvement, whereas inhibiting factors include heterogeneous student ability, time and facility constraints, and uneven home support. Strengthening professional competence is associated with improved fluency, tajwid accuracy, memorization strength, and Qur'anic character. The study contributes a competence-based model for assuring tahfidz learning quality in primary madrasahs.

Keywords: *Professional Competence; Tahfidz Al-Qur'an; Learning Quality; Madrasah Ibtidaiyah; Qur'an Memorization.*

INTRODUCTION

Qur'an memorization (tahfidz al-Qur'an) has become one of the fastest-growing components of Islamic primary education in Indonesia. Once confined largely to pesantren and non-formal halaqah, tahfidz is now institutionalised within formal madrasahs through dedicated tahfidz classes and whole-school programs that set graded memorization targets. The scale of the movement is considerable: in Jombang Regency alone, the "5000 Hafidz Al-Qur'an Juz 30"

initiative graduated 1,166 elementary and Islamic-elementary students within seven months in 2023 (Rabbani et al., 2025). This expansion reflects a broader aspiration of Islamic education, namely to cultivate not only cognitive mastery of the Qur'an but also the spiritual disposition and Qur'anic character (akhlaq qur'āniyyah) of learners.

Within this rapid expansion, the most pressing issue is no longer access to tahfidz programs but the assurance of their quality. The quality of tahfidz learning cannot be reduced to the quantity of verses committed to memory; it is more adequately captured by the fluency (kelancaran), accuracy of tajwid, strength and durability of memorization (mutqin), and the formation of Qur'anic character of students (Irmin & Rochim, 2021)¹; (Al Arifi et al., 2025). This emphasis on quality also carries a theological weight. The Qur'an itself foregrounds the preservation of the revealed text, as expressed in QS. Al-Hijr (15): 9, "Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its guardian." In the pedagogy of madrasah, this divine guarantee (tahfidz ilahi) is mediated through human guardianship (tahfidz insani), in which competent teachers and disciplined learners function as instruments of preservation (Shihab, 2001); (Ichwan, 2021).

Among the many factors that shape educational quality, the teacher is consistently identified as the most decisive. Indonesian Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, together with Permendiknas No. 16 of 2007, frames teacher professionalism in terms of four interlocking competences: pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competence, the last referring to the broad and deep mastery of the subject matter taught (Mulyasa, 2022); (Indonesia, 2005). International evidence corroborates the salience of these competences for learning outcomes. A meta-analytic review by (López-Martín et al., 2023), synthesising 202 effects across forty studies, found that teachers' characteristics and competencies explain a meaningful share of variance in student achievement, with the largest effects attributable to teachers' reflective attitude, continuing professional development, and teaching self-efficacy. Such findings reinforce the view that subject-matter mastery, when coupled with reflective practice, is a powerful lever for instructional quality.

In the specific context of tahfidz, however, a persistent and well-documented problem emerges. Many tahfidz teachers possess excellent personal memorization yet have not been equipped with the pedagogical and professional competence required to manage learning in a systematic and measurable way. The consequence is uneven memorization quality, weak consistency of muroja'ah (review), and the sub-optimal attainment of memorization targets. Field studies report that learners frequently struggle with low concentration, fluctuating motivation, boredom during repetitive muroja'ah, and difficulty balancing general academic workloads with memorization targets (Rabbani et al., 2025). These difficulties are pedagogical as much as they are individual; they call for teachers who can diagnose learning needs, vary methods, sustain motivation, and evaluate progress against clear criteria.

A review of prior research reveals both a substantial foundation and a clear gap. A growing body of work confirms that teacher competence is a principal determinant of learning quality: a meta-analytic review shows that teachers' characteristics and competencies, especially reflective practice and professional development, account for a meaningful share of achievement variance (López-Martín et al., 2023); structured professional-education programs measurably raise teachers' pedagogical competence (Am & Saiful, 2026); teacher competence

contributes substantially to students' literacy in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Badriyah & Chusniyah, 2026); and, in madrasahs specifically, teacher professionalism ranks among the strongest predictors of educational quality (Badrudin et al., 2025). In parallel, a growing body of work on tahfidz has documented memorization methods such as talaqqi, tikrar, tasmi', and muroja'ah, together with their enabling conditions and their challenges at the elementary level (Rabbani et al., 2025); (Al Arifi et al., 2025). Yet these two streams rarely meet: competence studies seldom focus on tahfidz, while tahfidz studies tend to foreground methods without systematically linking them to teachers' professional competence as the principal driver of learning quality. The few studies that do bridge them, such as (Ramadani & Rohman, 2025) analysis of pedagogical competence and Qur'anic memorization achievement, concentrate on the senior-secondary level, leaving the primary madrasah underexamined.

This gap is salient at MIN 2 Jepara, a state Islamic primary school (also known as MINDURA) located in Bawu, Jepara, Central Java. The madrasah is accredited "A", espouses the vision of producing a "superior, Qur'anic, and achievement-oriented generation", and operates a structured tahfidz program with a minimum target of five juz over six years, delivered partly through specialised tahfidz classes. A recent qualitative study at the same school documented how tahfidz learning management contributes to disciplined character, identifying competent teaching staff, innovative methods, a conducive environment, and parental involvement as supporting factors, and heterogeneous student ability, time and facility limitations, and insufficient home support as inhibiting factors (Mufroh et al., 2025). What remains under-examined, however, is the specific role that teachers' professional competence plays in improving the quality of tahfidz learning, precisely the focus of the present study.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer three questions: (1) How does teachers' professional competence contribute to improving the quality of Tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning at MIN 2 Jepara in the 2025/2026 academic year? (2) What are the supporting and inhibiting factors in this process? and (3) What improvements result from strengthening teachers' professional competence? By addressing these questions, the study aims to offer both a conceptual contribution, an integrated, competence-based account of tahfidz learning quality, and practical recommendations for madrasahs and Islamic education stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case-study design. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate because the study seeks to understand a natural setting in depth, with the researcher serving as the key instrument, data gathered through triangulated techniques, inductive analysis, and an emphasis on meaning rather than statistical generalisation (Sugiyono, 2022); (Moleong, 2022). The descriptive-analytic orientation enables the phenomenon, the role of teachers' professional competence in improving the quality of tahfidz learning, to be portrayed as it occurs in the field, while minimising the researcher's subjective bias.

The research was conducted at MIN 2 Jepara, Central Java, during the 2025/2026 academic year. Informants were selected purposively for their direct involvement in, and knowledge of, the tahfidz program. The primary informants were the madrasah principal, the deputy head of curriculum (waka kurikulum),

and the tahfidz teachers; secondary data sources comprised school documents such as the tahfidz curriculum and target sheets, memorization progress records, teacher data, lesson plans, and organisational profiles.

Three data-collection techniques were used. First, non-participant observation was employed to observe tahfidz learning activities, setoran (deposit of new memorization), muroja'ah, tajwid correction, and classroom management, without the observer taking part in the activities. Second, structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol, were conducted with the principal, the deputy head of curriculum, and tahfidz teachers to elicit data on professional competence and its role in learning quality. Third, documentation was used to obtain written and visual records supporting the study. Together these techniques allow methodological triangulation across observed practice, reported experience, and documentary evidence.

Data validity was established through source triangulation, complemented by prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Idrus, 2023). Source triangulation involved comparing information across informants and cross-checking interview accounts against observations and documents until the data reached saturation, that is, until responses remained consistent regardless of when, where, and from whom they were obtained.

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, comprising four concurrent activities: (a) data collection, in which observations, interviews, and documents are compiled into field notes; (b) data reduction, in which the material is summarised, focused, and organised around emerging themes; (c) data display, in which reduced data are presented as narrative descriptions, matrices, and charts to reveal patterns; and (d) conclusion drawing and verification, in which provisional conclusions are tested against returning evidence to ensure credibility (Idrus, 2023); (Sugiyono, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of MIN 2 Jepara and Its Tahfidz Program

MIN 2 Jepara (MINDURA) is a state Islamic primary school in Bawu, Jepara, Central Java, accredited "A". Historically, it began as MI Nurul Huda (1981), was nationalised as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri Bawu (1993), and was redesignated MIN 2 Jepara in 2017. Consistent with its vision of producing a "superior, Qur'anic, and achievement-oriented generation", the madrasah operates a structured tahfidz program with a minimum target of five juz across six years of study, organised partly through specialised tahfidz classes. The program is delivered through routine cycles of setoran (depositing new memorization), tasmi' (recitation for listening evaluation), and muroja'ah (scheduled review), and it has previously been associated with the formation of disciplined character among its students (Mufroh et al., 2025). This institutional commitment provides the context within which teachers' professional competence is enacted and within which learning quality is assured.

Within this setting, the analysis is organised around the three research questions. The data converge on a central finding: teachers' professional competence is the pivotal mechanism that translates the madrasah's tahfidz vision and curriculum into measurable gains in the quality of students' memorization.

The Role of Teachers' Professional Competence in Improving Tahfidz Learning Quality

The professional competence of tahfidz teachers improves the quality of learning through four interrelated functions: mastery of Qur'anic material; command of tahfidz methods; design of developmentally appropriate learning strategies; and continuous, criterion-based evaluation. These functions operationalise the professional-competence dimension of Law No. 14 of 2005 within the specific demands of memorization pedagogy, and each makes a distinct contribution to learning quality.

a. Mastery of Qur'anic material (penguasaan materi). A professional tahfidz teacher possesses *mutqin* (firm) memorization, correct recitation, accurate *tajwid*, and precise articulation of *makharij al-huruf*. This mastery functions as the living standard against which students' memorization is corrected, ensuring that what learners deposit truly corresponds to the received text. The teacher's ear for error, detecting a misplaced *madd*, an imprecise *makhraj*, or an inconsistent *waqf*, is what prevents inaccuracies from being memorized firmly and thus becoming difficult to undo. In this sense, mastery elevates correction from a technical act to the religious responsibility implied by QS. Al-Hijr: 9 (Shihab, 2001); (Muhaimin, 2022).

"When a child recites, I am not only checking whether the verse is complete; I am listening to the *makhraj* and the *tajwid*. If the foundation is wrong, the memorization becomes strong but incorrect, and that is much harder to repair later." (Tahfidz teacher)

b. Command of tahfidz methods (penguasaan metode). Competence is expressed in the deliberate, sequenced use of established methods, *talaqqi* and *musyafahah* (face-to-face oral transmission), *tikrar* (structured repetition), *tasmi'* (listening and peer recitation for evaluation), and scheduled *muroja'ah*, each matched to learners' abilities (Rabbani et al., 2025); (Al Arifi et al., 2025). The professional teacher orders these so that new memorization (*sabaq*) is consolidated through review (*sabqi* and *manzil*), pre-empting the rapid forgetting that erodes quality. Method, in other words, is not applied uniformly but calibrated: a fluent child is stretched with larger portions, while a struggling child is given shorter, more frequent repetitions.

c. Developmentally appropriate learning strategy (strategi pembelajaran). At the primary level, professional competence is inseparable from sensitivity to children's developmental and psychological needs. Effective teachers set realistic targets, segment verses, vary pacing, and sustain intrinsic motivation through encouragement, modelling, and a calm, *adab*-rich classroom climate, directly addressing the boredom and concentration problems commonly reported in *muroja'ah* (Rabbani et al., 2025); (Majid & Andayani, 2022). Strategy also includes the affective dimension: the teacher as a model of love for the Qur'an, whose patience and warmth convert obligation into willingness.

d. Continuous, criterion-based evaluation (evaluasi). Quality assurance requires that memorization be assessed not by quantity alone but against explicit criteria, fluency, *tajwid* accuracy, and strength/durability of memorization. Professional teachers maintain progress records (*kartu setoran*), conduct periodic *tasmi'* and examinations, and use the results to adjust instruction, closing the feedback loop that distinguishes systematic learning from *ad hoc* memorization (Mulyasa, 2021); (Hamalik, 2022). Evaluation thereby functions both as measurement and as a diagnostic instrument that informs the next cycle of teaching.

Taken together, these four functions show that professional competence is not a static credential but an enacted capability that converts a teacher’s personal mastery of the Qur’an into students’ measurable learning gains. Table 1 summarises each function, its observable indicators, and its contribution to learning quality.

Table 1. Functions of Teachers’ Professional Competence in Tahfidz and Their Contribution to Learning Quality

Competence function	Observable indicators	Contribution to learning quality
Mastery of Qur’anic material	Mutqin memorization; correct tajwid; precise makharij al-huruf; ability to detect and correct errors	Ensures accuracy and authenticity of students’ memorization
Command of tahfidz methods	Sequenced use of talaqqi, tiktirar, tasmi’, and muroja’ah; methods matched to ability	Strengthens retention and reduces forgetting
Developmentally appropriate strategy	Realistic targets; verse segmentation; varied pacing; motivation; adab-rich climate	Sustains engagement and fluency; reduces boredom
Continuous, criterion-based evaluation	Progress records; periodic tasmi’ and exams; feedback used to adjust teaching	Makes quality measurable and improvement systematic

Source: Author’s analysis, synthesised from field practice and the literature (Mulyasa, 2021); (Rabbani et al., 2025); (Ramadani & Rohman, 2025); (Mufroh et al., 2025)

This interpretation is consistent with broader evidence that subject-matter mastery, joined to reflective and continuously developed practice, exerts among the strongest teacher effects on achievement (López-Martín et al., 2023), and with evidence that pedagogical competence strengthens Qur’anic memorization achievement (Ramadani & Rohman, 2025). It also extends that literature into the specific domain of tahfidz, where the “subject matter” is the Qur’an itself and where mastery carries an additional, sacral dimension of preserving the text intact.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The enactment of professional competence is shaped by institutional and contextual conditions. Consistent with the documented experience of MIN 2 Jepara (Mufroh et al., 2025) and comparable tahfidz settings (Rabbani et al., 2025), the analysis identifies a coherent set of supporting and inhibiting factors, summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Enactment of Professional Competence

Supporting factors	Inhibiting factors
Structured, systematic tahfidz curriculum with clear, graded targets	Heterogeneous student memorization ability, complicating pacing and targets
Competent teaching staff and professional development (training, workshops, supervision, teacher working groups)	Limitations of time and facilities; tension between academic load and memorization
Conducive, Qur’anic school climate normalising discipline, adab, and consistent muroja’ah	Uneven home support; some families unable to sustain review at home
Parental and family involvement extending review and motivation beyond the classroom	Distraction and motivational fluctuation among young learners

A key analytical insight is that professional competence functions as a mediating resource. Competent teachers mitigate the inhibiting factors, differentiating instruction for mixed-ability groups, scheduling muroja'ah efficiently within limited time, and communicating with parents to extend review at home, whereas competence gaps amplify those same constraints. The supporting factors, in turn, are not merely external givens; they are partly produced and sustained by competent teachers who shape curriculum, model the Qur'anic climate, and engage families. Supporting and inhibiting factors are therefore best understood as conditions that interact with, rather than substitute for, teacher competence.

Improvements Resulting from Strengthening Professional Competence

Where professional competence is strengthened and consistently enacted, improvements appear across the recognised indicators of tahfidz quality, in both the process and the outcome domains. In the process domain, learning becomes calmer, more systematic, and better paced, with consistent setoran and muroja'ah cycles and tighter tajwid correction. In the outcome domain, students show greater fluency, more accurate tajwid, and stronger, more durable memorization, alongside steady progress toward the institutional target of five juz. Beyond cognitive outcomes, the program is associated with the formation of Qur'anic character, discipline, responsibility, and love for the Qur'an, an effect already documented at MIN 2 Jepara (Mufroh et al., 2025). Table 3 maps the indicators of improvement across the two domains.

Table 3. Indicators of Improvement in Tahfidz Learning Quality

Domain	Indicators of improvement
Process quality	Calmer, more systematic learning; consistent setoran and scheduled muroja'ah; closer tajwid correction; realistic, differentiated targets
Outcome quality	Greater fluency (kelancaran); more accurate tajwid; stronger and more durable (mutqin) memorization; progress toward the five-juz target
Character outcomes	Discipline, responsibility, and love for the Qur'an (akhlāq qur'āniyyah)

Source: Author's analysis; character outcomes drawn from Mufroh et al. (2025).

DISCUSSION

A Competence-Based Quality Model for Primary-Level Tahfidz

Synthesising the three findings yields a competence-based quality model for primary-level tahfidz. In this model, teachers' professional competence, comprising Qur'anic mastery, command of methods, learning strategy, and evaluation, acts upon a field of supporting and inhibiting factors to produce improvements in process and outcome quality, which in turn feed back, through evaluation and professional development, into renewed competence. The model integrates two literatures that have largely developed in parallel: the literature on teacher competence and learning quality (Am & Saiful, 2026); (Badrudin et al., 2025); (Badriyah & Chusniyah, 2026) and the literature on tahfidz methods and challenges (Al Arifi et al., 2025); (Rabbani et al., 2025); (Ramadani & Rohman, 2025).

Three points warrant emphasis. First, the model reframes professional competence as enacted rather than possessed: a teacher's personal hafalan is necessary but not sufficient; quality emerges only when that mastery is mobilised through method, strategy, and evaluation. This explains the recurring field observation that teachers with excellent memorization do not automatically produce high-quality learning. Second, the model positions evaluation as the engine of continuous improvement, the mechanism through which the cycle renews itself, echoing the meta-analytic finding that reflective practice and professional development are among the strongest teacher effects (López-Martín et al., 2023). Third, the model is practically actionable: it identifies leverage points, recruitment and certification in tajwid and tahfidz methodology, sustained professional development, criterion-based evaluation, and structured parental engagement, through which madrasahs can deliberately raise tahfidz quality.

The findings both confirm and extend prior work. They confirm (Mufroh et al., 2025) account of the supporting and inhibiting factors at MIN 2 Jepara, but extend it by specifying the mechanism, professional competence, through which those factors are managed and the madrasah's tahfidz vision is realised. This convergence aligns with empirical evidence that teacher professionalism, more than facilities or even spiritual programming alone, is among the dominant predictors of madrasah learning quality (Badrudin et al., 2025), and with findings that pedagogical competence raises Qur'anic memorization achievement (Ramadani & Rohman, 2025). They likewise extend the general competence literature by demonstrating that, in the tahfidz domain, professional competence must be understood as inseparable from the sacral standard of textual preservation and from the affective task of cultivating love for the Qur'an in young learners.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to describe the role of teachers' professional competence in improving the quality of Tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning at MIN 2 Jepara, together with its supporting and inhibiting factors and resulting improvements. It concludes, first, that professional competence improves tahfidz learning quality through four interrelated functions, mastery of Qur'anic material, command of tahfidz methods, developmentally appropriate learning strategy, and continuous criterion-based evaluation, which convert a teacher's personal mastery into students' measurable gains in fluency, tajwid accuracy, and durable memorization. Second, this enactment is enabled by a structured curriculum, competent and continuously developed staff, a Qur'anic school climate, and parental involvement, while being constrained by heterogeneous student ability, time and facility limitations, and uneven home support; professional competence itself mediates how strongly these factors operate. Third, strengthening professional competence is associated with improvements in both the process and outcomes of tahfidz, including the formation of Qur'anic character.

The study therefore recommends that madrasahs treat the professional competence of tahfidz teachers as a strategic priority, through targeted recruitment, certification in tajwid and tahfidz methodology, sustained professional development, and supportive supervision, and that they institutionalise criterion-based evaluation and structured parental engagement. The study contributes a competence-based quality model that integrates the previously separate literatures on teacher competence and tahfidz methods and

offers madrasahs a practical map for quality assurance. Future research should test and refine the model through comparative or longitudinal designs across multiple madrasahs, so as to strengthen its empirical and practical contribution to the assurance of tahfidz learning quality.

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