

Communication Strategies of Qur'an Teachers in Regulating the Mood of Young Children in Qur'anic Learning at Surau Umam (Asrama Wang Ulu)

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyse the communication strategies employed by a Qur'an teacher in regulating the mood of young children during Qur'anic learning at Surau Umam, Asrama Wang Ulu, Kangar, Perlis, Malaysia. The focus of the study is directed towards the forms of verbal and non-verbal communication used by the teacher, the effectiveness of these strategies in restoring children's readiness to learn, and the obstacles that arise in practice. The research is grounded in the reality that young children possess emotional capacities that are not yet mature, so that their mood shifts occur rapidly and often disrupt the Qur'anic learning process, which requires concentration. Bandura's social cognitive theory and humanistic perspectives in Islamic education are employed to interpret the teacher's role as both a model and a companion in children's emotional development. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive method, using data collection techniques in the form of passive participant observation and semi-structured interviews with one Qur'an teacher as the primary informant and children as the observational context. The findings show that the teacher develops a range of communication strategies such as emotional validation, the use of humour, the provision of limited choices, and the utilisation of facial expressions, physical touch, and the regulation of interpersonal distance as means of emotional co-regulation for children. These strategies are proven to be reasonably effective in reducing children's anxiety, boredom, and frustration, although the teacher still faces constraints in the form of limited time, differences in children's temperament, and a lack of formal training support in emotional management.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood's Mood, Qur'anic Learning, Qur'an Teacher.

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Introduction

Early childhoods are in a phase of rapid development in cognitive, social, and emotional domains. The limbic system, which governs emotions, is active from an early age, whereas the prefrontal cortex, which plays a role in emotional regulation, only reaches maturity in late adolescence. This condition makes young children highly vulnerable to rapid and intense emotional changes in their daily activities, including in the context of Qur'anic learning, which demands sustained concentration and perseverance.

Previous studies indicate that the majority of early childhood educators struggle to manage children's emotions during the learning process. Strong pedagogical competence alone is not always sufficient without being accompanied by interpersonal communication skills that are sensitive to children's emotional dynamics. In Qur'anic learning, the teacher's communication does not merely concern the delivery of content, but also how the teacher responds to children's restlessness, boredom, or refusal to engage with reading and memorising Qur'anic verses. Earlier research has demonstrated that the communication patterns of Qur'an teachers have a direct influence on children's success in mastering Qur'anic reading; elements such as tone of voice, choice of diction, facial expressions, and body posture all shape children's responses to instructions.

Bandura's social cognitive theory stresses that children learn through observing and imitating significant figures around them. The Qur'an teacher occupies a central position as a model observed by children, both in the way the Qur'an is recited and in the way negative emotions such as anger, fear, or shame are addressed. The manner in which the teacher displays composure, patience, and appreciation for children's effort will shape the children's own patterns of emotional regulation. A humanistic perspective in Islamic education complements this view by underscoring the importance of valuing each child's uniqueness and creating a learning climate marked by acceptance and empathy. In the context of Qur'anic learning, a humanistic approach entails treating children's emotional needs as an integral part of the teaching process.

The literature on teachers' communication strategies in early childhood education indicates that communication in this context has distinct characteristics. Children are not yet fully able to comprehend abstract and complex verbal language, and thus are more responsive to non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and physical touch. Research conducted in early childhood institutions confirms that consistency between verbal and non-verbal messages is key to the credibility of the teacher's communication; children are able to sense incongruence when the teacher's words are positive but their expression is flat or cold. These findings are highly relevant to Qur'anic learning in surau settings, where interactions take place in a relatively informal environment yet are laden with religious meaning.

At Surau Umam, Asrama Wang Ulu, Kangar, Qur'anic learning for young children is conducted routinely every day after the Maghrib prayer. Children arrive in varied physical and emotional conditions after a full day of activities at home and at school. This dynamic places the Qur'an teacher in constant contact with a range of children's moods: some are enthusiastic, some are tired, some feel anxious when asked to read in front of peers, and others become frustrated after committing repeated mistakes. In the absence of appropriate communication strategies, such situations may lead to a decline in learning motivation and to the emergence of negative associations with the activity of learning the Qur'an.

The literature review reveals that there is still a paucity of research specifically examining Qur'an teachers' communication strategies in regulating young children's mood during Qur'anic learning. Many studies place greater emphasis on technical methods of teaching tajwīd or memorisation, while the psychological and emotional dimensions of the child have not received sufficient attention. Yet, mood management is a crucial component of successful learning, particularly in surau environments that differ significantly from formal schools or Qur'anic learning centres.

In light of this reality, the present study is designed to address several key questions, namely: what forms of verbal and non-verbal communication does the Qur'an teacher employ in

responding to changes in young children's mood during Qur'anic learning at Surau Umam; how effective are these communication strategies in restoring children's readiness to learn; and what obstacles does the teacher encounter in implementing these strategies. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the body of knowledge in Islamic Early Childhood Education, especially in relation to pedagogical communication in Qur'anic learning. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for Qur'an teachers, parents, and institutional managers in designing communication strategies that are more attuned to children's emotional needs.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. A qualitative method is chosen because the study aims to understand social phenomena in depth from the perspective of participants, rather than merely measuring symptoms quantitatively. This approach enables the researcher to uncover the meanings underlying the Qur'an teacher's communicative acts when dealing with children experiencing mood changes in Qur'anic learning situations. Descriptive research is used to present a detailed and systematic portrayal of the communication strategies used by the teacher without manipulating variables.

The paradigm adopted is interpretivist. Within this paradigm, social reality is understood as the result of meaning construction by the actors involved. The researcher seeks to capture how the Qur'an teacher interprets the concept of children's mood, how she explains her reasons for choosing particular communication strategies, and how she assesses the effectiveness of her actions. Thus, the data collected comprise not only descriptions of overt behaviour, but also the teacher's reflections and subjective explanations.

The research site is Surau Umam, located in Asrama Wang Ulu, Jalan Wang Ulu 01000 Kangar, Perlis, Malaysia. The surau was selected because it regularly organises Qur'anic learning for young children with a sufficient number of participants for observation. In addition, the management of the surau granted the researcher access to conduct direct observations and interviews with the Qur'an teacher. The study was carried out over a two-week period, from Monday, 16 December 2025 to Sunday, 29 December 2025. During this period, the researcher attended ten Qur'anic learning sessions held every day after the Maghrib prayer, each lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

The primary subject of the study is a Qur'an teacher given the pseudonym Ustazah Siti, approximately 35 years old, with around five years of teaching experience at Surau Umam. The subject was selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria: teaching young children, having at least two years of teaching experience, actively teaching during the research period, and being willing to serve as an informant. The secondary subjects are children aged 4 to 6 years who are pupils of Ustazah Siti. These children were not interviewed in depth, but constitute the observational context for examining their responses to the teacher's communication strategies.

The main data collection techniques used are observation and interviews. Observation was conducted as passive participant observation, in which the researcher is present in the learning space without taking part directly in teaching activities. The researcher sat in a corner of the room and observed the interactions between the teacher and children, particularly when signs of mood change appeared, such as boredom, fatigue, anxiety, frustration, or peer conflict. The observation focused on aspects of verbal communication (choice of words, intonation, sentence structure, frequency of praise and reprimands) and non-verbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, body posture, physical distance, touch, and eye contact).

The researcher used a structured observation guide prepared prior to fieldwork. The guide contained a list of aspects to be observed and space for recording behavioural descriptions. In addition, the researcher produced field notes that captured the situational context, important dialogues, and initial reflections on the observed phenomena. To aid recall of verbal

communication details, the researcher also made audio recordings of the learning sessions with the teacher's consent.

Interviews were carried out using a semi-structured format. In this technique, the researcher prepares a set of key questions but remains flexible in exploring additional information based on the informant's answers. The first interview with Ustazah Siti took place at the end of the first week, lasting around 45 minutes, and aimed to obtain a general picture of her teaching experience, the challenges faced, and the communication strategies she commonly employs. The second interview, conducted at the end of the second week with a duration of about 60 minutes, focused on clarifying and elaborating upon observation findings, including reasons for choosing particular strategies, illustrative cases, and the teacher's evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies implemented.

Results Identifying Changes in Early Childhood's Mood

The observations indicate that changes in young children's mood during Qur'anic learning at Surau Umam do not occur abruptly, but rather unfold through recognisable behavioural stages. Bored mood, for instance, is often preceded by a reduction in children's verbal responses to the teacher's questions. Children who were initially active in answering begin to fall silent, daydream, and shift their attention towards peers. Bodily movements such as repeatedly changing sitting positions, tugging at clothing, or playing with stationery also emerge as indicators of boredom. In one session, a child named Aisyah appeared enthusiastic at the start of the lesson, but around the twenty-fifth minute she began whispering to her friend, then lay down on the carpet whilst saying "capek lah ustazah". The teacher responded by changing from verbal explanation to a more interactive letter-guessing game, and this adjustment successfully restored the children's enthusiasm.

Tired mood has different characteristics. Children who are tired show a clear decline in physical energy: their movements slow down, their voices become faint, and they tend to lean against the wall or a nearby friend. They may still follow the teacher's instructions, but at a very slow pace. When called upon to read from the Iqra' book, a tired child takes longer to stand and approach the teacher. This pattern appears more frequently on Mondays and Tuesdays, which the teacher associates with changes in children's sleep routines and activities over the weekend.

Anxious mood is frequently observed prior to individual reading sessions in front of the teacher. Children who are anxious exhibit behaviours such as fidgeting, clenching their hands, scratching their heads without any physical cause, or repeatedly asking to go to the toilet. Some children offer reasons to delay their turn, for example claiming to have forgotten their book, even though the Iqra' is clearly in front of them. This anxiety seems to stem from a fear of making mistakes in front of the teacher and their peers. In one instance, a child named Hafiz was observed sweating and clenching his hands tightly when his name was called. He said "saya belum hafal lagi", and the teacher responded by offering to read together slowly, which reduced his anxiety and encouraged him to try.

Frustrated mood associated with academic difficulty emerges when a child repeatedly makes errors on certain letters or readings despite having received assistance. A frustrated child may cry, remain silent for an extended period, or utter negative statements about themselves, such as "saya bodoh" or "saya tak pandai baca". Such statements reflect low self-efficacy and may lead to a defeatist attitude if not promptly addressed. In addition, social conflict between children generates complex negative moods. Disputes over sitting positions or stationery can make children reluctant to sit near one another and bring feelings of anger into the learning process.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of the teacher's sensitivity in reading signals of mood change through behavioural indicators and emotional expressions. By distinguishing between boredom, tiredness, anxiety, frustration, and social conflict, the teacher can design more targeted communicative responses. This is in line with the concept of

coregulation in the emotion-regulation literature, whereby adults act as external regulators who help children manage emotions that they are not yet able to regulate independently.

Verbal Communication Strategies of the Qur'an Teacher

The verbal communication strategies employed by Ustazah Siti reveal a conscious effort to safeguard children's self-esteem whilst fostering their courage to learn. One key feature is the use of positive language that avoids negative labels. When a child makes a reading error, the teacher does not immediately say "salah", but instead uses phrases such as "cuba lagi, tadi hampir betul" or "kita ulang pelan-pelan ya". Such framing helps children view mistakes as a natural part of the learning process rather than as evidence of inability.

Emotional validation is also a crucial component of the teacher's verbal strategies. When children cry or complain about the difficulty of a particular letter, the teacher first acknowledges their feelings, stating that it is natural to feel sad or upset when facing something challenging. Following validation, the teacher explains that the letter is indeed demanding but can be mastered through gradual practice. This combination of emotional acknowledgement and the provision of hope help reduce the intensity of negative emotions and restore children's motivation.

The teacher further makes use of light-hearted humour to ease tension when it rises. The humour employed never targets the child as an object of ridicule; rather, it is situational or involves the teacher herself as the subject of the joke. For instance, when a child repeatedly confuses a letter, the teacher describes the letter as "malu-malu" so that its sound "sembunyi". The children laugh, and the previously tense atmosphere becomes more relaxed. Research on communication in early childhood education suggests that appropriate humour can be an effective strategy for reducing stress and maintaining children's engagement.

Limited-choice strategies also feature prominently. Instead of asking "adik nak baca atau tidak?", which opens the door to refusal, the teacher poses questions such as "adik nak baca sekarang atau lepas lima minit?". Both options still lead to the act of reading, but the child feels a degree of control over the timing. This approach aligns with principles of effective communication in early childhood education that promote independence within clear boundaries.

In addition, the teacher uses simple metaphors to help children make sense of the learning process. For example, learning to read the Qur'an is likened to learning to ride a bicycle: one often falls at the beginning, but with persistent practice, one becomes proficient. This metaphor assists children in understanding that initial difficulty does not signify final failure, but rather constitutes part of the journey towards success. Taken together, these verbal communication strategies embody an integration of social cognitive principles, which emphasise the strengthening of self-efficacy, and humanistic approaches, which stress empathy, appreciation, and unconditional acceptance.

Non-Verbal Communication Strategies of the Qur'an Teacher

Non-verbal communication plays an equally significant role in managing children's mood at Surau Umam. Observations reveal that the teacher's facial expressions consistently align with her verbal messages. When offering praise, she displays a sincere smile and warm eye contact, rather than merely saying "bagus" with a flat expression. Congruence between verbal and non-verbal messages is essential for building children's trust in the teacher's sincerity.

Body posture and physical distance are carefully calibrated according to the interactional context. In individual communication, the teacher frequently lowers her body position to match the child's height, for example by sitting on the floor when engaging in a serious conversation. She explains that if she stands whilst the child is sitting, the child may feel small and intimidated. By sitting at the same level, children feel more comfortable expressing their feelings. In situations where children's emotions are very intense, the teacher initially maintains a safe

distance and then gradually moves closer as the emotional intensity decreases, so that children do not feel threatened.

Physical touch is used as an important form of emotional support. The type of touch is adjusted to the child's character, such as gently stroking the head, patting the back, or lightly holding the child's hand. For children who appear anxious before reading, a gentle touch on the shoulder or hand, accompanied by calming words, helps ease tension. For children who are crying, a brief, controlled embrace provides a sense of acceptance and protection. This practice corresponds with findings in co-regulation research, which suggest that physical presence and appropriate touch can help soothe a child's activated nervous system.

Hand gestures are employed to clarify explanations and sustain children's attention. When introducing new letters, the teacher often traces their shapes in the air with her hand, enabling children to follow the movement visually and kinesthetically. When the classroom atmosphere starts to stagnate, she uses more dynamic movements, such as rhythmic clapping or engaging hand gestures, to recapture children's focus. This strategy supports the principle that young children learn more effectively through multisensory experiences.

Stable and gentle eye contact is consistently evident in the teacher's interactions with children. When speaking, she endeavours to concentrate her attention on the child being addressed, resisting distractions caused by other children's behaviour. This conveys the signal that the child is valued and listened to. In this way, the non-verbal communication strategies employed by the teacher reinforce her verbal messages and contribute to the creation of an emotionally safe learning environment for children.

Effectiveness of the Strategies and Challenges Encountered

Overall, the communication strategies used by Ustazah Siti have proven effective in managing children's mood and sustaining their engagement in Qur'anic learning. The shift to play-based methods when children are bored succeeds in regaining their attention and enthusiasm. Emotional validation and the use of positive language reduce children's tendency to label themselves negatively when facing difficulties, thereby enhancing their motivation to try again. The combination of verbal and non-verbal support, such as smiling, touch, and eye contact, also helps to lower anxiety prior to individual reading.

From the perspective of social cognitive theory, these strategies contribute to strengthening children's self-efficacy. Praise that emphasises effort rather than solely outcomes, as well as figurative stories about the learning process, teaches children that abilities can be developed through sustained practice. From a humanistic standpoint, the teacher's way of listening, validating, and honouring children's feelings reflects the application of principles of empathy and unconditional positive regard. As a result, children feel safer, more confident, and more prepared to face learning challenges.

However, the study also identifies several challenges. First, the limited duration of learning sessions makes it difficult for the teacher to provide intensive individual attention when several children simultaneously experience negative moods. Second, differences in children's character and temperament require a wide range of strategies, whilst the teacher has not yet received specialised formal training in children's emotional management. She relies heavily on intuition and personal experience, so that the strategies used remain somewhat experimental. Third, environmental factors, such as the multipurpose nature of the surau space and limited supporting facilities, mean that an ideal learning environment cannot always be realised.

In addition, parental support is not yet fully optimal. Not all parents recognise the importance of preparing their children physically and emotionally before attending Qur'anic lessons, for example by ensuring adequate rest and that children are not hungry. Yet, biological factors such as fatigue and hunger greatly influence children's mood. The teacher hopes for more intensive communication between the surau and parents so that children's mood can be managed synergistically between home and the learning setting.

These findings suggest that, although Qur'an teachers' communication strategies are effective, they require institutional backing and stronger collaboration to reach their full potential. Special training for Qur'an teachers in pedagogical communication and emotional regulation, as well as the development of practical guidelines, are urgently needed to enhance the quality of Qur'anic learning for young children.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the management of young children's mood during Qur'anic learning at Surau Umam is highly dependent on the teacher's sensitivity and creativity in employing verbal and non-verbal communication strategies. Young children exhibit a variety of negative moods such as boredom, tiredness, anxiety, frustration, and social conflict which, if not responded to appropriately, can hinder the learning process. As the Qur'an teacher, Ustazah Siti has developed a set of strategies including the use of positive language, emotional validation, light humour, the provision of limited choices, and simple metaphors, reinforced by congruent facial expressions, approachable body posture, calming physical touch, and warm eye contact. This combination of strategies helps children feel understood, valued, and supported, thereby restoring their readiness to learn.

In practical terms, the communication strategies used have been shown to reduce pre-reading anxiety, alleviate boredom through varied activities, and lower the intensity of frustration when children face reading difficulties. Children become more willing to try, more resilient in the face of mistakes, and more easily redirected to focus after their mood is addressed empathetically. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these strategies remains constrained by short learning durations, diverse child temperaments, limited formal training for teachers, and insufficient synergy with parents in preparing children emotionally before attending Qur'anic classes. Accordingly, there is a need to strengthen teachers' capacity through specialised training, the development of practical communication guidelines, and enhanced communication between the surau and families.

This research recommends that Islamic educational institutions and surau managers incorporate children's emotional management as a key component in training programmes for Qur'an teachers. Teachers are also encouraged to engage in ongoing reflection and professional development through peer discussions and literature review, so that their communication strategies become richer and more focused. Parents are expected to forge closer collaboration with teachers in monitoring their children's emotional condition and reinforcing positive messages at home. Future researchers may extend this inquiry by conducting comparative studies across several surau or other Qur'anic learning institutions to obtain a broader picture of the variation in teachers' communication strategies in differing socio-cultural contexts.

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