

From Recitation to Comprehension: Integrating Reading Strategies into Early Fiqh Learning

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Abstract:

Early madrasah pupils may memorise foundational religious texts while struggling to read accurately, fluently, and meaningfully. Although early-literacy research supports explicit multicomponent instruction, evidence remains limited on how to adapt such instruction to shahada learning in fiqh or how individual students progress across reflective intervention cycles. This study examined changes in first-grade students' shahada reading performance following an Integrated Reading Strategy. This classroom action research, with a mixed-methods orientation, involved 30 students at MI Ma'arif Bendosari during the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were collected through reading assessments, observations, interviews, and instructional documentation across a pre-cycle phase and two cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. We analysed quantitative scores descriptively and integrated them with qualitative evidence. The mean score increased from 61.17 to 69.83 and 76.33, while mastery rose from 26.7% to 60.0% and 96.7%. All students improved by 5-25 points, with larger gains occurring among those with lower baseline scores, and the score range narrowed from 45 to 25 points. These findings indicate that iterative phonetic, visual, collaborative, and individual support was associated with broader and more evenly distributed reading mastery. Integrated reading instruction should therefore complement memorisation in early fiqh education, with differentiated support retained for students needing further help.

Keywords: Integrated Reading Strategy; Shahada; Fiqh; Reading Mastery; Individual Trajectories

Abstrak:

Peserta didik kelas awal madrasah dapat menghafal teks keagamaan dasar, tetapi masih mengalami kesulitan membaca secara tepat, lancar, dan bermakna. Meskipun penelitian literasi awal mendukung pembelajaran eksplisit multikomponen, bukti mengenai penerapannya pada materi syahadat dalam fikih serta perkembangan individual selama siklus intervensi reflektif masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis perubahan kemampuan membaca syahadat siswa kelas I setelah penerapan Strategi Membaca Terpadu. Penelitian tindakan kelas berorientasi metode campuran melibatkan 30 siswa MI Ma'arif Bendosari pada semester ganjil tahun pelajaran 2025/2026. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes membaca, observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi pembelajaran pada tahap prasiklus serta dua siklus yang mencakup perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Skor kuantitatif dianalisis secara deskriptif dan diintegrasikan dengan bukti kualitatif. Nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 61,17 menjadi 69,83 dan 76,33, sedangkan ketuntasan bertambah dari 26,7% menjadi 60,0% dan 96,7%. Seluruh siswa mengalami kenaikan 5-25 poin, dengan peningkatan lebih besar pada siswa berskor awal rendah, sementara rentang skor menyempit dari 45 menjadi 25 poin. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dukungan fonetik, visual, kolaboratif, dan individual yang disempurnakan secara bertahap berkaitan dengan ketuntasan membaca yang lebih luas dan merata. Strategi ini direkomendasikan untuk melengkapi hafalan dalam pembelajaran fikih awal dengan tetap menyediakan bantuan secara konsisten dan terdiferensiasi bagi siswa yang memerlukan dukungan lanjutan.

Kata kunci: Strategi Membaca Terpadu; Syahadat; Fikih; Ketuntasan Membaca; Trajektori Individual



INTRODUCTION

Limited reading of foundational religious texts remains a critical problem in early madrasah education. Reading the shahada introduces children to a central declaration of Islamic faith, not merely a technical text. Instruction dominated by oral repetition may enable recall without developing accurate, confident, and meaningful reading. At MI Ma'arif Bendosari, the pre-cycle mean was 61.17, and only 8 of 30 students met the minimum mastery criterion. Observations also identified hesitant reading, inaccurate pronunciation, limited textual understanding, and low confidence when students read aloud. Indonesian evidence indicates that adaptive, interactive, and visually engaging instruction strengthens primary reading, while suitable methods and media support religious learning outcomes (Gildore et al., 2025; Latuconsina, 2023). Early religious literacy therefore requires instruction that responds iteratively to learners' demonstrated needs.

Research supports early-reading interventions but rarely examines the shahada within fiqh. This gap matters because interventions do not explain how reading development interacts with religious meaning. Aggregate gains may also conceal whether weaker students benefit or remain behind. Reviews show that explicit code-and-meaning instruction improves foundational reading, especially in individual or small-group formats (Otaiba et al., 2022; Ruan et al., 2024). Indonesian studies identify materials, technology, instructional design, and cultural relevance as components of effective primary reading interventions (Gildore et al., 2025; Moreira & Mello, 2026). Religious education research emphasises methods and media but rarely traces individual scores across reflective classroom cycles (Huth et al., 2021; Latuconsina, 2023). A context-specific study is therefore required to connect reading development, religious meaning, and individual change.

Multicomponent instruction offers a relevant foundation for addressing differences in beginning reading performance. Early readers require coordinated support in phonological processing, word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension because these skills are interdependent. Combining them lets teachers adjust support when students respond differently to common activities. Research syntheses indicate that explicit code-focused and meaning-focused instruction generally improves foundational reading skills (Stuckey et al., 2022). A meta-analysis reported benefits from fluency, phonological, orthographic, and morphological interventions across literacy profiles (Goldstein et al., 2023; Ruan et al., 2024). Indonesian evidence further associates effective interventions with interactivity, contextual relevance, visual design, and student-centred adaptation (Gildore et al., 2025; Moreira & Mello, 2026). These findings support an integrated strategy but do not specifically explain shahada reading.

Religious literacy research shows that instructional form shapes how children connect textual competence with religious understanding. This relationship matters because religious texts function as reading materials, sources of meaning, and resources for identity formation. Repetition may support recall but provide insufficient opportunities for comprehension, participation, and reflection. Indonesian research identifies teaching methods, media, cognition, and student attitudes as important dimensions of religious learning outcomes (Huth et al., 2021; Latuconsina, 2023). Studies of Qur'anic instruction describe listening, imitation, repetition, and multisensory activities as complementary supports for pronunciation and literacy (Abdillah & Churrahman, 2022). Early religious education research also associates age-appropriate pedagogy with literacy, engagement, and faith development (Huth et al., 2021). Nevertheless, integrated reading instruction for the shahada in first-grade fiqh remains insufficiently investigated.

This study examined how an Integrated Reading Strategy improved first-grade students' ability to read and understand the shahada at MI Ma'arif Bendosari. This objective connects general early literacy research with the teaching of a foundational Islamic text. It also addresses the limited evidence relating aggregate classroom improvement to individual trajectories across reflective intervention

cycles. A pre-cycle assessment established the initial distribution of scores, mastery, pronunciation, understanding, and confidence. Cycle I combined listening, imitation, collective reading, individual worksheet practice, and simple comprehension activities. Reflection informed the addition of phonetic reinforcement, visual prompts, repeated reading, small-group practice, and individual guidance in Cycle II, while quantitative and qualitative evidence informed interpretation. This design examined the magnitude, distribution, and classroom process of change.

Iteratively refined, multicomponent instruction should improve shahada reading by addressing decoding difficulty, limited practice, and low confidence. Phonetic guidance and repeated reading should strengthen pronunciation and fluency through modelling and practice. Visual prompts, collaborative activities, and individual assistance should support meaning construction and enable lower-performing students to participate successfully. Integrated code-focused and meaning-focused instruction improves foundational reading across diverse elementary learners. Small-group intervention and adaptive support are associated with stronger literacy development among learners requiring additional assistance. Each intervention phase should therefore increase the mean and minimum scores and the mastery rate while narrowing performance differences. If supported, this argument positions religious literacy as an adaptive learning process rather than the reproduction of memorised formulas.

RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis comprised the reading performance and classroom participation of 30 first-grade students learning the shahada in fiqh at MI Ma'arif Bendosari. This class was selected because preliminary assessment indicated difficulties in pronunciation, fluency, textual understanding, and confidence when reading aloud. Focusing on one intact class enabled the study to examine collective improvement while tracing differences in individual responses to the same instructional intervention. The research was conducted during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. We examined student performance at the class level through mean scores and mastery rates, and at the individual level through score trajectories across three assessments. The classroom served as a bounded

educational setting where reading development, instructional adjustment, and student participation could be observed under routine learning conditions.

The study employed classroom action research with a mixed-method orientation based on the Kemmis and McTaggart spiral, comprising a pre-cycle assessment and two action cycles. This design was selected because the research aimed to improve an identified classroom problem while allowing instruction to be revised through reflection. Combining quantitative and qualitative evidence enabled the study to measure changes in reading achievement and explain the classroom processes accompanying those changes. Each cycle followed four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In Cycle I, I implemented guided collective and individual reading, then used the observed difficulties to redesign the next intervention. Cycle II added phonetic reinforcement, visual media, repeated reading, small-group activities, and individual guidance, and integrated evidence from both strands during interpretation (Rabgay & Kidman, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023).

Three complementary sources of evidence were used: assessment data from 30 students, observational and interview information, and instructional documents produced during the intervention. Student assessment data were necessary to establish the extent and distribution of changes in reading performance. Observational, interview, and documentary evidence was included to explain how those numerical changes corresponded with participation, confidence, pronunciation, and classroom responses. Quantitative information included individual reading scores from the pre-cycle assessment, Cycle I, and Cycle II. Qualitative information comprised classroom observation notes, interview records, reflections from the collaborating teacher, and documentation of teaching activities. The study examined instructional materials, including lesson modules, student worksheets, word and syllable cards, visual media, assessment instruments, and observation sheets, to connect implemented activities with the evidence generated in each phase.

Data were collected sequentially through reading assessments, classroom observations, interviews, and documentation during the pre-cycle phase and two intervention cycles. Reading assessments measured changes in students' pronunciation, fluency, and understanding against the minimum mastery criterion.

Observations and interviews complemented the test results by capturing participation, confidence, learning difficulties, and students' responses to instructional adjustments. Before the intervention, students completed an initial reading assessment, and the teacher documented their classroom behaviour to establish the baseline condition. During Cycle I, data were gathered across two meetings involving listening, repetition, collective reading, individual worksheet practice, and simple comprehension tasks. Cycle II repeated the assessment and observation process after introducing phonetic exercises, visual prompts, reading games, repeated reading, small-group turns, longer practice, and individual guidance.

Quantitative scores were analysed descriptively, while qualitative evidence was categorised and compared across the intervention phases. Descriptive analysis documented within-class improvement without claiming population effects or experimental causality. Qualitative analysis connected score changes with developments in participation, pronunciation, fluency, textual understanding, and reading confidence. Individual scores were tabulated to calculate the mean, minimum, maximum, mastery frequency, mastery percentage, and change from the pre-cycle assessment to Cycle II. Observation, interview, and documentary records were grouped by phase, condensed into categories, and compared to identify recurring developments and unresolved learning difficulties. Evidence was triangulated across sources, reflection guided the subsequent action, and success required at least 75% of students to score 70 and more than 80% to participate actively in classroom learning (Rabgay & Kidman, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Changes in Students' Reading Performance Across the Intervention Phases

Students' reading performance improved from the pre-cycle assessment to Cycle II, indicating that the intervention led to broader mastery and a more concentrated score distribution. The class's mean increased at each phase, while the number of students meeting the minimum mastery criterion increased from a minority to nearly the entire class. Improvement was visible at the lower end of the

distribution, as the minimum score increased and the gap between the lowest and highest scores narrowed. These aggregate changes show that progress extended beyond high-performing students and across the classroom. To clarify the scale and consistency of this development, Table 1 compares the mean, score range, and mastery status of 30 students across the three assessment phases.

Table 1. Summary of students' reading performance across phases

Phase	n	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Met KKM, n (%)	Did not meet KKM, n (%)
Pre-cycle	30	61.17	40	85	8 (26.7)	22 (73.3)
Cycle I	30	69.83	55	85	18 (60.0)	12 (40.0)
Cycle II	30	76.33	65	90	29 (96.7)	1 (3.3)

Note. KKM = minimum mastery criterion; the threshold was 70.

Table 1 presents the aggregate reading performance of the 30 students across the three assessment phases. In the pre-cycle assessment, the mean score was 61.17, with scores ranging from 40 to 85. Only 8 students (26.7%) met the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) of 70, while 22 students (73.3%) remained below it. In Cycle I, the mean score increased to 69.83, and the number of students meeting the KKM rose to 18 (60.0%). Scores during this phase ranged from 55 to 85. By Cycle II, the mean score had reached 76.33, with scores ranging from 65 to 90. A total of 29 students (96.7%) achieved mastery, leaving only one student (3.3%) below the required criterion.

The aggregate data display a continuous upward shift in reading performance across the three phases. The class's mean increased at each stage, although the gain was larger between the pre-cycle assessment and Cycle I than between Cycles I and II. The mastery rate followed a similar progressive pattern, rising by 33.3 percentage points in Cycle I and a further 36.7 percentage points in Cycle II. Improvement was particularly visible at the lower end of the score distribution. The minimum score increased from 40 to 55 and subsequently to 65, while the maximum score remained at 85 before rising to 90. Consequently, the overall score range narrowed from 45 points in the pre-cycle assessment to 30 points in Cycle I and 25 points in Cycle II. This pattern shows that performance shifted upward while becoming increasingly concentrated.

Although this study was not formally designed as a Multi-Tiered System of Support, the progression across the three phases can be interpreted through the Response to Intervention framework. Within this framework, assessment functions not only as an outcome measure but also as feedback for adjusting instructional intensity based on students' responses (Gillon, 2023; Stuckey et al., 2022). Cycle I provided structured classroom-level instruction, while Cycle II intensified support through phonetic reinforcement, repeated reading, visual prompts, small-group activities, and individual guidance. The simultaneous increase in the mean, minimum score, and mastery rate suggests that these adjustments particularly supported students positioned at the lower end of the initial distribution. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that structured small-group instruction and targeted fluency and phonological training can improve early literacy performance among students with weaker foundational skills (Goldstein et al., 2023; Ruan et al., 2024). In the social and ideological context of a first-grade madrasah, the expansion of mastery from 26.7% to 96.7% represents broader access to the shahada as both a written text and a foundational expression of Islamic identity. Nevertheless, improvement should be understood as context-dependent because intervention outcomes can vary according to instructional dosage, implementation fidelity, and individual responsiveness (Piasta et al., 2022; Stuckey et al., 2022).

Individual Trajectories of Reading Performance Across Intervention Phases

Students' reading performance improved across the intervention phases, but the magnitude of progress varied between individuals. Examining these trajectories is essential because increases in the class mean and mastery rate do not show whether improvement was evenly distributed or driven by a small group of students. The longitudinal data capture how learners with baseline scores responded to guided reading, phonetic reinforcement, visual media, repeated practice, small-group activities, and individual assistance. They identify students who progressed rapidly, those who improved gradually, and those who continued to experience difficulties after Cycle II. By presenting the scores of all 30 students from the pre-cycle assessment through both intervention cycles, Table 2

demonstrates the breadth, consistency, and limits of improvement at the individual level.

Table 2. Individual reading scores across phases

Student ID	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II	Net change
S01	75	80	85	+10
S02	65	70	75	+10
S03	60	65	70	+10
S04	70	75	80	+10
S05	55	60	70	+15
S06	60	70	75	+15
S07	80	85	90	+10
S08	65	75	80	+15
S09	45	60	70	+25
S10	50	65	75	+25
S11	60	70	80	+20
S12	85	85	90	+5
S13	40	55	65	+25
S14	55	65	70	+15
S15	75	80	85	+10
S16	65	70	80	+15
S17	70	75	85	+15
S18	50	65	70	+20
S19	60	70	75	+15
S20	55	65	70	+15
S21	60	70	75	+15
S22	50	60	70	+20
S23	65	75	80	+15
S24	45	60	70	+25
S25	70	75	80	+10
S26	60	70	75	+15
S27	50	65	70	+20
S28	55	65	70	+15
S29	75	80	85	+10
S30	65	70	75	+10

Note. Student names were replaced with identification codes to protect the privacy of minor participants. Net change was calculated as the Cycle II score minus the pre-cycle score.

Table 2 shows a consistent upward pattern in students' reading scores across the three assessment phases. Twenty-nine students improved during Cycle I, while one maintained the same score before improving in Cycle II, no student declined. From the pre-cycle assessment to Cycle II, individual gains ranged from 5 to 25 points. Twelve students gained 15 points, nine gained 10 points, four gained

20 points, four gained 25 points, and one gained 5 points. Students with lower baseline scores generally recorded the largest gains. Ten students who had not met the KKM in the pre-cycle assessment achieved mastery in Cycle I, followed by another 11 students in Cycle II. All eight students who had initially met the KKM maintained their mastery throughout the study. By Cycle II, 29 of the 30 students had achieved the required score. Although Student S13 improved substantially from 40 to 65, this student remained below the KKM and therefore required further individual support.

The individual score trajectories reveal three main patterns. First, improvement was consistent across students, as no student declined and nearly all students gained in both cycles. Second, students with lower pre-cycle scores tended to increase more. Those who initially scored between 40 and 60 generally gained 15 to 25 points, whereas students who began with scores between 70 and 85 mostly gained 5 to 15 points. This pattern narrowed the performance gap, as the score range shifted from 40-85 in the pre-cycle phase to 55-85 in Cycle I and 65-90 in Cycle II. Third, the rate of improvement gradually moderated, with the average gain decreasing from 8.67 points in Cycle I to 6.50 points in Cycle II. The final scores became increasingly concentrated between 70 and 85, indicating greater performance consistency, although one student remained below the mastery criterion.

The narrowing score distribution and the greater gains among students with lower initial scores can be interpreted as a reduction in learning disparities within the classroom, rather than merely an increase in average achievement. In the social context of first-grade madrasah education, the students began with unequal reading abilities, but teacher modelling, guided repetition, visual media, small-group interaction, and individual assistance provided a shared structure for learning. This process aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development, in which learners can perform beyond their independent ability with scaffolding and social interaction. Araújo et al. (2025) also support this interpretation, finding that teacher-led, small-group, multicomponent interventions are particularly beneficial for early-grade students with reading difficulties. Similarly, Downing et al. (2026) showed that combining decoding and language-oriented instruction can improve

word reading and comprehension. In this study's instructional context, the shift from predominantly oral memorisation to phonetic, visual, collaborative, and meaning-oriented activities enabled the shahada to be approached as both a reading text and a foundational expression of Islamic faith. Ideologically, improved reading ability therefore represents greater student access to religious literacy and participation in forming an Islamic identity. However, Student S13's continued non-mastery indicates that collective scaffolding does not eliminate individual differences and should be supplemented with differentiated support.

CONCLUSION

Effective early religious reading instruction depends on iterative adaptation to students' observed needs. Reading the shahada requires more than memorising its sounds. It also depends on guided decoding, repeated practice, meaningful interaction, and sufficient confidence to read independently. The mean score increased from 61.17 before intervention to 69.83 in Cycle I and 76.33 in Cycle II. Mastery rose correspondingly from 26.7% to 60.0% and finally 96.7%. Classroom observations recorded stronger pronunciation, fluency, participation, and confidence after phonetic reinforcement, visual prompts, small-group practice, and individual guidance were added. Responsive, multicomponent instruction can therefore transform the shahada from a memorised formula into an accessible text through which young learners more fully develop foundational religious literacy during their first years of madrasah education.

Combining aggregate and student-level evidence reveals both the scale and distribution of change in early religious reading. This approach moves the analysis beyond a class average by showing how learners responded across successive instructional phases. It also extends literacy research into fiqh education, where scholars have paid limited attention to relationships among decoding, comprehension, and religious meaning. The aggregate data demonstrate simultaneous increases in mean achievement, minimum scores, and mastery rates. The longitudinal data show that every student improved, with the largest gains generally occurring among learners with lower baseline scores. The action-research design documents how structured reflection informed the addition of phonetic,

visual, collaborative, and individual supports. These findings offer an adaptive, multicomponent perspective on how foundational religious literacy develops through classroom intervention.

These findings remain bounded by the study's single-site, two-cycle classroom action design. Without a comparison group and inferential statistical tests, the observed improvements cannot establish definitive causal effects. The short implementation period also prevented examination of whether students retained their reading gains after the intervention ended. The participants comprised only 30 first-grade students from MI Ma'arif Bendosari. Reading outcomes came primarily from classroom assessments, without detailed evidence of instrument validity, scoring reliability, or quantified learning participation. The study did not systematically analyse family support, prior literacy exposure, or individual learning needs as factors shaping students' progress. Future research should use multisite samples, validated measures, comparison conditions, and delayed assessments to more rigorously test the durability, mechanisms, and broader applicability of these findings.

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