

FAITH, ETHICS AND HUMANITY: QUR'ĀN MEMORIZATION CENTRES AND MORAL REVIVAL IN ILORIN

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Abstract

The act of memorizing the Qur'ān had started since the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad which made his companions and those that followed them to memorize the Qur'ān to the extent of establishing various institutions of *Tahfīzul-Qur'ān*. This act has been extended to the modern day educational centres in many parts of the country. However, the rise in moral decadence in Ilorin is a call for reflection, despite being historically known for its Islamic scholarship. Thus, this paper aims at exploring the role of Qur'an memorization centres in addressing this menace in Ilorin with a view to bringing into lime light their contributions to moral formation and identity development of the Muslim youths therein. The research adopts historical, descriptive and phenomenological methods of research. The historical method has assisted in accounting for the historical trends of Qur'ān memorization in Ilorin while descriptive method has been used to explain the gradual process of Qur'ān memorization. Phenomenological method has assisted in relating the discussion to the contemporary society to bring out its relevance to curbing moral decadence. The paper reveals that the functions of Qur'an memorization centres goes beyond spirito-theological, as it also serves as a vital institution for cultivating ethical values essential for a stable society. It also discusses the curriculum integration and pedagogical reforms adapted by these centres while revealing the unhealthy condition of Qur'ān memorization centres such as unconducive environment, inadequate funding and non recognition of the centres by the government are prominent challenges. The paper concludes by advocating that revitalizing Qur'an memorization centres in Ilorin can play a significant role in curbing moral decadence and promoting a harmonious society.

Key words: Faith, Ethics, Humanity, Moral decadence, Qur'an memorization

Introduction

The learning and memorization of the Qur'ān form the backbone of Islamic spirituality, moral refinement, and identity. They are viewed not only as devotional acts but also as pathways to spiritual illumination, with memorizers promised divine rewards and elevated status in the Hereafter. Prophet Muhammad (May the peace of Allah be upon him) emphasized Qur'ānic education by gathering his companions to teach them each revelation and encouraging them to memorize and apply its teachings.¹ Early Muslims approached Qur'ānic learning systematically; combining memorization, understanding and practice, following the example of the companions who did not move beyond ten verses until they had mastered both meaning and application.² The Prophet's companions such as Ibn Mas'ūd and Zayd ibn Thābit played key roles in shaping this legacy, passing their knowledge to the *Tābi'ūn* and establishing early learning circles in Makkah, Madinah, and the Prophet's Mosque, which became the earliest model of Qur'ānic schools.³

The institutionalization of Qur'ānic education expanded significantly during the early Islamic period. Under 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb, Qur'ānic instruction became systematized with the appointment of teachers, structured curricula, and public funding for instructors, ensuring continuity of learning. This institutional support was strengthened during the Abbasid era, where excellence in memorization was celebrated and rewarded, further strengthening the transmission of Qur'ānic knowledge.⁴ As Islam spread geographically, diverse regions established Qur'ānic centres that served both educational and moral functions, preserving the religious text and nurturing ethical consciousness within their communities.

Ilorin city, which has been long recognized as a centre of Islamic scholarship in Yorubaland; these Qur'ān memorization centres remain widespread, yet the city faces increasing moral decline manifested in youth delinquency, substance abuse, and the weakening of communal values. Despite families continuing to send children to these centres to cultivate discipline, humility, and ethical awareness, concerns persist regarding their current effectiveness in shaping moral character.⁵ Qur'ān memorization remains deeply relevant to the humanities because of its emphasis on human dignity, justice, and ethical responsibility. As secular institutions often prioritize cognitive development over moral formation, Qur'ānic centres offer a spiritual and ethical framework for character building. This study therefore investigates how these institutions in Ilorin contribute to addressing moral decay and sustaining the ethical and human-centered values inherent in Islamic education.

Conceptual Definitions

Faith

Faith is generally defined as a strong belief, trust, or confidence in something or someone, especially in the absence of complete proof or certainty⁶. It involves an inner conviction that guides a person's attitudes, decisions and actions. Faith also refers to a believer's deep spiritual assurance that coordinates how they understand life and make moral decisions. According to the Islamic context, faith also reflects a believer's acknowledgement of Allah, acceptance of His guidance and reliance on the Qur'an as the main constitution for living ethically.⁷ In other words, faith represents the core spiritual motive that drives individuals to digest the Qur'anic teachings, reframe their behaviors and also contribute to developing a morally sound and ethically upright community.

Ethics

Ethics means the principles and standards that guide what is considered right in a community. It also involves the moral guidelines, values and expectations that shape how individuals make choices and relate to others.⁸ As regards the Glorious Qur'an and its memorization as well as the drive for morality in the Muslim community, ethics reflects the Qur'an teachings and guidelines that influence people to behave with good and sound morals.

Humanity

Humanity is the moral sensitivity and the sense of shared dignity that guide how people interact with one another. It comprises compassion, kindness and an awareness of welfarism of others.⁹ In relation to Qur'an memorization and the moral upliftment of the Muslim community, humanity reflects the refined conduct and concern for societal well-being that grows as individuals digest Quranic teachings and translate them into respectful relationship

Moral Decadence

Moral behaviour is an act that brings about good result for persons as constituents of the society. It is applicable to the entire international society, and it encompasses principles that help to differentiate right from wrong and could be learnt over time. Empathy and other related social awareness are vital in moral development. Morality is one's beliefs about the appropriateness of an act, thought or feeling. Moral standard is built from Childhood, which then extends into adulthood.¹⁰ Islamic teachings train youths to dedicate their actions and life to Allah alone. It teaches discipline, showing them that knowledge acquisition is for the benefits of this world and the hereafter. Through Islamic teaching and ethics;

youth's actions, decisions and approaches to all forms of knowledge, as well as their attitude to life in general are governed by the precepts of Islam.

Qur'ān Memorization

The phrase “Qur'ān memorization” consists of the terms *Qur'ān* which is derived from the Arabic root *Qara'a* meaning “to read or recite” and used linguistically for *Maqra'u* “something to be read” and “memorization”, known in Arabic as *hifz*, which denotes preservation, safeguarding, and retention. Ibn Ishāq explains that the term *Qur'ān* is applied to the revelation because of its significance and because it comprises many *suwar* (chapters)¹¹, while scholars further describe it as a universal divine address intended to guide humanity to truth and lasting well-being.¹² Memorization, an ancient learning tool, plays a central role in knowledge acquisition and contributes to deeper understanding and automaticity in learning.¹³ Thus, *Qur'ān* memorization refers to preserving the sacred text in one's heart, a process called *hifz ul-Qur'ān*, and Muslims believe based on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, that those who memorize and live by the *Qur'ān* will be elevated in rank in the Hereafter according to the portion they have committed to memory¹⁴

Historical Trends of Qur'ān Memorization in Ilorin

Historically, the memorization of the *Qur'ān* began in Makkah and gained widespread recognition after the Hijrah to Madinah, where many companions excelled in *Qur'ānic* scholarship. Some companions were appointed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to teach others, reflecting the centrality of the *Qur'ān* in all aspects of Muslim life, including spiritual, social, political, and economic development. Memorizers were accorded special recognition, often leading prayers and performing key religious duties.¹⁵ Among notable reciters were the four rightly guided caliphs, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Mu'adh ibn Jabal, Ubay ibn Ka'ab, and others, whose efforts ensured the *Qur'ān*'s preservation for future generations—a tradition that continues today in Ilorin.¹⁶

In Ilorin, *Qur'ānic* learning and memorization date back to the advent of Islam in the town, focusing initially on memorizing small portions to facilitate daily prayers.¹⁷ By the late 19th century, some scholars became recognized *Huffāz* through constant recitation, even without formal centers. Notable early memorizers included Alfa Ma'adasi of Ode Adana, Shaykh Miqdad of Wara, and Shaykh Muhammad Miqdad Aboto Alfa, whose dedication to recitation and spiritual practices laid the foundation for subsequent generations.¹⁸

By the 20th century, *Qur'ān* memorization gained more structure, particularly following the invitation from the University of Sokoto (now Usmanu Danfodiyo University) in 1986 for *Qur'ānic* competitions. This event marked the

beginning of formalized memorization in Ilorin, with the then Emir, Alhaji Zulqarnanin Gambari, inviting Huffāz like Hafīz Abdul Rasheed Wara to train learners.¹⁹ These efforts significantly contributed to the development of Qur'ānic memorization centers in Ilorin, shaping a structured system for teaching and learning the Qur'ān.

Modern Qur'ānic schools in Ilorin today now emphasize consolidation through collective repetition, with numerous *Tahfīzul-Qur'ān* institutions supported by parents, the Muslim community, and philanthropists.²⁰ Competitions, such as *Musābaqah* and the National Qur'ān Recitation Competition initiated in 1986 by the Centre for Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, have further strengthened memorization practices.²¹ These events have encouraged youth participation, improved recitation skills, and fostered unity among Muslims across diverse tribal and cultural backgrounds.

Today, thousands of youths in Ilorin have memorized the entire Qur'ān or substantial portions, with hundreds graduating annually from the numerous Qur'ānic schools.²² Kwara State competitors have earned recognition at national and international levels, with early achievements led by female participants and recent milestones including Jameelat Tijani, Maryam Onilu, and Issa Abdul-Lateef at the 2024 national competition in Kebbi State, and Uthman Ayinde representing Kwara internationally in Algeria in 2025.²³ These developments highlight Ilorin's continued prominence in Qur'ānic memorization and its contribution to preserving Islamic knowledge and culture.

Critical Reflection on Ethical Formation in Qur'an Memorization Centres

Qur'an memorization centres in Ilorin serve as both preservers of the divine text and incubators of moral and ethical development. Prophet Muhammad stated, "*The best among you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it,*" emphasizing that Qur'anic learning is not only intellectual but also a moral endeavor.²⁴ Students are trained to embody Qur'anic values through disciplined memorization practices, guided by teachers (Ustādh) who model ethical behavior, correct recitation errors, and address lapses in etiquette. As Al-Ghazālī notes in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, the moral character of teachers profoundly influences the ethical formation of students.²⁵ Instruction begins with intention, respect, and responsibility, fostering perseverance, self-restraint, and time management that translate into everyday ethical conduct.

Ethical education is embedded in daily lessons, where virtues such as patience (*ṣabr*), truthfulness (*ṣidq*), modesty (*hayā'*), and justice (*ʿadl*) are derived from memorized verses and reinforced through practical examples, storytelling, and group discipline. For instance, (Q16:90), which commands justice and good

conduct, is explained in ways that connect memorization with social behavior, ensuring that students internalize ethical principles alongside their recitation.²⁶ The process transforms memorization centres into environments where spiritual and moral development occurs simultaneously.

Community expectations further reinforce ethical formation. In Ilorin, a Hāfīz (Qur'an memorizer) is regarded as custodians of divine knowledge, entrusted with exemplary behavior, leadership roles, and peer mentorship. As Makdisi observes, Islamic education historically aimed at moral transformation as much as knowledge transmission.²⁷ These societal expectations create an ethical framework in which memorization and character development are mutually reinforcing, positioning Qur'anic centres as vital institutions within the broader social structure.

However, challenges remain in consistently realizing these ideals. Some centres focus narrowly on rote memorization without comprehension, risking "ethical illiteracy," while variations in teaching quality and excessive authoritarian discipline may foster fear rather than moral reflection.²⁸ Ethical formation requires not only memorization but understanding, contextual application, and emotional support, as noted by Yazee, who emphasizes Tafsīr and critical thinking for genuine ethical internalization.²⁹ Reform-oriented approaches that balance memorization, moral reflection, emotional intelligence, and gender sensitivity are necessary to ensure that Qur'an memorization centres produce graduates capable of sincere ethical and spiritual growth.

Prospects of Qur'an Memorization Centres and their Relevance to Humanity

The institutionalization of Qur'ān memorization centres led to the establishment of more schools where emphasis is placed on Islamic studies with particular reference to Qur'ān recitation and memorization. These schools are either owned by individuals or Muslim organizations to serve the humanity. These centres are manned with efficient and effective *Huffāz* who teaches the young and old the techniques of memorizing the Qur'ān and its understanding. Presently, some schools in Ilorin metropolis and beyond are merging Qur'ān memorization with western education and they have been graduating students with complete Qur'ān in their memory. There are other schools or centers that focus on *Islamiyyāt* and *Arabiyyat* along with *Tahfīzu 'l-Qur'ān* without merging it with western education.³⁰

In terms of enhancing literacy, critical thinking and commitment to learn the Qur'ān by heart places the spotlight on the remarkable abilities of the brain. Qur'an memorization is an exercise that shows the remarkable powers of the reciters dedication to their faith, learning it by heart has enormous effects on the

later academic achievements. To lay credence to this, an Ilorin born Qur'ān memorizer, Abdul Hafiz Imam Aliagan, at the age of 27 bagged a PhD degree with distinction in Biomedical Sciences from the University of Texas Health, at San Antonio. He is a grandson of Chief Preacher of Ilorin Central Mosque, Imam Yakub Aliagan, and also a son of Prof. Abubakar Aliagan of the University of Ilorin. Apart from memorizing the entire Qur'ān while in secondary school, he also obtained outstanding results in his WAEC and JAMB exams.³¹

Muslims now become aware that Islamic education in general and Qur'ānic recitation and memorization in particular plays an important role in their lives. This is because of their constant recitation. They become aware that every message in the Qur'ān is totally relevant to their lives and concerns them. Such understanding makes their readings alive, dynamic and meaningful. Muslim parents who have no intention of sending their children to Islamic school now do so. They send them to such schools where emphasis is placed on Qur'ānic recitation and memorization. Others who have sent their children to schools which has no place for Islamic education in general and Qur'ānic education along with it sciences in particular are now withdrawing them from such schools and sending them to Western schools blended with Qur'ān memorization.³²

These centres also play a pivotal role in preserving indigenous Islamic heritage and identity by serving as repositories of classical Islamic knowledge, transmitted through generations using traditional pedagogical methods. They also foster communal identity and moral consciousness thereby resisting cultural erosion in the era of globalization and western education. As such Qur'an memorization centres are not merely institutions but vital cultural infrastructures that sustain the Islamic way of life. Thus, these centres emphasizing oral transmission and rigorous recitation practice ensure continuity with the Islamic scholarly traditions.³³

Furthermore, Imamship in Islam is an office bestowed upon the one who has greater knowledge of the Qur'ān. It is basically assigned to the best of people among the humanities in terms of knowledge and mastery of the recitation of Qur'ān along with other qualities. The Prophet himself and his rightly guided Caliphs (Successors) assumed it. Due to its significance, the Prophet decreed that the most knowledgeable and competent in the recitation of Qur'ān should be appointed as an Imām which is in conformity with the *Ḥadīth* narrated by Abu Mas'ūd.³⁴

Conclusion

So far, it has been discussed that the Qur'ān memorization has been in existence since the Prophetic period, as he enjoined some of the companions to

learn the Qur'an from some specific companion. It has also discussed that in Ilorin, learning Qur'ānic recitation and memorization is as old as the advent of Islām in the town. Since then, schools have been established where Qur'ānic teachers teach students under the shade of trees etc. Later on, modern Qur'ānic schools emerged in Ilorin which is popularly known as *Tahfizul-Qur'an* centres. Currently, the *Tahfizul-Qur'an* institutions and *Tahfiz* classes are almost every nooks and cranny in Ilorin.

The contributions of this centres extends beyond religious learning to align with broader goals of humanity, such as the promotion of empathy, critical thinking, discipline and cultural identity. In a world filled with moral decadence, these centres offer a structured ethical development for the students, however, challenges such as inconsistent teaching standards, unhealthy teaching environment, over emphasis on rote learning, insufficient integration of Qur'ānic comprehension should be critically addressed. Thus, to fully actualize their potential, Qur'an memorization centres must evolve in ways that seek balance between traditional values and contemporary practices.

In light of the above, this paper is recommending that Quran memorization should be paired with structured lessons on *Tafsir* and its ethical relevance. Also, memorization and internalization of the Qur'ān should be inculcated from childhood. Similarly, these centres should address discipline with compassion and wisdom. There is also an urgent need to integrate and introduce subjects like ethics, Islamic history among others to compliment memorization and enhance critical thinking. There should also create structured moral education programs that translate the Quranic verses memorized into real life application. They should also encourage their students to apply Qur'ānic teachings through community based projects such as volunteering, outreach to vulnerable ones and thereby promoting the principle of social responsibility.

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