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Qira'at Dialectics in Islamic Religious Education: Tracing the History, Standardization, and Diversity of Qur'anic Readings

Sopyan Hadi^{1*} and Mukhlisin²

***Correspondence:**

Sopyan Hadi
dosen00292@unpam.ac.id

^{1,2} Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aimed to explain how the plurality of *qira'at* can be reconciled conceptually with *'Uthmānic muṣḥaf* standardization and translated into bounded pedagogical implications for Islamic Religious Education (PAI). A structured integrative literature review was conducted using publisher and journal portals, Crossref-indexed records, institutional repositories, and backward reference checking. The final analytical corpus comprised 25 sources, including peer-reviewed studies, authoritative Qur'anic-studies monographs, a classical *qira'at* source, and official Indonesian *muṣḥaf*-standardization material. Sources were appraised for authority, methodological transparency, verifiability, and relevance, then coded across five themes: transmission and canonization, *Sab'atu Aḥruf* and *Qira'at Sab'ah*, *'Uthmānic rasm* and reading plurality, *qira'at* pedagogy, and PAI implications. The synthesis showed that canonical *qira'at* constitutes a controlled plurality sustained through authoritative oral transmission and constrained by linguistic criteria and *'Uthmānic rasm*; *Sab'atu Aḥruf* and *Qira'at Sab'ah* are historically related but conceptually distinct. Existing educational evidence remains concentrated in specialist *qira'at* and tertiary contexts, leaving general PAI application underdeveloped. These findings support a staged PAI framework emphasizing conceptual accuracy, source verification, and respectful engagement with legitimate difference rather than claims of demonstrated classroom effectiveness. The review is limited by non-exhaustive searching, heterogeneous source types, and the absence of classroom data; future research should empirically test the proposed framework across diverse PAI settings.

Keywords: *Qira'at*, Islamic Religious Education, *Sab'atu Aḥruf*, *'Uthmānic Rasm*, Qur'anic Literacy.

Introduction

Qur'anic instruction is a central component of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), yet the pedagogical problem addressed in this study is narrower than the general importance of religious education. In many school and madrasah settings, recitation practice is organized around the widely used transmission of *Ḥaḥṣ 'an 'Āṣim*. This practical uniformity supports classroom coordination, but it can obscure the historically regulated plurality represented by canonical *qira'at* when the dominant classroom reading is implicitly treated as the only legitimate form. The resulting issue is not whether PAI should abandon a standard classroom recitation, but how it can explain recognized reading plurality without weakening textual authority or confusing distinct levels of Qur'anic study (Kolb, 2023; Abdullah et al., 2025).

For this article, *qira'at* refers to transmitted systems of Qur'anic reading associated with recognized readers and transmission paths, whereas *tajwīd* refers primarily to rules governing accurate performance within recitation. *Qira'at* therefore cannot be reduced to accent, dialectal habit, or a set of optional pronunciations. Its study intersects with oral transmission, sanad, Arabic linguistic possibility, and the written framework of *'Uthmānic rasm*. Classical *qira'at* scholarship also treats the acceptance of readings as a disciplined question of transmission and conformity rather than free textual variation (Ibn al-Jazarī, 2002; Nasser, 2013).



The educational literature shows that qira'at teaching is already an established field, but its empirical base is concentrated in specialist environments. Daud and Ibrahim (2019) examined university students' perceptions of qira'at learning; Abdul Hamid (2023) investigated qira'at-related teaching skills among secondary-school Qur'anic Skills Class teachers; Syafee et al. (2024) identified the need for a specific tawjīh al-qira'at teaching model in Malaysian *qira'at* institutions; and Salihin et al. (2024) documented teaching practices among higher-education lecturers. More recent case evidence likewise reports practical challenges in a specialized secondary tahfiz institution (Salihin et al., 2025). Together, these studies demonstrate pedagogical activity and recurring implementation issues, but they do not yet resolve how qira'at should be conceptually positioned within general PAI for non-specialist learners.

This gap becomes more significant because digital environments make multiple recitation traditions increasingly visible. Contemporary educational discussion has begun to consider digital and artificial-intelligence tools in Qur'an and qira'at learning (Syed Aziz et al., 2025). Exposure to unfamiliar readings may create a pedagogical risk when learners lack concepts for distinguishing recognized qira'at from error; however, this article does not treat learner confusion as an empirically established condition in Indonesian PAI. It is framed instead as a theoretical risk that requires careful curriculum design and subsequent classroom testing.

A second conceptual problem concerns Sab'atu Aḥruf. The expression derives from transmitted prophetic reports but has generated numerous classical interpretations concerning what the 'seven aḥruf' signify. Modern scholarship likewise emphasizes that early authorized plurality, the *ʿUthmānic* written tradition, and the later canonization of named readings should not be collapsed into one historical event or one taxonomy (İnce, 2014; Nasser, 2013; Taufiq & Hariyanto, 2024). Consequently, Sab'atu Aḥruf cannot simply be equated with Qira'at Sab'ah, the later set of seven canonical readers associated especially with Ibn Mujāhid's canonizing intervention (Nasser, 2015).

A third problem concerns the meaning of standardization. Traditional Muslim accounts attribute a decisive codex project to Caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān in response to disagreement over recitation, whereas modern manuscript and philological scholarship investigates the timing and mechanics of consonantal-text stabilization through different evidentiary methods. Studies of the Qur'anic consonantal skeleton and regional codices support very early textual stabilization while also documenting regional features and leaving aspects of the historical reconstruction open to debate (Sinai, 2014a, 2014b; Sidky, 2020). The pedagogical significance of this historiography lies in distinguishing transmitted religious accounts, material-textual reconstruction, and the present article's own synthesis rather than presenting all three as identical forms of evidence.

The relation between qira'at plurality and *ʿUthmānic* standardization is therefore treated here as a dialectic in an analytical, not merely rhetorical, sense. The tension is between a plurality of authorized oral readings and the need for a stable communal written reference; the mediating mechanism is the interaction between rasm as a constrained consonantal framework and oral transmission as the carrier of specific reading traditions; and the conceptual outcome is bounded plurality rather than either unrestricted variation or absolute uniformity (Nasser, 2013; Sidky, 2020, 2023). This formulation makes the concept of dialectic productive: it explains how standardization can limit possibilities while still leaving room for transmitted variation.

Within Indonesian PAI, the question is how far this bounded plurality can contribute to Qur'anic literacy without turning an advanced qira'at discipline into an overloaded school subject. Qur'anic literacy is used here in a deliberately restricted sense: it includes performative literacy, such as accurate reading and listening, and epistemic-contextual literacy, such as understanding how authoritative readings are transmitted and verified. It does not automatically encompass moderation, tolerance, or critical thinking as proven outcomes. Those broader dispositions are treated as pedagogical propositions whose plausibility must be distinguished from demonstrated classroom effects (Fuadi et al., 2026; Mukhibat et al., 2024).

Religious-moderation scholarship offers a relevant but separate educational frame. PAI can cultivate respectful engagement with intra-religious diversity when differences are addressed through knowledge, ethical dialogue, and clear normative criteria (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Saada, 2023). In the qira'at context, the proposed mechanism is specific: students encounter a case in which legitimate difference is neither denied nor treated as limitless, and they are asked to justify judgments through

transmission and textual criteria. The present review does not claim that such instruction causes moderation; it identifies a theoretically coherent pathway that can be tested empirically.

Existing studies therefore reveal two bodies of scholarship that have rarely been integrated. Qur'anic studies explains transmission, canonization, aḥruf, rasm, and reading plurality, while qira'at education research examines teacher practice, student perception, teaching models, and implementation challenges in specialist settings (Daud & Ibrahim, 2019; Abdul Hamid, 2023; Salihin et al., 2024, 2025; Syafee et al., 2024). The unresolved PAI problem is how to translate the first body of scholarship into age-appropriate conceptual learning while respecting the evidentiary limits of the second.

This study addresses that gap through an integrative synthesis of historical-textual and educational literature. It does not seek to determine which classical interpretation of every qira'at controversy is definitive; rather, it identifies areas of convergence, disagreement, and pedagogically relevant distinction. This scope is necessary because doctrinal simplification can be as misleading as an unstructured presentation of competing views.

Accordingly, the study asks three questions: (1) How do qira'at scholarship and recent historiography explain the relationship between reading plurality and *Uthmānic* standardization? (2) How should Sab'atu Aḥruf be distinguished from later canonical qira'at without erasing scholarly disagreement? and (3) What bounded pedagogical implications can be defensibly derived for general PAI without converting conceptual synthesis into unsupported causal claims?

The novelty of the study lies in connecting these questions through the analytical concept of mediated or bounded plurality. Rather than offering another chronological overview of qira'at history, the article interprets rasm and oral transmission as interacting constraints and then uses that relationship to delimit what PAI may reasonably teach. This framing also requires a strict separation between review findings and educational proposals.

The study therefore contributes at two levels. Conceptually, it clarifies why diversity and standardization need not be treated as mutually exclusive categories in Qur'anic reading history. Pedagogically, it develops a staged proposal for PAI in which learning objectives, content, methods, and assessment remain proportionate to learner level and to the evidence available in the literature.

Because the study is literature-based, all references to possible learner dispositions are framed as implications rather than measured effects. No claim is made here that qira'at instruction has already improved tolerance, critical thinking, or Qur'anic literacy among the target PAI population. The following review therefore first establishes the transmission and textual-historical foundations of qira'at, then examines Sab'atu Aḥruf and *Uthmānic* standardization, and finally derives a limited educational framework. This sequence keeps descriptive history, analytical synthesis, and pedagogical recommendation methodologically distinct.

Terminology is standardized throughout the manuscript: qira'at denotes transmitted readings; qira'at readers or imams denotes recognized transmitters/readers rather than 'priests'; *Uthmānic* rasm denotes the consonantal orthographic framework rather than an 'Ottoman language'; and muṣḥaf denotes a written Qur'anic codex. Transliteration is used consistently where it improves disciplinary precision. These delimitations define the manuscript's research problem and prevent the pedagogical discussion from exceeding the evidentiary scope of an integrative review.

Method

This study employed a structured integrative literature review because the research questions require the synthesis of historical-textual scholarship, pedagogical studies, and official standardization material rather than statistical aggregation (Snyder, 2019; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Searches were conducted across original publisher and journal portals, Crossref-indexed bibliographic records, and institutional repositories, supplemented by backward reference checking. Search combinations included 'qiraat' OR 'qirā'āt', 'Sab'atu Aḥruf' OR 'seven aḥruf', '*Uthmānic* rasm' OR 'Uthmanic codex', 'qiraat teaching', 'Islamic Religious Education' OR 'PAI', and 'Qur'anic literacy'. The principal publication window was 2014-2026 to prioritize current scholarship; earlier foundational works were retained when indispensable to qira'at methodology or canonization. Eligible sources were published in English, Indonesian, Malay, or Arabic and had to address at least one research question with identifiable authorship and a traceable publication record. Duplicate records, tangential works, sources whose

relevance depended on author-name mismatch, and aggregator copies were excluded when an original publisher record was available. Screening proceeded through title/abstract relevance followed by full-text or full-record appraisal. The final analytical corpus comprised 25 sources: peer-reviewed journal articles, authoritative Qur'anic-studies monographs, Ibn al-Jazari's classical qira'at work, and an official Indonesian muṣḥaf-standardization source. Appraisal considered disciplinary authority, methodological transparency, bibliographic verifiability, and direct evidentiary relevance. Each source was coded under five categories: (1) transmission and canonization, (2) Sab'atu Aḥruf and Qira'at Sab'ah, (3) *Uthmānic* rasm and reading plurality, (4) qira'at pedagogy, and (5) implications for PAI. Constant comparison across categories was used to identify convergences, disagreements, and conceptual relationships. To enhance interpretive credibility, historical claims were cross-checked across traditional/classical, modern Qur'anic-studies, and educational sources where appropriate, and educational recommendations were explicitly treated as review-derived propositions rather than classroom outcomes.

Results

Reading Plurality and *Uthmānic* Standardization in the Qira'at Tradition

The synthesis identifies qira'at as a controlled tradition of Qur'anic reading sustained through the interaction of oral transmission and a written consonantal framework. Nasser (2013) shows that the history of variant readings cannot be reduced to spontaneous dialectal variation, while Sidky (2023) demonstrates that consonantal dotting and oral recitation must be interpreted in relation rather than as independent textual systems. Qira'at is therefore analytically distinct from both ordinary pronunciation differences and from the general rules of tajwīd: it refers to transmitted reading systems whose authority depends on recognized scholarly transmission.

This distinction matters educationally because recent qira'at studies frequently address specialized knowledge, pedagogical competence, or learner perception rather than the basic conceptual architecture required by general PAI. University students in Daud and Ibrahim (2019), Qur'anic Skills Class teachers in Abdul Hamid (2023), and lecturers studied by Salihin et al. (2024) represent contexts in which qira'at is already a defined area of study. Their findings cannot be generalized directly to ordinary PAI classrooms, but they support one review finding: qira'at pedagogy requires purposeful explanation and cannot be assumed to emerge from recitation practice alone.

Within the transmitted Islamic tradition, the well-known report concerning 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Hishām ibn Ḥakīm functions as a normative witness to authorized variation in recitation. The present study uses such reports as evidence for how the tradition understood legitimate plurality, not as a substitute for modern manuscript-historical reconstruction. This distinction is important because the evidentiary status of transmitted reports, later qira'at literature, and material-textual analysis is not identical (İnce, 2014; Nasser, 2013).

Classical accounts associate the spread of the Companions and early reciters with regional centers of Qur'anic learning, while later qira'at scholarship systematized named transmission traditions. Modern study of regional codices likewise identifies patterned regional features in early Qur'anic manuscripts (Sidky, 2020). The review therefore avoids the informal and overly linear claim that regional difference alone 'created' qira'at; rather, regional transmission, oral authority, written codices, and later scholarly canonization interacted over time.

Canonization further narrowed and organized this inherited plurality. Ibn Mujāhid's selection of seven readers was historically influential, but the number seven in that later canon should not be projected backward as a direct equivalent of Sab'atu Aḥruf. Nasser (2015) shows that the canonization process involved scholarly judgment about acceptable transmission, while Ibn al-Jazari's later synthesis established a broader ten-reading framework and articulated the well-known criteria relating transmission, Arabic linguistic conformity, and compatibility with the *Uthmānic* rasm (Ibn al-Jazari, 2002).

Traditional Muslim accounts attribute the standardizing codex project to Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and connect it to the need to limit dispute within an expanding Muslim community. Modern historiography approaches the same period through manuscript, orthographic, and philological evidence. Sinai (2014a, 2014b) argues for an early closure of the Qur'anic consonantal skeleton, while Sidky (2020) identifies regionality within early codex traditions. These findings are compatible with

early textual stabilization but do not make every detail of later transmitted narratives independently demonstrable. The present synthesis therefore distinguishes traditional attribution, modern reconstruction, and pedagogical interpretation.

The *‘Uthmānic* rasm functions in this synthesis as a constraint rather than as a complete notation of every recitational feature. Early consonantal writing left some distinctions underdetermined, while oral transmission supplied reading-specific information; at the same time, not every graphically possible reading became canonical. Ibn al-Jazarī’s formulation links an acceptable reading to sound transmission, conformity with Arabic, and compatibility with the rasm of a *‘Uthmānic* codex (Ibn al-Jazarī, 2002). Modern work on early codices and consonantal dotting reinforces the importance of analyzing written and oral evidence together (Sidky, 2020, 2023). In Indonesia, official muṣḥaf standardization by the Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur’an belongs to a much later regulatory context; its relevance here is analogical and institutional, illustrating how written conventions can stabilize public use without serving as direct evidence for seventh-century events (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur’an, 2019; Hakim & Diman, 2025).

A review-derived educational implication follows from this verification structure. The three qira’at criteria should not be converted mechanically into a classroom ‘fact-checking formula’; rather, they model a broader epistemic principle: judgments about a religious text require identifiable chains of authority, disciplinary rules, and textual constraints. In PAI, this principle can support source-verification activities, but its effect on students’ critical literacy remains a proposition to be tested rather than a finding of the present review.

The dialectic identified by the review contains three analytical moments. First, there is tension: oral tradition preserves more than one recognized reading, while communal textual practice requires a stable written reference. Second, there is mediation: *‘Uthmānic* rasm constrains the range of possible readings, while oral transmission specifies which possibilities belong to recognized reading traditions. Third, there is a bounded outcome: unity is achieved neither by abolishing all variation nor by accepting unlimited variation, but through institutionally and scholarly regulated plurality (Nasser, 2013; Sidky, 2020, 2023; Sinai, 2014a, 2014b). This framework contributes more than the descriptive statement that diversity and standardization coexist; it explains the mechanism by which each limits and enables the other.

Sab’atu Aḥruf and Canonical Qira’at: Conceptual Distinctions and Scholarly Debates

Sab’atu Aḥruf remains one of the most debated concepts in the history of Qur’anic transmission and should not be treated as a settled synonym for either seven Arab dialects or the seven canonical *qira’at*. Classical scholarship produced a wide range of interpretations concerning the meaning of *aḥruf*, including explanations based on tribal or dialectal accommodation, lexical substitution, grammatical and morphological variation, different modes of recitation, and other forms of authorized multiformity within the early transmission of the Qur’an. This interpretive diversity itself indicates that no single taxonomy achieved uncontested acceptance across the scholarly tradition. Modern scholarship has likewise resisted overly reductive explanations, particularly those that collapse early oral plurality, the emergence of the *‘Uthmānic* written tradition, and later processes of *qira’at* canonization into a single historical phenomenon (Ince, 2014; Nasser, 2013; Taufiq & Hariyanto, 2024). Accordingly, the present review adopts a deliberately cautious analytical position: *Sab’atu Aḥruf* is best understood as referring to an early authorization of recitational plurality whose precise historical taxonomy remains disputed. Such caution is necessary because the concept belongs to an earlier layer of Qur’anic transmission than the subsequently systematized canonical reading traditions.

A crucial distinction must therefore be maintained between *Sab’atu Aḥruf* and *Qira’at Sab’ah*. The latter refers not to the original seven *aḥruf*, but to a later scholarly canon associated especially with Ibn Mujāhid’s influential selection of seven readers. The numerical correspondence between “seven” *aḥruf* and seven canonical readers has sometimes encouraged the assumption that the two categories are directly equivalent; however, the historical development of *qira’at* makes such identification difficult to sustain. Nasser (2015) shows that canonization involved scholarly judgment concerning the acceptability and authority of transmitted readings, rather than the mechanical preservation of seven primordial categories. Furthermore, the later recognition of ten canonical readings, consolidated in the scholarship of Ibn al-Jazarī, demonstrates that the canonical structure of *qira’at* was itself the product of a developed scholarly tradition. Ibn al-Jazarī’s formulation also emphasizes that an acceptable

reading must satisfy recognized criteria involving transmission, conformity with Arabic linguistic possibilities, and compatibility with the *‘Uthmānic rasm* (Ibn al-Jazarī, 2002). Consequently, *Qira’at Sab‘ah* should be understood as a historical canon of recognized reading authorities rather than as a direct enumeration of the seven *ahruf*.

The distinction also becomes clearer when *Sab‘atu Ahruf* and canonical *qira’at* are situated within the interaction between oral transmission and the *‘Uthmānic rasm*. The written consonantal framework did not encode every phonological and recitational feature in a fully explicit manner; consequently, oral transmission continued to play a decisive role in specifying recognized readings. At the same time, orthographic possibility alone did not make every theoretically possible reading authoritative. The canonical tradition emerged through the interaction of written constraints, linguistic acceptability, and recognized scholarly transmission. Modern studies of early Qur’anic codices and consonantal dotting similarly reinforce the need to analyze oral and written evidence relationally rather than as independent or competing systems (Sidky, 2020, 2023). From this perspective, the historical relationship among *ahruf*, *rasm*, and *qira’at* is better understood as a process of regulated or bounded plurality: written standardization constrained the range of permissible readings, while oral transmission preserved particular authorized realizations within that framework. This interpretation avoids two opposite simplifications—namely, that *‘Uthmānic* standardization eliminated all legitimate variation or, conversely, that early plurality implied unrestricted textual fluidity.

The principal scholarly implication is therefore one of conceptual differentiation rather than definitive resolution. This review does not claim to settle the precise historical meaning of *Sab‘atu Ahruf*, because the surviving classical and modern interpretations remain diverse and because different kinds of evidence prophetic reports, later *qira’at* literature, manuscript analysis, and modern historiography operate with different methodological assumptions. Instead, the review establishes a minimum point of analytical clarity: *Sab‘atu Ahruf* represents an early framework of authorized plurality, whereas canonical *qira’at* represents a later, disciplined system of transmitted readings shaped by scholarly verification and canonization. The two phenomena are historically related, but they are neither synonymous nor reducible to one another. This distinction is especially important for Islamic Religious Education because collapsing the two concepts can produce anachronistic explanations in which later canonical categories are projected backward onto the earliest period of Qur’anic transmission. A more defensible pedagogical approach is therefore to present the relationship as one of historical continuity accompanied by conceptual differentiation: early authorized plurality provides the broader background, while canonical *qira’at* reflects the later scholarly regulation and transmission of recognized reading traditions. Such an approach preserves both the reality of legitimate diversity and the disciplined criteria by which that diversity came to be bounded within the Qur’anic scholarly tradition.

Bounded Pedagogical Implications of Qira’at for Islamic Religious Education

The educational relevance of this dialectic is best framed as a proposition about how learners may encounter legitimate difference. Religious-moderation scholarship emphasizes knowledge-based engagement with plurality and the pedagogical value of distinguishing principled openness from relativism (Mukhibat et al., 2024; Saada, 2023). *Qira’at* offers a domain-specific example: recognized differences are respected because they meet disciplinary criteria, while unsupported readings remain open to critique. The hypothesized mechanism is therefore exposure to bounded difference plus explicit reasoning about its evidentiary limits. No causal claim about increased moderation or tolerance is made without classroom data.

Qur’anic literacy is correspondingly defined in two dimensions for this study. Performative literacy concerns the ability to recite and listen accurately; epistemic-contextual literacy concerns basic understanding of how recognized readings are transmitted, differentiated, and verified. The construct does not subsume every desirable educational outcome. Critical thinking and moderation may be associated pedagogical aims, but they require separate operationalization and measurement (Fuadi et al., 2026). This narrower definition prevents the manuscript from treating recitation skill, historical knowledge, verification, and character outcomes as a single undifferentiated competence.

On the basis of the synthesis, the article proposes a three-level framework rather than a full new subject. At the basic level, the objective is recognition that more than one authoritative reading tradition exists; content is limited to simple teacher-selected examples, pedagogy uses guided listening and

explanation, and assessment asks learners to identify difference without judging it as error. At the secondary level, objectives expand to explaining *Sab'atu Aḥruf*, *Qira'at Sab'ah*, *sanad*, and *'Uthmānic rasm*; case-based dialogue and source comparison are appropriate, with assessment focused on conceptual distinction and evidence-based explanation. At the tertiary or specialist level, students may analyze transmission, *rasm*, *tawjīh*, and interpretive consequences through supervised textual study. This staged framework is a review-derived proposal, not an empirically validated curriculum model (Abdul Hamid, 2023; Syafee et al., 2024).

A dialogic approach is preferable when the learning objective concerns conceptual plurality because students need opportunities to ask why readings differ and what makes a difference authoritative. Evidence from *qira'at* pedagogy points to the importance of deliberate teaching strategies, student engagement, and structured explanatory models (Daud & Ibrahim, 2019; Salihin et al., 2024, 2025). This does not displace *talaqqī* in practical recitation; it differentiates the method used to transmit performance from the method used to discuss historical and conceptual questions.

For practical recitation, *talaqqī* and direct correction remain central, while audio examples, guided comparison, and carefully selected digital resources can supplement not replace qualified instruction. The growing discussion of AI and digital tools in Qur'an and *qira'at* education further increases the need for source transparency and teacher mediation when learners encounter unfamiliar recitations online (Syed Aziz et al., 2025).

Teacher development should therefore be presented as an implementation requirement rather than as an assumed deficit in all PAI teachers. Empirical studies in specialist contexts have documented variation in *qira'at* teaching skills and recurring pedagogical challenges (Abdul Hamid, 2023; Salihin et al., 2024, 2025). Before wider PAI integration, professional development should focus on conceptual accuracy, limits of teacher competence, referral to qualified *qira'at* specialists, and age-appropriate explanation. The present review provides no basis for generalizing a competency deficit to all Indonesian PAI teachers.

Teaching materials should use technically accurate terminology and distinguish historical evidence from pedagogical analogy. Visual timelines of textual history, schematic representations of transmission, and authenticated audio examples may support explanation, but every example should identify its reading tradition and qualified source. Materials should also avoid implying that orthographic possibility alone validates a reading or that all recitational differences are equivalent (Hakim, 2018; Sidky, 2023).

Assessment in the proposed framework is likewise an educational recommendation rather than a research finding. Knowledge tasks may test distinctions among *qira'at*, *Sab'atu Aḥruf*, *Qira'at Sab'ah*, and *rasm*; performance tasks may assess careful listening or recitation only where qualified instruction is available; and reflective or discussion tasks may evaluate whether students can justify a respectful response to recognized difference. These indicators should be validated in future classroom research before being treated as evidence of learning effectiveness.

Discussion

The present synthesis clarifies three interrelated findings concerning the relationship between *qira'at*, *'Uthmānic* standardization, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI). First, canonical *qira'at* is best understood neither as unrestricted textual variation nor as merely optional pronunciation, but as a bounded plurality maintained through authoritative oral transmission while remaining constrained by linguistic acceptability and compatibility with the *'Uthmānic rasm*. Second, standardization and plurality are not mutually exclusive processes. The *'Uthmānic* written framework provides a stable communal textual boundary, whereas transmitted reading traditions preserve authorized variation within that boundary. Third, *Sab'atu Aḥruf* and the later canonical *Qira'at Sab'ah* belong to distinguishable historical and conceptual categories; consequently, the numerical correspondence between “seven” *aḥruf* and seven canonical readers should not be converted into an assumption of equivalence. Educationally, the review further shows that existing empirical work remains concentrated in specialist *qira'at*, *tahfiz*, Qur'anic-skills, and tertiary settings. Therefore, the proposed staged framework for general PAI constitutes a theoretically and historically grounded pedagogical proposition rather than evidence of demonstrated classroom effectiveness. This distinction is central to the contribution of the study because it prevents historical synthesis

from being translated prematurely into causal educational claims.

These findings are broadly consistent with recent international Qur'anic-studies research while offering a distinctive integrative interpretation. Sidky's (2020, 2023) analyses of regional codices and consonantal dotting provide strong grounds for treating written and oral evidence as interacting rather than competing dimensions of Qur'anic transmission. In particular, Sidky's (2023) evidence for inherited regional oral traditions challenges explanations that reduce canonical readings to later attempts to decipher an ambiguous consonantal text. Material-manuscript research similarly complicates any simplistic conception of a monolithic written transmission: Connolly and Posegay (2021), through their study of Qur'anic fragments from the Cairo Genizah, demonstrate the importance of orthographic and codicological evidence for reconstructing the Qur'an's material transmission. At another level, VanderMeulen's (2021) ethnographic investigation of recording all seven canonical readings in Morocco shows that *qira'at* authority remains fundamentally aural and relational even when recitation enters technologically mediated environments. The present synthesis converges with these studies in rejecting a binary opposition between oral plurality and textual stability. However, it extends them by conceptualising their interaction as a three-stage dialectic of tension, mediation, and constraint, thereby providing a framework that can subsequently be translated into pedagogical categories without claiming to resolve all historiographical controversies.

The educational significance of this bounded-plurality framework also resonates with international studies of Islamic religious education published between 2020 and 2026. Ulfat (2020) stresses the importance of empirical inquiry in moving Islamic religious education beyond assumptions about what religious instruction ought to achieve, while Tuna (2022) demonstrates that the quality of Islamic religious education is inseparable from teacher professionalisation and disciplinary competence. Likewise, Suhayib and Ansyari (2023) emphasise alignment among educational purposes, curriculum components, and contextual conditions, whereas Aseery (2024) highlights the importance of pedagogical design for learner motivation and engagement in religious education. These studies support the present article's insistence that introducing *qira'at* into PAI requires deliberate curriculum design rather than simply transferring specialist content into ordinary classrooms. The argument also converges with Umashankar's (2020) emphasis on the Qur'an as an aural and multisensory object of learning and with Agbaria's (2022) account of religious pluralism as an educational problem requiring careful engagement with multiple interpretations rather than unbounded relativism. More recently, Felsenthal and Agbaria (2026) advocate forms of critical Islamic education that connect religious knowledge with disciplined reflection, while Muis (2026) demonstrates the continuing importance of curriculum structure in translating religious-moderation values into educational goals, experiences, methods, and evaluation. Nevertheless, these international studies address broader religious education, pluralism, or pedagogy rather than *qira'at* specifically. They therefore strengthen the pedagogical plausibility of the present framework but cannot be treated as empirical evidence that teaching canonical reading diversity itself produces moderation, critical thinking, or tolerance.

The Indonesian context provides an equally important point of comparison. Research increasingly shows that Qur'anic and Islamic learning is embedded in institutional, technological, and locally mediated forms of religious authority. Pabbajah et al. (2021), for example, document a transition from exclusively face-to-face religious learning toward digitally mediated Islamic education among Indonesian university students, while Ghozali et al. (2022) show how TikTok has become a site for Qur'anic reading, teaching, and interpretation. These developments reinforce the present study's concern that digital accessibility does not eliminate the need for qualified transmission and source verification. At the textual-institutional level, Al Farisi (2023) demonstrates the complexities involved in producing acceptable Indonesian Qur'an translations, while Lukman (2024) shows that institutional interests can shape different state-authorised editions of *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*. Although translation and *qira'at* are distinct disciplines, these studies are relevant because both reveal that authoritative presentation of the Qur'an is mediated through scholarly and institutional processes rather than through texts in isolation. Indonesian research on PAI likewise supports a contextualised educational approach. Mulyana (2023), Mukhibat et al. (2024), and Subchi et al. (2022) demonstrate the importance of carefully operationalising religious moderation rather

than treating tolerance or moderation as automatic consequences of religious instruction. Research involving Sufian similarly indicates that Islamic education can benefit from pedagogical models that connect religious content with contextualised and participatory learning (Al Khansa et al., 2024), while Erlina et al. (2025) show that structured problem-based learning can create opportunities for reasoned engagement with religious-moderation values. Importantly, however, neither study concerns canonical *qira'at* directly. Their relevance is therefore pedagogical rather than evidentiary: they support contextual and dialogic PAI design, but they do not establish the effectiveness of the staged *qira'at* framework proposed here.

Theoretical, pedagogical, and policy implications. Theoretically, the findings refine the relationship between oral transmission and written standardization through the concept of bounded plurality: *rasm* establishes textual possibility and limitation, scholarly transmission specifies authoritative realization, and canonization regulates the relationship between the two. This model consequently avoids both an absolute-uniformity thesis and an unrestricted-variation thesis. Pedagogically, the implication is a differentiated rather than encyclopaedic incorporation of *qira'at* into PAI. At a basic level, students may recognise that more than one authoritative reading tradition exists; at an intermediate level, they may distinguish *Sab'atu Ahruf*, *Qira'at Sab'ah*, sanad, and *'Uthmānic rasm*; and only at specialist levels should students engage more deeply with transmission, *tawjīh*, and textual consequences. This progression corresponds to the staged proposal already developed in the manuscript. Digital media can supplement this sequence through authenticated recitation recordings, annotated comparisons, and visual transmission maps, but such resources should preserve provenance and qualified scholarly mediation; contemporary media-education scholarship similarly stresses critical source evaluation and teacher capacity in increasingly digital learning environments (Jumakulova & Kushieva, 2025). At the policy level, curriculum authorities should therefore prioritise terminological accuracy, authenticated digital resources, teacher professional development, and referral pathways to qualified *qira'at* specialists rather than requiring every general PAI teacher to become a specialist. Recent Islamic-education frameworks similarly emphasise curricular coherence and pedagogical innovation (Bin Hassan & Syafri, 2026; Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023). In contrast to the generic policy template concerning psychological well-being, no mental-health intervention can be inferred from the present evidence, because the review contains no mental-health measures or clinical data.

Novelty and contribution. The novelty of this study lies not simply in reviewing the history of variant Qur'anic readings, but in integrating Qur'anic textual history, oral transmission, canonization, and PAI pedagogy through the operational concept of bounded plurality. Rather than treating diversity and standardization as contradictory categories, the framework specifies how they mutually delimit one another through transmission, linguistic constraints, and *'Uthmānic rasm*. Methodologically, the article also makes an important evidentiary distinction between historical-textual findings, empirical educational evidence, and pedagogical propositions. This distinction enables the review to derive educational implications without presenting them as tested outcomes. In addition, the staged PAI framework translates specialist scholarship into progressively differentiated learning objectives, content, methods, and assessment while retaining clear limits on what should remain within qualified specialist instruction. The contribution is thus simultaneously conceptual and pedagogical: it provides a vocabulary for explaining authoritative Qur'anic plurality and a bounded mechanism for introducing that plurality into general Islamic education. This directly develops the novelty already articulated in the manuscript, where the interaction of *rasm* and oral transmission is used to delimit what PAI may reasonably teach.

Limitations and future research. The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the methodological boundaries of the review. The search strategy was structured but not database-exhaustive; the inclusion of Arabic, Malay, Indonesian, and English materials may introduce accessibility and language-selection bias; and the analytical corpus combines classical sources, modern historical-textual studies, empirical educational studies, and official documents with different evidentiary purposes. Moreover, bounded plurality is an interpretive synthesis rather than an independently validated theoretical model. Most importantly, no classroom observation, teacher interview, student assessment, experimental condition, or longitudinal evidence was generated, meaning that the proposed framework cannot yet be described as effective in improving Qur'anic

literacy, moderation, tolerance, or critical source evaluation. Future studies should therefore conduct more systematic database-based reviews, preserve explicit screening records, and empirically pilot the three-level framework across general PAI settings. Classroom research should validate age-appropriate materials and assessment instruments and measure conceptual understanding, recitation performance, source-verification competence, and attitudinal outcomes as separate constructs. Comparative studies across schools, madrasahs, pesantren, and specialist *qira'at* institutions could establish how teacher preparation and learner level condition implementation. Finally, emerging digital and AI-assisted Qur'anic learning warrants investigation into provenance, authenticity, expert mediation, and students' ability to distinguish canonical *qira'at* from unauthorised or incorrectly generated recitations. Such research would transform the framework developed here from a defensible review-derived proposition into an empirically testable model of Qur'anic literacy education.

Conclusion

The review concludes that *qira'at* plurality and '*Uthmānic* standardization are best interpreted as a relationship of bounded plurality. Recognized readings are preserved through scholarly transmission and constrained by linguistic and rasm-based criteria, while the '*Uthmānic* written tradition supplies a communal textual boundary rather than a mechanism that erases every authorized reading difference. Sab'atu Aḥruf should therefore not be collapsed into Qira'at Sab'ah, and the exact relationship between early authorized plurality and later canonical readings must remain open to the documented range of scholarly interpretation. The article's principal conceptual contribution is to operationalize this relationship as a dialectic of tension, mediation, and constraint rather than merely stating that diversity and standardization coexist.

For PAI, the evidence supports only a bounded pedagogical implication: *qira'at* may be introduced progressively to improve conceptual accuracy about authoritative reading diversity and to model disciplined source verification, while claims about moderation, critical thinking, or literacy gains remain hypotheses rather than demonstrated outcomes. The review is limited by non-exhaustive searching, heterogeneous source quality, interpretive coding, and the absence of classroom data. Future research should therefore pilot the staged framework in general PAI settings, validate age-appropriate learning materials and assessments, and test conceptual, performance, source-evaluation, and attitudinal outcomes as separate constructs.

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