

Mapping Qur'anic Reading Competence Among Muslims in Kendari City

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Fluent Qur'anic recitation is a fundamental religious competence for Muslims, yet prior studies indicate that this competence varies considerably and has rarely been mapped at a granular, city-wide level. This study aims to map the level of Qur'anic reading competence among Muslims in Kendari City, along with the barriers, supporting factors, and improvement efforts perceived by the community. A descriptive quantitative approach with a performance-test-based survey design was employed, involving 1,079 respondents proportionally distributed across 11 subdistricts, selected through stratified multistage random sampling. Data were analyzed descriptively and categorized using a normative reference standard. The results show that competence is predominantly at the moderate level (54.6%), followed by low (24.8%), high (12.1%), and very low (8.4%) categories, with a clear spatial gap: Kambu, Poasia, and Kendari Barat show relatively better attainment, whereas Mandonga, Nambo, and Abeli lag behind. Excessive gadget use during leisure time was the dominant barrier (61.4%), while awareness of the importance of Qur'anic reading was the strongest supporting factor (91.9%), and all proposed improvement efforts received near-unanimous agreement (96.7–99.9%). These findings provide an empirical basis for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local stakeholders to design targeted interventions for strengthening Qur'anic literacy across Kendari City.

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INTRODUCTION/PENDAHULUAN

The Qur'an holds a central position as the primary source of Islamic teaching, serving both as a sacred text recited in ritual worship and as an ethical and epistemological reference for a Muslim's life. Reading the Qur'an with precision — correct pronunciation (*makhraj*), consistent application of *tajweed*, and fluent delivery — is more than a mechanical skill; it functions as a

core religious competence through which a Muslim comes to grasp and internalize the meaning of the sacred text (Felsenthal & Agbaria, 2023). Prior work also links this competence to how intensively and how well a person practices worship, meaning weak reading ability may carry consequences for the broader religious quality of a community (Khabibullah et al., 2026).

Despite its central position, empirical studies over the past decade have consistently reported a gap between this normative ideal and the actual reading competence of Muslims. For example, an action-research study among 126 Indonesian nursing students reported that roughly three-quarters of them still could not recite the Qur'an fluently, even after more than ten years of formal religious schooling (Supriyadi & Julia, 2019). The picture is similar among educators: elementary school teachers' own Qur'anic literacy varies considerably, shaped by the religious habits and social capital they and their schools carry (Fuadi et al., 2026). These conditions indicate that low Qur'anic reading competence is not merely an individual issue, but a structural phenomenon rooted in variations in learning quality and socio-religious background across educational levels and regions.

Scholarly interest mirrors this concern at the global scale. A Scopus-based bibliometric review shows steadily rising output on Qur'an learning and cognition since the early 2010s (Ardiansyah et al., 2024), while a separate bibliometric study points to a post-2016 surge in research on digitalizing Qur'anic recitation, drawing contributors from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and even North America and Europe (Ramli et al., 2026). Conceptually, competence in the education literature is understood as multidimensional — cognitive, practical, and contextual-social elements that interact rather than operate separately (Mannonen et al., 2025) — so any instrument meant to capture it must likewise cover more than one dimension to reflect real variation in attainment. This holds for Qur'anic reading competence too, which weaves together cognitive (tajweed rules), psychomotor (makhraj accuracy), and affective (reading fluency) strands. Fluency in particular has a long history as a literacy construct, typically defined through three components — accuracy, rate, and prosody (Rasinski et al., 2022) — and this same pattern is closely tied to comprehension among second-language readers (Yang, 2021). More recently, natural-language-processing research has shown that mispronunciation during Qur'anic recitation can be identified and

diagnosed in a systematic way (El Kheir et al., 2025), lending further support to treating makhraj and tajweed as measurable indicators within a competence-mapping instrument.

Empirical precedents show that mapping of Qur'anic reading competence has been carried out at certain regional scales in Indonesia. One such precedent mapped Qur'anic literacy among 1,975 secondary school students in Bandung, West Java, and went on to propose learning strategies found effective for raising that competence (Supriyadi, 2022). Nevertheless, as far as the literature review conducted for this study shows, a comprehensive, systematic mapping study of Qur'anic reading competence based on a standardized instrument at the level of Kendari City — the capital of Southeast Sulawesi Province, with a heterogeneous Muslim population in terms of ethnic background, religious education pathway, and socio-economic strata — has not yet been available. This research gap is crucial to fill, given that accurate mapping data is a prerequisite for religious institutions, educational units, and local government in designing well-targeted Qur'anic literacy strengthening programs, rather than relying on general assumptions that are not based on local empirical evidence.

Based on the theoretical review above, this study is built on the conceptual framework that the level of Qur'anic reading competence is a dependent variable measured through three main dimensions — accuracy of letter articulation (makhraj), mastery of tajweed rules, and reading fluency — whose attainment is presumed to vary according to participants' demographic characteristics, including gender, age group, and subdistrict of residence, and to be influenced by the interaction between inhibiting and supporting factors at the individual, family, and environmental levels. This framing aligns with the broader view that religious competence is inherently multidimensional and shaped by context (Mannonen et al., 2025), so any mapping exercise needs to capture both the level of attainment and the contextual forces behind it. This variation in attainment is subsequently mapped descriptively to produce a

comprehensive picture of the distribution of Qur'anic reading competence levels among Muslims in Kendari City, which is expected to serve as an evidence-based foundation for formulating policies to strengthen Qur'anic literacy at the city level.

Building on this discussion, this study aims to systematically map the level of Qur'anic reading competence among Muslims in Kendari City, covering the dimensions of makhraj accuracy, tajweed mastery, and reading fluency, as well as to identify the inhibiting factors, supporting factors, and improvement efforts perceived by the community in each subdistrict. This study tests the argument that Qur'anic reading competence is not a uniform construct at the city level, but instead shows a systematic spatial gap between subdistricts as a function of variation in social, family, and learning-environment factors. This mapping is expected to contribute to enriching the evidence-based literature on religious competence, while also providing an empirical data foundation for the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Qur'anic education institutions, and local policymakers in formulating contextual Qur'anic literacy improvement intervention programs in Kendari City.

The significance of this study lies in two main aspects. Theoretically, this study extends the application of the reading fluency framework and the multidimensional competence model to the context of Qur'anic reading at a city-wide population scale, which has thus far been more widely applied in the context of Latin-script literacy or single-institution-scale samples. Practically, the subdistrict-based mapping results produced by this study provide a granular data foundation that can be directly used by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, local religious institutions, and religious education units in Kendari City to design proportional intervention programs tailored to the specific needs of each area, rather than applying uniform policies that ignore variation in attainment across regions.

METHOD/METODE PENELITIAN

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach with a performance-test-based survey

design, aiming to systematically map the level of Qur'anic reading competence without manipulating the research variables. The study was conducted in the administrative area of Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi Province, covering all 11 subdistricts as regional strata units, namely Kadia, Wua-wua, Baruga, Puuwatu, Kambu, Kendari Barat, Poasia, Kendari, Mandonga, Nambo, and Abeli. The study population comprises all Muslims residing in Kendari City who have completed basic religious education. Given the broad scope of the population, sampling was conducted through a stratified multistage random sampling technique, namely tiered sampling with subdistricts as regional strata, followed by proportional random selection of respondents within each stratum, an approach commonly favored in large-population educational research because it protects subgroup representation while sharpening estimation precision (George, 2021). Through this technique, 1,079 respondents were obtained, proportionally distributed across the 11 subdistricts.

Primary data were collected through an oral performance test of Qur'anic reading, administered directly by trained assessors — certified Qur'an teachers or qari/qariah — to each respondent, supplemented by a questionnaire on demographic data, inhibiting factors, supporting factors, and improvement efforts as supporting data. The assessment instrument was developed in the form of an analytic rubric covering three dimensions — makhraj accuracy, tajweed mastery, and reading fluency — with a graded rating scale for each dimension. Operationalization of the reading fluency dimension refers to the three fluency components well-established in literacy research, namely accuracy, rate, and prosody (Rasinski et al., 2022), while operationalization of the makhraj and tajweed dimensions refers to the mispronunciation detection and diagnosis framework developed in computational Qur'anic recitation assessment research (El Kheir et al., 2025). Instrument content validity was tested through expert judgment involving qiraat experts, educational measurement experts, and

Qur'anic education practitioners, and cross-assessor consistency was checked using the Kappa coefficient for inter-rater reliability (Mat Said et al., 2022).

The collected data were analyzed descriptively using frequency, mean, and percentage statistics for each dimension. Each respondent's composite score was categorized into four attainment levels using the Norm-Referenced Guideline (Pedoman Acuan Norma, PAN), namely high ($X \geq 3.25$), moderate ($2.50 \leq X < 3.25$), low ($1.75 \leq X < 2.50$), and very low ($X < 1.75$). The categorization results were then cross-tabulated with demographic variables and subdistrict regions to produce a distribution map of Qur'anic reading competence levels among Muslims in Kendari City, presented both narratively and in tabular form as a basis for policy recommendations.

This study was conducted with due regard to research ethics principles involving human subjects. All respondents were given an

explanation of the study's purpose and provided oral informed consent prior to undergoing the performance test, accompanied by a guarantee of identity confidentiality and the use of data solely for academic purposes and policy formulation. Participation was voluntary, allowing respondents to withdraw at any time without any consequence, and the field data collection procedure received support from the Kendari City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs as the implementing partner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research data were collected from 1079 respondents proportionally distributed across the 11 subdistricts of Kendari City, in accordance with the tiered sampling procedure described in the Method section.

Findings

Respondent characteristics by gender in each subdistrict are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender per Subdistrict

Subdistrict	Male (f)	Male (%)	Female (f)	Female (%)	N
Kadia	61	61.0%	39	39.0%	100
Wua-wua	34	42.0%	47	58.0%	81
Baruga	40	40.0%	60	60.0%	100
Puuwatu	54	54.0%	46	46.0%	100
Kambu	43	43.0%	57	57.0%	100
Kendari Barat	47	47.0%	53	53.0%	100
Poasia	51	51.0%	49	49.0%	100
Kendari	66	66.0%	34	34.0%	100
Mandongga	54	54.0%	46	46.0%	100
Nambo	52	52.5%	47	47.5%	99
Abeli	61	61.6%	38	38.4%	99
Kendari City	563	52.2%	516	47.8%	1079

Source: primary data processed, 2026.

In aggregate, the composition of respondents at the city level is relatively balanced, with a proportion of 52.2% male and 47.8% female, although it varies considerably between subdistricts. The age distribution of respondents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Age Group per Subdistrict (frequency)

Subdistrict	<25 yrs	26–32 yrs	33–39 yrs	>40 yrs	N
Kadia	51	28	16	5	100
Wua-wua	59	14	6	2	81
Baruga	71	13	9	7	100
Puuwatu	40	22	18	20	100
Kambu	61	24	5	10	100
Kendari Barat	58	23	8	11	100
Poasia	51	38	5	6	100
Kendari	79	9	6	6	100
Mandongga	65	14	11	10	100
Nambo	38	27	16	18	99
Abeli	48	27	14	10	99
Kendari City	621	239	114	105	1079

Source: primary data processed, 2026.

The age distribution shows a consistent pattern across all subdistricts, namely the dominance of the young productive-age group under 25 years (57.6%), followed by the 26–32 age group (22.2%), 33–39 (10.6%), and above 40 (9.7%). The level of Qur'anic reading competence is consolidated in Table 3.

Table 3. Consolidated Level of Qur'anic Reading Competence per Subdistrict

Subdistrict	N	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low	Dominant Category
Kadia	100	4.0%	56.0%	36.0%	4.0%	Moderate
Wua-wua	81	21.0%	55.6%	13.6%	9.9%	Moderate
Baruga	100	6.0%	74.0%	17.0%	3.0%	Moderate
Puuwatu	100	5.0%	49.0%	40.0%	6.0%	Moderate

Kambu	100	37.0%	45.0%	14.0%	4.0%	Moderate
Kendari Barat	100	10.0%	81.0%	9.0%	0.0%	Moderate
Poasia	100	30.0%	57.0%	10.0%	3.0%	Moderate
Kendari	100	10.0%	68.0%	18.0%	4.0%	Moderate
Mandongga	100	0.0%	34.0%	48.0%	18.0%	Low
Nambo	99	1.0%	47.5%	28.3%	23.2%	Moderate
Abeli	99	11.1%	33.3%	37.4%	18.2%	Low
Kendari City	1079	12.1%	54.6%	24.8%	8.4%	Moderate

Source: primary data processed, 2026. Percentages calculated from the N of each subdistrict.

In aggregate, Qur'anic reading competence in Kendari City is dominated by the moderate category (54.6%), followed by low (24.8%), high (12.1%), and very low (8.4%). Nine of the eleven subdistricts show a dominant moderate category, whereas Mandonga and Abeli subdistricts show a dominant low category; Kambu subdistrict recorded the highest proportion of the high category (37%), while Kendari Barat is the only subdistrict with no respondents in the very low category (0%). Inhibiting factors, supporting factors, and improvement efforts are consolidated in Tables 4, 5, and 6.

Table 4. Percentage of Respondents Answering “Yes” for Each Inhibiting Factor per Subdistrict (%)

Subdistrict	Parents	Household	Learning Env.	Workload	Peers	Gadget	Trends	Shyness
Kadia	47.0	48.0	57.0	77.0	54.0	67.0	63.0	50.0
Wua-wua	11.1	14.8	27.2	72.8	43.2	70.4	42.0	24.7
Baruga	10.0	21.0	23.0	43.0	37.0	56.0	41.0	21.0
Puuwatu	15.0	11.0	16.0	71.0	57.0	77.0	68.0	56.0
Kambu	20.0	13.0	25.0	45.0	46.0	58.0	40.0	22.0
Kendari Barat	3.0	2.0	2.0	4.0	1.0	4.0	2.0	4.0
Poasia	10.0	15.0	12.0	36.0	51.0	74.0	32.0	20.0
Kendari	13.0	15.0	18.0	27.0	31.0	47.0	30.0	22.0
Mandongga	31.0	24.0	34.0	61.0	62.0	72.0	55.0	54.0
Nambo	43.4	60.6	63.6	50.5	59.6	66.7	63.6	44.4
Abeli	26.3	39.4	47.5	80.8	56.6	85.9	84.8	56.6

Kendari City	21.0	24.1	29.6	51.3	45.3	61.4	47.5	34.2
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Notes: Parents=insufficient parental encouragement; Household=unsupportive home environment; Learning Env.=unsupportive learning environment; Workload=burden of tasks/work; Peers=peer influence; Gadget=greater interest in playing with gadgets; Trends=preoccupation with current trends; Shyness=embarrassment/reluctance to start again. Source: primary data processed, 2026.

Table 5. Percentage of Respondents Answering “Yes” for Each Supporting Factor per Subdistrict (%)

Subdistrict	Parental Encouragement	Environment	Personal Interest	Awareness of Importance
Kadia	80.0	61.0	86.0	89.0
Wua-wua	90.1	81.5	90.1	95.1
Baruga	93.0	84.0	97.0	95.0
Puuwatu	94.0	88.0	88.0	92.0
Kambu	89.0	81.0	91.0	98.0
Kendari Barat	93.0	93.0	100.0	99.0
Poasia	92.0	88.0	90.0	92.0
Kendari	92.0	92.0	90.0	91.0
Mandongga	85.0	78.0	91.0	89.0
Nambo	76.8	61.6	94.9	99.0
Abeli	76.8	59.6	66.7	72.7
Kendari City	87.4	78.9	89.5	91.9

Source: primary data processed, 2026.

Table 6. Percentage of Respondents Answering “Agree” for Each Improvement Effort per Subdistrict (%)

Subdistrict	Home Habituation	Qur'an School (TPA) Enrollment	Teacher Welfare	Government Program	Facilities
Kadia	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Wua-wua	100.0	100.0	100.0	98.8	97.5

Baruga	100.0	99.0	98.0	93.0	91.0
Puuwatu	100.0	94.0	97.0	93.0	91.0
Kambu	100.0	99.0	100.0	97.0	94.0
Kendari Barat	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Poasia	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.0	99.0
Kendari	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.0	98.0
Mandongga	100.0	97.0	99.0	98.0	94.0
Nambo	99.0	96.0	100.0	96.0	99.0
Abeli	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Kendari City	99.9	98.6	99.4	97.6	96.7

Source: primary data processed, 2026.

In aggregate, the most frequently selected inhibiting factor is the tendency to play with gadgets during leisure time (61.4%), followed by workload/task burden (51.3%), current trends (47.5%), and peer influence (45.3%), while the highest supporting factors are awareness of the importance of reading the Qur'an (91.9%), personal interest (89.5%), and parental encouragement (87.4%). All proposed improvement efforts received agreement ranging from 96.7% to 99.9% across all subdistricts.

Analysis and Discussion

The age distribution pattern of respondents, dominated by the young productive-age group under 25 years (57.6%) across all subdistricts, indicates that young people are the primary target group for Qur'anic literacy strengthening programs in Kendari City, while also being the group most vulnerable to the gadget and current-trend barriers shown in Table 4. The relatively balanced gender composition at the city level (52.2% male, 47.8% female), although varying sharply between subdistricts such as Kendari (66.0% male) and Baruga (60.0% female), indicates that the Qur'anic reading competence gap in Kendari City is more influenced by regional and social-environment factors than by

gender alone, consistent with this study's emphasis on the importance of a spatially targeted intervention approach rather than a demographically uniform one.

The dominance of the moderate category in most subdistricts is consistent with previous findings documenting that Muslims' Qur'anic reading competence, including at the higher-education level, has not fully reached a fluent standard despite years of formal religious education (Supriyadi & Julia, 2019). The considerable variation between subdistricts, particularly the gap between Kambu (37% high category) and Mandonga and Abeli (dominant low category), confirms that religious competence attainment is not determined solely by individual factors, but is also shaped by the religious habitus and social capital of respondents' residential environments (Fuadi et al., 2026). Because this competence has also been linked to how intensively people practice worship (Khabibullah et al., 2026), the subdistrict-level spatial gap identified here carries direct practical weight for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Kendari City government, who can use it to prioritize tiered Qur'anic literacy interventions — with Mandonga, Abeli, and Nambo as the top-priority areas.

Gadgets emerging as the leading barrier fits a broader pattern documented in recent systematic reviews: screen time among children and adolescents worldwide has been rising, with entertainment and social-media use accelerating further after the pandemic (Mori et al., 2026). This finding is also coherent with research trends showing the rapid digitalization of various aspects of religious life (Ramli et al., 2026), which on one hand opens opportunities for digital-based Qur'an learning, but on the other hand risks becoming a competitor for leisure time if not balanced with adequate digital literacy. The implication is that interventions to improve Qur'anic reading competence in Kendari City need to also consider strategies for managing device-use time, including the possible integration of digital Qur'an learning applications as a means of redirecting respondents' leisure time.

That parental encouragement stood out as a supporting factor echoes systematic-review evidence on parental involvement in education, which links home-based learning support and family-school communication to better learning outcomes for children (Musengamana, 2023). Meanwhile, the relatively lower level of support from the residential environment compared to the other three factors strengthens the argument that religious competence is a socially constructed construct rather than solely the result of individual learning, so strengthening the surrounding ecosystem — such as revitalizing majelis taklim (religious study groups) and Qur'anic education parks (TPA) — should be one of the policy priorities.

The near-unanimous agreement on every proposed improvement effort suggests that residents see strengthening Qur'anic reading competence as a responsibility distributed across several fronts at once — consistent with the broader claim that religious competence, being multidimensional, calls for intervention at more than one layer simultaneously (Mannonen et al., 2025). Strong support for improving Qur'an teacher welfare likewise aligns with the argument that quality assurance in religious education — spanning both competence standards and

instructor welfare — is a structural precondition for sustaining high-quality learning and assessment practices (Poncini, 2023). Overall, the spatial gap mapped granularly at the subdistrict level (George, 2021) constitutes the main contribution of this study, as well as an empirical data foundation that can be directly utilized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Kendari City government, and local Qur'anic education institutions to design targeted, proportional interventions tailored to the specific needs of each area.

On the theoretical side, these results add to the religious-competence literature by showing that subdistrict-level spatial mapping surfaces variation that a single city-wide aggregate would obscure — reinforcing the point that competence needs to be measured multidimensionally and in context if it is to reflect real attainment (Mannonen et al., 2025). Practically, these findings point to three complementary policy steps for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Kendari City government: tiered intervention prioritizing subdistricts with low attainment categories, a digital literacy program integrated with Qur'an learning to offset the dominance of gadgets as the primary barrier, and strengthening the welfare and competence standards of Qur'an teachers as a prerequisite for the sustainability of learning quality across all subdistricts.

CONCLUSION

This study mapped the level of Qur'anic reading competence among Muslims in Kendari City based on data from 1079 respondents across 11 subdistricts. The most important finding, and the one that most strongly confirms the urgency of this study, is the revelation of a sharp, previously undocumented spatial gap: nine subdistricts fall into the dominant moderate category, while Mandonga and Abeli fall into the dominant low category, with Mandonga having no respondents at all in the high category. This gap is not caused by a lack of motivation or normative community support, which was in fact recorded as consistently high (87.4–99.9%), but rather by structural implementation factors, particularly the tendency of young people to use gadgets during

leisure time, which is far more pronounced in the lagging subdistricts.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that the Kendari City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs prioritize a tiered Qur'anic literacy strengthening program, giving precedence to Mandonga, Abeli, and Nambo subdistricts as the primary intervention areas, accompanied by a digital literacy program that integrates Qur'an learning into young people's social-media activities, as well as improved welfare and competence standards for Qur'an teachers as a prerequisite for sustaining learning quality. Local government and local Qur'anic education institutions are also advised to make use of the granular database produced by this study as a reference in formulating measurable, tiered strategic plans for strengthening religious literacy in Kendari City.

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The research design is a descriptive cross-sectional

one, and therefore cannot be used to draw causal inferences; data on inhibiting factors, supporting factors, and improvement efforts were collected through respondent self-reports, which are potentially subject to social-desirability bias; the number of respondents was not entirely uniform across subdistricts (N=81–100); and the research instrument did not yet cover further dimensions such as variation in qiraat or the depth of meaning comprehension (*tadabbur*). These mapping results are also specific to the Kendari City context, so generalization to other regions requires separate replication. Therefore, further longitudinal or experimental research, with a broader instrument dimension coverage and a more varied sample, is needed to test the effectiveness of the recommended interventions and to build a comparative database on the level of Qur'anic reading competence among Muslims nationally. With more in-depth and comprehensive results, better-targeted policies for strengthening Qur'anic literacy can be formulated.

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