

From Tradition to Educational Institution: The Evolution of MTQ in Strengthening Qur'anic Education in Asahan

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ABSTRACT

Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) has evolved beyond a Qur'anic recitation competition into an important instrument for strengthening Qur'anic education and preserving Islamic cultural traditions in Indonesia. However, studies examining the historical transformation of MTQ as a community-based educational institution remain limited, particularly at the local level. This study investigates the historical development and educational transformation of MTQ in Asahan Regency from 1946 to 2024. This study employed a qualitative historical approach using heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Data were collected from archival documents, government records, LPTQ reports, historical photographs, oral history interviews with religious leaders and MTQ organizers, and relevant academic literature. Data triangulation was applied to enhance the credibility of the historical reconstruction. The findings reveal that MTQ in Asahan originated as a community initiative to revive Qur'anic learning following the Japanese occupation and gradually evolved into an institutionalized Qur'anic education system. Between 1970 and 2010, MTQ expanded through increasing government involvement, broader organizational coordination, and structured participant development. Since 2011, institutional strengthening has been characterized by formal collaboration among LPTQ, government agencies, pesantren, madrasahs, and Qur'anic learning centers, resulting in continuous coaching systems, expanded educational functions, and improved institutional capacity. MTQ in Asahan represents a sustainable community-based Qur'anic educational institution rather than merely a religious competition. This study contributes to Islamic education scholarship by demonstrating how local religious initiatives can evolve into institutionalized educational systems that strengthen Qur'anic literacy, educational sustainability, and the preservation of Islamic educational heritage.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Qur'anic education constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of Islamic education, aiming not only to develop learners' ability to read the Qur'an correctly but also to cultivate religious understanding, moral character, spiritual awareness, and lifelong commitment to Islamic values. In Indonesia, Qur'anic

education has historically been delivered through various formal, non-formal, and community-based institutions, including *pesantren*, madrasah, Qur'anic learning centers (*Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an*), and community religious organizations. These educational settings collectively contribute to strengthening Qur'anic literacy and preserving Islamic traditions across generations. Consequently, Qur'anic education should not be understood merely as instructional activities focused on recitation skills but as a comprehensive educational ecosystem that integrates cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and spiritual development (Hakim et al., 2022; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2023).

Among various community-based initiatives supporting Qur'anic education in Indonesia, Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) occupies a distinctive position. Although widely recognized as a Qur'anic recitation competition, MTQ has gradually evolved into an educational institution that promotes the systematic development of Qur'anic competencies through continuous training, mentoring, assessment, and public appreciation of excellence in Qur'anic learning. Contemporary MTQ no longer functions solely as a competitive event but has become an integral component of Qur'anic education by encouraging learners to master *tajwid*, *makhraj*, memorization, interpretation, public presentation, and ethical values embedded in the Qur'an. Furthermore, MTQ provides opportunities for collaboration among educational institutions, religious scholars, government agencies, and local communities to strengthen sustainable Qur'anic learning. Recent studies demonstrate that structured MTQ coaching contributes not only to improving technical recitation skills but also to strengthening discipline, religious character, and students' motivation to learn the Qur'an.

The educational significance of MTQ has received increasing scholarly attention. Previous studies have discussed MTQ as a form of aesthetic reception of the Qur'an (Jannah, 2016), a medium of Islamic communication and *da'wah* (Ronaldi, 2022; Ronaldi et al., 2023), and an instrument for improving Qur'anic education and community religious development (Rusdiansyah, 2023). Other scholars have examined institutional management within the Institute for the Development of Qur'anic Recitation (Lembaga Pengembangan Tilawatil Qur'an [LPTQ]), emphasizing the importance of structured coaching systems, professional trainers, and sustainable educational programs in developing competent *qāri'* and *qāri'ah* (Arfa, 2016; Rahman, 2021; Zaki et al., 2021). More recent educational studies also indicate that MTQ-based coaching enhances students' Qur'anic literacy, spiritual character, and learning motivation through systematic instructional activities rather than isolated competition events.

Despite these contributions, existing studies predominantly examine MTQ from functional, managerial, or communicative perspectives. Research has generally focused on competition management, participant coaching, *da'wah*, or aesthetic appreciation, while relatively limited attention has been given to understanding MTQ as a historical educational institution that has evolved through long-term interactions between communities, religious leaders, educational institutions, and government organizations. Likewise, studies rarely explain how local community initiatives gradually transformed into structured educational systems that continuously produce Qur'anic learning, institutional capacity, and educational regeneration. Consequently, the historical evolution of MTQ as a community-based educational institution remains insufficiently explored within the literature on Islamic education.

This gap is particularly evident in studies concerning the historical development of MTQ in Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. Historical records indicate that Qur'anic recitation competitions were organized in Pondok Bungur Village as early as February 12, 1946, several years before the implementation of the first National MTQ. Rather than emerging from formal governmental programs, these early activities were initiated by local religious scholars and community leaders to revive Qur'anic learning, rebuild religious life, and educate the younger generation during the difficult post-war period. Historical documents and local archives suggest that MTQ initially functioned as a community learning movement where Qur'anic recitation, moral education, and religious mentoring were integrated into collective educational practices before gradually becoming institutionalized. This historical experience offers an important opportunity to understand how local educational initiatives

contribute to the broader development of Islamic education in Indonesia (Indonesia, 1989; Syahputra, 2025; Berita Merdeka Online, 2025).

However, scholarly reconstruction of this educational transformation remains limited. Existing documentation concerning MTQ in Asahan is scattered across local archives, organizational reports, historical newspapers, photographs, and oral testimonies that have not been systematically synthesized through rigorous historical inquiry. As a result, there is still limited understanding of how MTQ in Asahan evolved from a community-based Qur'anic learning movement into an institutionalized educational system involving LPTQ, local government, Islamic educational institutions, pesantren, and Qur'anic training centers. Addressing this issue is important because understanding the historical evolution of educational institutions provides valuable insights into how community participation, educational leadership, and institutional collaboration contribute to sustainable educational development.

This study therefore aims to reconstruct the historical development of MTQ in Asahan Regency from 1946 to 2024 while examining its transformation as a community-based Qur'anic educational institution. Employing a qualitative historical approach through heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Gottschalk, 1985; Kuntowijoyo, 2013), this study integrates archival records, official documents, organizational reports, oral history interviews, historical photographs, and relevant literature to analyze the educational evolution of MTQ across nearly eight decades. Rather than viewing MTQ merely as a religious competition, this research conceptualizes MTQ as a dynamic educational institution that has progressively developed structured systems of coaching, curriculum-like learning activities, talent identification, educational leadership, and institutional collaboration supporting lifelong Qur'anic learning.

The novelty of this study lies in four major contributions. First, it reconstructs the educational history of MTQ in Asahan over almost eighty years using multiple historical sources subjected to critical verification. Second, it explains how community initiatives gradually evolved into a sustainable Qur'anic educational institution supported by government, LPTQ, pesantren, schools, and local communities. Third, it extends current scholarship by positioning MTQ within the discourse of Islamic education rather than limiting it to competition, *da'wah*, or cultural festivals. Finally, this study enriches the historiography of Islamic education by demonstrating that local religious traditions can become sustainable educational institutions capable of strengthening Qur'anic literacy, preserving Islamic cultural heritage, developing future Qur'anic educators, and fostering religious character across generations.

The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of Islamic education. Theoretically, the study expands understanding of how community-based religious traditions evolve into sustainable educational institutions that support Qur'anic learning beyond formal schooling. Practically, the findings provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, LPTQ administrators, educational institutions, and local governments regarding the development of structured Qur'anic education, institutional strengthening, community participation, and the preservation of local educational heritage. By situating MTQ within the broader framework of Islamic educational development, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the role of community-based educational institutions in promoting Qur'anic literacy and strengthening Islamic education in contemporary Indonesia.

2. METHODS

This research was conducted in Asahan Regency, North Sumatra Province, with a specific focus on Pondok Bungur Village, Rawang Panca Arga District, which was chosen because of its historical significance as the location of the first Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) in Asahan in 1946. This event marked the starting point for the development of MTQ in the region, expanding to the provincial and national levels. This research used a qualitative approach with historical methods. According to (Kuntowijoyo., 2013) the historical method aims to reconstruct past events systematically and objectively

through the process of collecting, evaluating, verifying, and interpreting relevant sources. In this context, historical sources are anything that directly or indirectly provides information about past events (Abdurrahman, 2011). Therefore, this research emphasizes the importance of using diverse and accountable sources. In addition, the data collection stage is a very important initial step because the quality of research results is largely determined by the completeness and accuracy of the sources obtained (Sjamsuddin, 2016), so this process is directed at finding valid past facts.

Data were collected using multiple strategies to ensure the validity and richness of historical reconstruction. Written documents, such as official government decrees on MTQ, reports from the Asahan LPTQ, meeting minutes, and newspaper articles, served as primary sources to trace the chronological development of MTQ. Physical artifacts and archival photographs, including awards, certificates, and images of the first MTQ in 1946, provided corroborative evidence to strengthen the historical narrative. Additionally, oral history interviews were conducted with religious leaders, local officials, former participants, winners, and community members involved in MTQ organization. These interviews offered valuable information not recorded in written sources, including motivations, challenges, and socio-cultural dynamics related to MTQ's implementation.

The study draws on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official archival records, LPTQ documents, historical newspapers, personal accounts of founders and participants, photographs, and certificates. These were supplemented with in-depth interviews to capture undocumented historical events. Secondary sources, such as books on MTQ history, local histories of Asahan, Islamic cultural studies, and previous academic research, provided context and supported the verification of primary data.

Data analysis followed a rigorous historical approach consisting of four main stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Gottschalk, 1985). The heuristics stage involved systematically identifying and collecting relevant sources, including archival materials, government documents, photographs, interviews, and media reports. Verification included both external and internal criticism to assess the authenticity and credibility of the sources. External criticism evaluated the physical originality of the documents, while internal criticism assessed the reliability and consistency of the content. Interpretation involved contextualizing the verified facts within the social, political, and religious circumstances of Asahan to understand the significance of MTQ in community life. Finally, historiography entailed organizing and presenting the findings in a chronological and analytical narrative, reconstructing MTQ development from its inception in 1946 to contemporary practices in 2024.

By combining multiple sources, rigorous verification, and contextual interpretation, this research ensures the accuracy and reliability of historical reconstruction. The methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of MTQ as a socio-religious phenomenon, highlighting its origins, evolution, and impact on the cultural and religious identity of the Asahan community. The approach is sufficiently detailed to enable replication and provides a clear framework for other researchers interested in the historical study of local cultural and religious practices.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Historical Origins of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an in Asahan Regency (1946)

Historical evidence collected from archival documents, official records, oral history interviews, and supporting historical literature indicates that the first Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) in Asahan Regency was organized on February 12, 1946, in Pondok Bungur Village, Rawang Panca Arga District, North Sumatra. The available documentary evidence consistently identifies this event as one of the earliest documented Qur'anic recitation competitions organized at the community level in Indonesia. The historical reconstruction further shows that the establishment of the MTQ occurred during the immediate post-independence period, when local Muslim communities sought to restore religious activities that had been disrupted during the Japanese occupation. Historical documents

preserved by local institutions, complemented by testimonies from community leaders and religious figures, consistently identify Pondok Bungur as the location where the earliest organized MTQ activities in Asahan were conducted.

The collected archival materials indicate that Pondok Bungur was selected because it provided relatively stable environmental conditions following the end of the Japanese occupation. Historical records describe the village as an area that had experienced comparatively limited physical destruction and retained sufficient public space to accommodate community gatherings. Documentary sources further show that religious facilities, including the local mosque and surrounding communal spaces, remained functional and were subsequently utilized for organizing Qur'anic learning activities and the MTQ event. Contemporary historical records also indicate that the accessibility of the village facilitated the participation of representatives from neighboring communities within Asahan Regency. These conditions enabled the implementation of an organized religious event involving participants, community members, religious scholars, and local leaders.

Archival documents further record that the implementation of the MTQ coincided with a period of social transition following Indonesian independence. Historical sources describe the post-war period as a time during which religious and community activities gradually resumed after prolonged disruption. The official date of February 12, 1946, appears consistently across historical documents examined in this study, providing chronological evidence regarding the organization of the event. Oral testimonies collected from local informants similarly recount that the activity represented one of the earliest large-scale religious gatherings conducted after the restoration of local security conditions. The convergence of documentary and oral evidence provides a chronological framework for reconstructing the early development of MTQ in Asahan.

Historical evidence demonstrates that religious considerations constituted an important background for organizing the 1946 MTQ. Archival records describe efforts by local religious leaders to revive Qur'anic recitation activities that had declined during the occupation period. Community testimonies consistently report that Qur'anic learning circles (*halaqah*), recitation gatherings, and mosque-based educational activities gradually resumed prior to the organization of the MTQ. The available documents indicate that the competition was closely associated with broader efforts to encourage community participation in Qur'anic recitation and religious learning. Several interview participants also recalled that religious scholars encouraged villagers to improve their recitation skills through collective preparation before participating in the event. These historical accounts suggest that the MTQ was organized alongside ongoing Qur'anic educational activities conducted within the local community.

The documentary evidence also reveals the existence of strong community participation throughout the preparation and implementation of the MTQ. Historical records describe the involvement of village residents in preparing venues, coordinating participants, and supporting logistical arrangements. Oral history interviews similarly emphasize that community members voluntarily contributed labor, facilities, and financial assistance to ensure the successful organization of the event. Archival materials indicate that the preparation process involved cooperation among religious scholars, community elders, youth organizations, and local residents. Contemporary reports preserved within local historical documentation further note that the event attracted public attendance beyond the immediate village, illustrating broad community engagement during its implementation.

The historical reconstruction identifies several prominent individuals who played significant roles in organizing the first MTQ. Documentary records consistently identify M. Ali Umar as the principal initiator responsible for coordinating the event. Additional archival materials record the involvement of Husin Kamal and H. M. Tahir Abdullah as members of the organizing committee. Historical documents further describe an administrative structure that included leadership, secretarial responsibilities, financial management, judging committees, and operational coordination. Surviving committee records indicate that responsibilities were distributed among multiple individuals according to organizational functions. Available documentation also records the participation of women in

several committee activities, reflecting their involvement in supporting the implementation of the event.

Archival documents and organizational records indicate that the objectives of the 1946 MTQ extended beyond the conduct of a Qur'anic recitation competition. Official historical documents describe several intended purposes, including encouraging wider community participation in Qur'anic recitation, supporting the revitalization of mosque-based religious activities, promoting the learning of proper Qur'anic recitation, and providing opportunities for young participants to demonstrate their recitation abilities. Oral testimonies likewise describe the MTQ as an event attended by children, adolescents, adult participants, religious scholars, and community members, suggesting broad demographic participation. Historical documentation also records that Qur'anic recitation constituted the central activity throughout the implementation of the event, while supporting religious gatherings and community interactions accompanied the competition.

The collected historical sources further indicate that the organization of the MTQ contributed to the continuity of similar activities in subsequent years. Archival evidence documents the gradual expansion of Qur'anic recitation competitions to broader administrative levels within Asahan Regency. Historical records preserved by local institutions demonstrate increasing community participation, the emergence of more structured organizational arrangements, and the involvement of local governmental authorities during later periods. Although these subsequent developments are discussed separately in the following sections, the available evidence identifies the 1946 event in Pondok Bungur as the earliest documented reference point within the historical trajectory reconstructed in this study.

Overall, the empirical evidence obtained from archival records, official documents, oral history interviews, photographs, and supporting historical literature consistently documents that the first MTQ in Asahan Regency was organized in Pondok Bungur Village on February 12, 1946, through the collective participation of religious leaders and local communities. The available historical sources record the geographical setting, chronological sequence, organizational structure, principal actors, community involvement, and documented objectives associated with the event, providing the empirical basis for reconstructing the earliest phase of MTQ development in Asahan Regency.

3.1.2 Development of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an in Asahan Regency During the Transitional Period (1970–2010)

Historical documents and institutional records indicate that the period between 1970 and 2010 represented an important stage in the organizational development of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) in Asahan Regency. During these four decades, MTQ activities expanded from community-organized events into regular district-level programs supported administratively by the local government. Archival records demonstrate that the implementation of MTQ became increasingly systematic, with regular scheduling, broader participant representation from sub-districts, and greater involvement of regional government institutions in planning and financing the activities. Official reports further document a gradual increase in the number of competition branches, participants, organizing committees, and supporting institutions throughout this period.

Institutional documents show that responsibility for organizing MTQ during this period was largely coordinated through the Regional Government, particularly the Public Welfare Division (*Bagian Kesejahteraan Rakyat*), which facilitated administrative preparation, budgeting, and event implementation. Although the Institute for the Development of Qur'anic Recitation (Lembaga Pengembangan Tilawatil Qur'an [LPTQ]) had begun to be recognized within organizational structures, archival records indicate that its institutional role remained limited and had not yet been supported by a permanent organizational framework. Committee documents reveal that organizing structures were generally established specifically for each annual MTQ, with committee members appointed according to the needs of individual events rather than through a permanent institutional arrangement. Official reports similarly indicate that committee responsibilities included participant registration, competition management, judging coordination, accommodation, finance, and logistical preparation.

Available documentary evidence further indicates that coordination among government agencies, religious institutions, and community organizations gradually expanded throughout this period. Government records document the participation of local administrative offices, religious affairs institutions, educational organizations, and community leaders in preparing and implementing MTQ activities. Meeting minutes and administrative correspondence preserved in institutional archives demonstrate increasing cooperation among these stakeholders in determining competition schedules, participant selection procedures, judging panels, and technical regulations. Nevertheless, official records also indicate that organizational procedures varied across implementation periods because standardized operational guidelines had not yet been formally established.

Historical documentation also records the expansion of participant coaching activities during this transitional period. Institutional reports indicate that training programs were generally organized prior to the annual MTQ rather than implemented continuously throughout the year. Coaching activities primarily focused on preparing selected participants representing districts and sub-districts. Archival documents identify *tajwid*, *makhraj*, vocal technique (*nagham*), memorization, and performance preparation as the principal components of participant training. Interview data collected from former participants and local religious leaders similarly describe coaching sessions conducted in mosques, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), and community Qur'anic learning centers under the supervision of experienced *qāri'*, *qāri'ah*, and religious scholars. The duration and intensity of coaching programs varied across districts depending on the availability of instructors, facilities, and financial resources.

Archival materials further demonstrate that participant recruitment relied primarily on local educational and religious institutions. Records indicate that mosques, *pesantren*, madrasahs, Qur'anic learning centers, and community religious organizations served as the principal sources for identifying prospective participants. Local selection events were conducted in several sub-districts before representatives advanced to the regency-level competition. Administrative reports reveal that successful participants subsequently received additional coaching before representing Asahan Regency in provincial MTQ competitions. Historical records also indicate that many instructors involved in participant preparation served voluntarily within their respective communities, while coaching activities were organized through local religious networks rather than centralized institutional programs.

Documentary evidence also records a gradual expansion in the number and diversity of competition branches implemented during this period. Initially focused primarily on Qur'anic recitation (*tilawah*), MTQ programs subsequently incorporated additional categories including *Hifzhil Qur'an* (Qur'anic memorization), *Fahmil Qur'an*, *Syarhil Qur'an*, Qur'anic calligraphy, and other branches following developments introduced at provincial and national levels. Official competition guidelines preserved within institutional archives document revisions to technical regulations, assessment criteria, and judging procedures corresponding to the expansion of competition categories. Administrative records further indicate increases in participant numbers across multiple branches over successive implementation periods.

Historical reports additionally demonstrate increasing public participation in MTQ implementation throughout the 1970–2010 period. Local government reports, newspaper documentation, and interview testimonies consistently describe community attendance during opening ceremonies, competitions, and closing events. Community members participated not only as spectators but also as volunteers supporting accommodation, transportation, venue preparation, food services, and event logistics. Several archival photographs preserved within local historical collections illustrate the involvement of community organizations, youth groups, educational institutions, and religious leaders during MTQ activities. Official reports also record the participation of schools and Islamic educational institutions in supporting cultural performances accompanying the competitions.

Financial records and administrative documents indicate that funding for MTQ implementation increasingly originated from regional government budgets while continuing to receive supplementary contributions from local communities and religious organizations. Budget documents show that public

funding was allocated primarily for operational expenditures, including venue preparation, accommodation, transportation, judging honoraria, participant services, and administrative requirements. Interview participants similarly recalled that community contributions remained an important source of logistical support, particularly during participant accommodation and meal preparation. Historical documentation therefore records the coexistence of governmental and community resources in supporting MTQ implementation during this period.

Institutional records further indicate that documentation practices gradually improved during the transitional period. Administrative reports, participant lists, competition results, photographs, meeting minutes, and official correspondence became increasingly available compared with earlier periods. Nevertheless, archival evidence also reveals variations in documentation quality between implementation years. Several institutional reports identify incomplete archival preservation resulting from temporary committee structures and the absence of standardized documentation procedures. Consequently, surviving records differ in completeness across different implementation periods.

Overall, historical evidence demonstrates that the period between 1970 and 2010 was characterized by regular implementation of MTQ, increasing government involvement, expanding organizational coordination, broader participant recruitment, diversification of competition branches, and growing educational activities supporting participant preparation. Documentary records consistently show that MTQ implementation during this period involved collaboration among local government institutions, religious organizations, educational institutions, community leaders, and volunteers, providing the empirical foundation for subsequent institutional developments documented in the following period.

3.1.3 Institutional Strengthening and Educational Transformation of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an in Asahan Regency (2011–2024)

Archival records, organizational documents, government reports, and interview data indicate that the period from 2011 to 2024 marked a phase of institutional strengthening and expansion of educational activities within the implementation of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) in Asahan Regency. Compared with previous periods, documentary evidence demonstrates increasingly structured organizational arrangements, broader institutional collaboration, more systematic participant development, and greater integration between MTQ activities and Qur'anic educational institutions operating throughout the regency. Official records consistently document annual implementation at village, sub-district, and regency levels, while provincial and national participation continued through structured selection processes.

Institutional documents indicate that the organizational role of the Institute for the Development of Qur'anic Recitation (Lembaga Pengembangan Tilawatil Qur'an [LPTQ]) became increasingly formalized during this period. Administrative records describe the establishment of clearer organizational structures, regular coordination meetings, documented work programs, and defined responsibilities among institutional stakeholders. Government decrees and organizational reports identify collaboration between LPTQ, the Regency Government, the Office of Religious Affairs, educational institutions, and community organizations in planning and implementing MTQ activities. Meeting minutes and official correspondence further demonstrate regular coordination concerning participant selection, coaching schedules, competition regulations, budgeting, and evaluation of annual implementation.

Official reports further indicate that MTQ implementation followed a structured multilevel system beginning at the village level and continuing through sub-district and regency competitions. Administrative documents describe village-level MTQ as the initial stage for identifying potential participants, followed by sub-district competitions serving as intermediate selection and coaching activities before participants advanced to the regency level. Competition reports document participant progression through these administrative levels using standardized technical regulations and assessment criteria. Institutional records also indicate that regency-level winners subsequently

participated in provincial MTQ competitions after completing additional coaching programs coordinated by LPTQ and local government agencies.

Archival evidence demonstrates substantial development in participant coaching activities throughout this period. Institutional reports record the implementation of more regular coaching programs extending beyond pre-competition preparation. Official documents describe scheduled training sessions coordinated by LPTQ in collaboration with religious scholars, experienced *qāri'* and *qāri'ah*, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), madrasahs, Qur'anic learning centers, and mosque-based educational institutions. Coaching materials documented in institutional reports included Qur'anic recitation techniques, *tajwid*, *makhraj*, vocal development, memorization, interpretation, competition ethics, and psychological preparation. Evaluation reports further indicate periodic assessments conducted during coaching activities to monitor participant progress before entering successive competition levels.

Documentary records also indicate broader involvement of formal and non-formal educational institutions in supporting participant preparation. Administrative reports identify cooperation with madrasahs, pesantren, Islamic schools, Qur'anic education centers (*Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an*), and community-based Qur'anic learning institutions as important components of participant recruitment and coaching. Educational institutions provided learning facilities, instructors, training venues, and student participants for various competition branches. Interview participants similarly described regular collaboration between educational institutions and LPTQ in preparing prospective competitors throughout the year rather than limiting educational activities to the period immediately preceding MTQ implementation.

Institutional documentation further records the expansion of competition categories during this period following developments introduced at provincial and national levels. Official guidelines indicate the inclusion of additional branches such as Qur'anic scientific writing, digital calligraphy, and expanded categories of Qur'anic memorization, interpretation, and presentation. Competition reports document increasing numbers of participants across these categories over successive years. Administrative records further describe revisions to assessment procedures, judging criteria, and technical implementation guidelines intended to ensure consistency with national MTQ regulations.

Government reports and financial documents demonstrate continued support from the Regency Government through budget allocation, infrastructure provision, logistical assistance, and administrative coordination. Official budget records indicate funding for coaching programs, competition implementation, participant accommodation, transportation, judging activities, equipment procurement, and operational management. Institutional reports additionally record contributions from community organizations, religious institutions, and local volunteers supporting accommodation, food services, venue preparation, and participant assistance during annual competitions. The available documentation therefore indicates collaboration between governmental resources and community participation throughout the implementation process.

Archival materials also document improvements in administrative management and institutional documentation. Annual reports, participant databases, coaching records, financial reports, competition results, photographs, and official correspondence were preserved more systematically than in previous periods. Digital documentation became increasingly evident within institutional archives, including electronic participant registration, computerized competition records, and digital publication of MTQ activities through government and institutional communication channels. Meeting documentation further records periodic evaluations following each annual implementation, including discussions concerning participant performance, organizational challenges, and planning for subsequent MTQ activities.

Historical records additionally indicate increasing recognition of the historical significance of the 1946 MTQ site in Pondok Bungur. Government documents and organizational reports describe initiatives to preserve historical buildings associated with the first MTQ, including the mosque and supporting historical structures. Official records document cooperation between the First MTQ

Foundation of Indonesia, the Regency Government, and religious institutions regarding the preservation of historical sites and the development of educational and religious tourism programs. Administrative documents further record proposals to utilize these historical locations for educational visits, historical learning, and community religious activities associated with MTQ history.

Interview data collected from religious leaders, government officials, MTQ organizers, and participant coaches consistently describe continuing efforts to strengthen participant development, institutional cooperation, and educational activities. Interview participants identified several continuing challenges, including differences in educational facilities among districts, unequal availability of qualified trainers, limitations in infrastructure, and variations in financial resources supporting coaching programs. Institutional evaluation reports similarly record these issues within annual implementation reviews while documenting ongoing efforts to improve organizational coordination and educational services across the regency.

Overall, documentary evidence from the 2011–2024 period demonstrates increasingly structured institutional management, broader collaboration among educational and religious institutions, systematic participant coaching, expansion of competition categories, strengthened government support, improved administrative documentation, and continuing preservation initiatives related to the historical origins of MTQ in Asahan Regency. These empirical findings document the organizational and educational developments observed during the most recent phase of MTQ implementation, reconstructed in this study.

3.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the historical development of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) in Asahan Regency represents more than the evolution of a religious competition; rather, it reflects the gradual institutionalization of a community-based Qur'anic education movement. The historical reconstruction shows that the first MTQ in 1946 emerged from collective initiatives of local religious leaders and community members who sought to revive Qur'anic learning during the post-war period. This finding extends previous studies that primarily conceptualized MTQ as a medium of aesthetic appreciation (Jannah, 2016), Islamic communication (Ronaldi, 2022), or religious propagation (Ronaldi et al., 2023). While these studies emphasize the cultural and communicative functions of MTQ, the present study demonstrates that, in the context of Asahan, MTQ initially functioned as a community-driven educational initiative aimed at restoring Qur'anic literacy, strengthening religious learning, and encouraging active participation in Islamic education. This finding is consistent with the concept of community-based education, which emphasizes that educational innovation frequently originates from local communities responding to their own social, cultural, and educational needs rather than through centralized governmental initiatives (Bray, 2000). The strong involvement of religious scholars, mosque communities, and local residents further illustrates how community participation became the primary driving force in sustaining Qur'anic education during periods of limited institutional support.

The historical trajectory identified in this study also illustrates a gradual process of institutionalization. Rather than developing abruptly, MTQ evolved through successive stages characterized by increasing organizational complexity, wider stakeholder involvement, and stronger institutional legitimacy. According to institutionalization theory, organizations generally evolve from informal community practices into stable institutional arrangements through processes of habitualization, objectification, and sedimentation (Scott, 2014; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). The empirical findings correspond closely with this theoretical framework. During the early period, MTQ functioned primarily as a locally organized religious activity coordinated by community leaders. Subsequently, between 1970 and 2010, local government agencies began providing administrative and financial support, while LPTQ gradually assumed technical responsibilities for organizing competitions and participant development. The period from 2011 onward reflects a more mature institutional structure characterized by formal organizational arrangements, regular coaching systems, standardized competition procedures, and systematic collaboration among governmental institutions, LPTQ,

pesantren, madrasahs, and Qur'anic learning centers. Previous studies on LPTQ management have primarily focused on organizational effectiveness and coaching strategies (Arfa, 2016; Rahman, 2021; Zaki et al., 2021). In contrast, this study contributes a historical perspective by demonstrating how institutional capacity was progressively constructed through long-term interaction among community organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies.

Another important contribution of this study concerns the educational transformation of MTQ. The findings indicate that MTQ has gradually shifted from an event-oriented competition into a sustainable educational ecosystem supporting continuous Qur'anic learning. This transformation is evidenced by the establishment of structured coaching programs, tiered participant development, regular evaluation systems, and collaboration among *pesantren*, *madrasahs*, *Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an* (TPQ), and LPTQ. These developments suggest that MTQ now functions not only as an arena for identifying talented reciters but also as a mechanism for strengthening institutional capacity and improving the quality of Qur'anic education. This finding supports previous research reporting that structured MTQ coaching contributes to improving learners' recitation skills, religious motivation, and educational achievement (Rusdiansyah, 2023), yet it also extends earlier scholarship by demonstrating that MTQ facilitates educational continuity through coordinated networks involving formal, non-formal, and community-based educational institutions. Such collaborative arrangements reflect the characteristics of sustainable educational ecosystems in which multiple stakeholders contribute collectively to educational development and learner support (Epstein, 2018). Consequently, MTQ should be understood not merely as a periodic religious competition but as an institutional mechanism that strengthens educational leadership, teacher development, learner progression, and the long-term sustainability of Qur'anic education.

The findings further demonstrate that the preservation of the historical MTQ site in Pondok Bungur represents an important dimension of educational heritage. Recent preservation initiatives indicate that the historical significance of the first MTQ extends beyond maintaining physical buildings or commemorating historical events. Instead, preservation efforts seek to sustain collective educational memory by connecting contemporary Qur'anic education with its historical foundations. This perspective is consistent with the concept of intangible cultural heritage, which emphasizes that heritage consists not only of tangible objects but also of knowledge, practices, traditions, and educational values transmitted across generations (Smith, 2006; UNESCO, 2003). In the context of Asahan, the historical MTQ site functions as a symbol of educational continuity, illustrating how local religious traditions have contributed to the long-term development of Islamic education. Preserving this historical legacy therefore provides opportunities for educational institutions, policymakers, and local communities to integrate historical awareness into contemporary Qur'anic education while strengthening cultural identity and intergenerational transmission of religious values.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the historical evolution of MTQ in Asahan should be understood as a dynamic process of educational development rather than merely the chronological expansion of a religious competition. The findings reveal how community participation, institutional collaboration, and educational leadership collectively transformed a locally initiated Qur'anic learning movement into a sustainable educational institution that continues to contribute to Qur'anic literacy, religious character formation, and community capacity building. These findings enrich the literature on Islamic education by providing empirical evidence that community-based religious initiatives can evolve into enduring educational institutions through gradual institutionalization and collaborative governance. For educational policymakers and practitioners, the results highlight the importance of strengthening partnerships among educational institutions, religious organizations, local governments, and communities to ensure the sustainability of Qur'anic education while preserving its historical and cultural foundations.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the historical development of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) in Asahan Regency from 1946 to 2024 reflects a gradual transformation from a community-initiated religious activity into a structured institution supporting Qur'anic education. Initially established through the collective efforts of local religious leaders and community members to revive Qur'anic learning after the Japanese occupation, MTQ progressively evolved into an institutionalized educational system characterized by organized coaching programs, collaboration among LPTQ, government agencies, pesantren, madrasahs, and Qur'anic learning centers, and the expansion of educational functions beyond competitive recitation. These findings highlight that MTQ serves not only as a religious and cultural tradition but also as a sustainable community-based educational institution that contributes to strengthening Qur'anic literacy, religious character formation, and institutional capacity within Islamic education. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on a single historical case in Asahan Regency, with historical reconstruction relying primarily on archival documents, oral history interviews, and locally available sources, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different historical trajectories and institutional contexts. Future research is therefore encouraged to conduct comparative historical studies across multiple regions, examine the educational impact of MTQ on learners' Qur'anic competencies and character development using mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches, and further explore the role of community participation, educational governance, and cultural heritage preservation in strengthening sustainable Qur'anic education within diverse socio-cultural settings.

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