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From Digital Gaming to Self-Discipline: Negotiating Mobile Legends and *Tahfidz* Practices among *Santri*

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Abstract : The expansion of digital culture poses a challenge to *Tahfidz* education, as students must balance the appeal of online games with the demands of concentration and continuity in memorizing the Qur'an. Unlike previous studies that measured the impact of games on academic achievement, this study explores patterns of Mobile Legends usage, how these patterns interact with *Tahfidz* discipline, and the strategies students use to maintain the quality of their memorization. This qualitative case study was conducted at the Oemah *Santri* Islamic Boarding School in Semarang through interviews, observations, and documentation, utilizing triangulation and member checking. The results show: First, gaming patterns are flexible and occur in residual time, filling gaps after obligations and daily recitation sessions are completed. Second, negotiation occurs through prioritizing obligations, adhering to collective schedules, and self-discipline (*mujahadah al-nafs*). Third, strategies for maintaining memorization include ensuring muraja'ah, scheduling, layered monitoring, and limiting duration. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, these practices reflect the values of aulawiyat, mujahadah al-nafs, muhasabah, and amanah of time as discussed in Zainuddin al-Malibari's *Hidayatul Adzkiya*, as well as the learning ethos of *al-jidd*, *al-muwāẓabah*, and *al-himmah* in the thought of Az-Zarnuji. This study makes an important contribution by shifting the paradigm from technological restrictions toward spiritually grounded digital self-regulation, offering an empirical foundation for Islamic boarding schools to formulate adaptive and transformative digital literacy policies without sacrificing the tradition of Qur'anic discipline.

Keywords digital self-regulation; Mobile Legends; *Tahfidz* students; Quranic discipline; Islamic boarding school

abstract *Ekspansi budaya digital menantang pendidikan Tahfidz ketika Santri harus menegosiasikan daya tarik gim daring dengan tuntutan konsentrasi dan kontinuitas hafalan Al-Qur'an. Berbeda dari penelitian terdahulu yang mengukur dampak gim terhadap prestasi akademik, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pola penggunaan Mobile Legends, negosiasinya dengan disiplin Tahfidz, dan strategi Santri menjaga kualitas hafalan. Studi kasus kualitatif ini dilakukan di Pondok Pesantren Oemah Santri Semarang melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, dengan triangulasi dan member checking. Hasil menunjukkan: Pertama, pola bermain bersifat elastis dan residual, mengisi celah waktu setelah kewajiban dan setoran selesai. Kedua, negosiasi dilakukan melalui prioritas kewajiban, kepatuhan jadwal kolektif, dan pengendalian diri (mujahadah al-nafs). Ketiga, strategi menjaga hafalan meliputi pengamanan muraja'ah,*

penambatan jadwal, pemantauan berlapis, dan pembatasan durasi. Dari perspektif Pendidikan Agama Islam, praktik ini merefleksikan nilai aulawiyat, mujahadah al-nafs, muhasabah, dan amanah waktu dalam kajian kitab Hidayatul Adzkiya karya Zainuddin al-Malibari, serta etos belajar al-jidd, al-muwāẓabah, dan al-himmah dalam pemikiran Az-Zarnuji. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting berupa pergeseran paradigma dari restriksi teknologi menuju digital self-regulation yang bermuatan spiritual, menawarkan landasan empiris bagi pesantren untuk merumuskan kebijakan literasi digital yang adaptif dan transformatif tanpa mengorbankan tradisi disiplin Qur'ani.

Keywords *digital self-regulation; Mobile Legends; Santri Tahfidz; disiplin Qur'ani; pesantren*

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the landscape of the young generation's learning life, making digital devices the main space for recreation, social interaction, and identity formation (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). In this ecosystem, online gaming has emerged as the dominant form of digital life. Understanding digital gaming through a simple dichotomy between productive or destructive is a false oversimplification (Saipullah et al., 2025). Cutting-edge literature shows a complex relationship between play activities and academic life, where the relationship between the two is not always linear (Alzahrani & Griffiths, 2025). The World Health Organization (2020) confirms that gaming disruption is determined by a loss of control and shifted priorities, not just the gaming activity itself. Empirical data reinforce this complexity; in Indonesia, around 74% of learners play Mobile Legends regularly, with 7% of them playing up to 30 hours per week (Anugrah, 2022). This phenomenon is directly correlated with religious behavior, where 40% of intensive players report a decrease in motivation in learning Islamic Religious Education and the consistency of worship, such as delayed prayer or murojaah (Rasyidah, 2024). In comparison, a study in Malaysia showed that although the penetration rate of online games among Muslim students was similar (around 68%), only 15% reported significant disruption to worship, thanks to the more massive and structured integration of digital literacy into their Islamic Education curriculum (Mokhtar & Lubis, 2024). This perspective reminds the world of education not to pathologize every play activity. A more productive question is to understand how learners develop the cognitive and emotional capacity to set boundaries and adapt digital behavior to spiritual and academic goals (Fikriyyah & Wardani, 2024). Therefore, the focus of research must shift towards an in-depth understanding of digital life management amid the dynamic demands of learning, without getting caught up in excessive negative stigma (Sofa, 2025).

Unfortunately, the educational literature in Indonesia is still very dominated by an impact-oriented paradigm, which positions games, especially Mobile Legends, as an independent variable that causes a decrease in achievement or concentration. As an online game in the MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) genre, Mobile Legends has distinctive characteristics, namely being immersive, competitive, team-based, and cannot be paused in the middle of the game, so it demands the player's full focus for a certain duration (Nurdiansyah & Darma, 2024). Various studies tend to construct this game solely as a negative predictor. For example, Irawan et al. (2023) and Fauziah et al. (2022) used a quantitative approach to investigate its influence on academic performance, while Alfaroji and Puriani (2026) and Haidar & Antika. (2022) using correlational design to examine its impact on concentration and procrastination. Even in the context of Islamic Religious

Education, research still often places play intensity as a direct predictor of learning outcomes (Siregar and Miswar, 2026). These various correlational studies are important for mapping risks, but an approach that focuses only on impact leaves a large explainative vacuum. Statistical and duration measurements have not been able to explain the micro-processes, i.e. what learners actually do when the urge to play clashes with the obligation to learn. The existing literature has not explored how they respond to self-control failures, what coping strategies are built after such failures, and how institutional norms affect their ability to independently regulate digital behavior. This gap demands a shift in focus from simply measuring negative impacts to comprehensively understanding students' self-regulation mechanisms, so that their micro-experiences in navigating the conflict between digital entertainment and academic obligations can be revealed more fully and meaningfully for educators.

This issue of self-regulation finds a much more complex and challenging context in the Qur'anic *Tahfidz* education. Memorizing and maintaining memorization (muraja'ah) requires high repetition, continuity, full concentration, and strict time management (Zulhannan & Musyarrofah, 2024). On the other hand, contemporary students live in an inevitable digital ecology, where gadgets offer a double side: supporting memorization through applications, but at the same time being a source of massive distraction (Azmy & Rahmawati, 2025). Islamic boarding schools often respond to device penetration with a restrictive approach in the form of restricting access, scheduling, or banning hardware in anticipation of misuse (Larson, 2024). This creates a dynamic tension between strict institutional discipline and the appeal of gaming that is by design immersive, competitive, and recreative (Ulya et al., 2021). The digital life of students thus takes place in an encounter between technological access, institutional control, religious norms, and personal choices that continue to wrestle (Fikri, 2022). However, previous research tended to treat "gadgets" as a general category and discussed more regulation at the institutional policy level. In fact, a deeper pedagogical challenge lies in how students maintain discipline when direct supervision of ustadz or caregivers is reduced (Subahri & Said, 2025). In this space of autonomy, there is a very dynamic constant negotiation between the pleasure of playing games that offer instant gratification and the heavy demands of maintaining a consistent memorization of the Qur'an, which ultimately shapes the character of their spiritual and intellectual independence. Research Prastyana et al. (2026) It shows that the spiritual development of students through the intensification of tawhid teaching is related to increasing discipline, self-control ability, and spiritual awareness of students in the pesantren environment.

To understand these dynamics, digital concepts *self-regulation* offers a much more solutive theoretical framework. Haru et al. (2023) defines it as an individual's active process of managing behavior. Recent studies criticize approaches that rely solely on external restrictions. Money (2026) argues that simply reducing digital exposure can ignore the development of adolescents' capacity to self-regulate. There is a fundamental difference between simply being regulated by an outsider (*being regulated*) and become internally independent (*becoming self-regulated*). In line with the framework, Khoiriyyah & Chamami (2026) Explains that the value of mujahadah emphasizes self-control, consistency, and inner awareness. Previous studies still have research gaps related to the lack of a deep understanding of the dynamic relationship between external regulations and internal agencies. To bridge this, the Oemah *Santri* Islamic Boarding School was chosen as the locus

because of its very unique semi-permissive policy, gadgets are restricted during formal activities but are released in their free time. Coupled with the heterogeneous demographics of student students, this pesantren is an ideal laboratory to observe the clash of external regulations and internal agencies in real life without any absolute coercion from the caregiver. Departing from this gap, this study aims to explore how *Tahfidz* students negotiate Mobile Legends activities with the demands of Qur'anic discipline which includes deposit consistency and memorization responsibilities (Aufa et al., 2024). This study asks three questions: (1) what is the pattern of using Mobile Legends among *Tahfidz* students; (2) how to negotiate between the habit of playing Mobile Legends and the demands of *Tahfidz* discipline; and (3) how is the strategy of students in maintaining the quality of memorization in the midst of the habit of playing Mobile Legends. This study offers a significant paradigm shift from *digital restriction* Going digital *self-regulation* In Islamic Religious Education, placing digital challenges is not just a threat that must be limited, but as a pedagogical arena that is crucial for the formation of character, independence, and self-regulation capacity of students in the digital era.

METHODS

This study aims to analyze the negotiation between gaming and *Tahfidz* discipline in the experience of Mobile Legends user students at this Islamic boarding school using a qualitative approach with a case study design (Rusli, 2021). This approach was chosen because the phenomenon cannot be measured by numbers alone, but requires a deep understanding of the meaning, inner conflicts, and adaptation strategies carried out by students in balancing the hobby of playing online games with the obligation to memorize the Quran (Sakir & El Syam, 2024). The design of the case study allows researchers to comprehensively explore the social and religious dynamics that occur in the micro environment of pesantren (Septiana & Khoiriyah, 2024). The selection of the location at the Oemah *Santri* Islamic Boarding School, Ngaliyan District, Semarang City, Central Java, is based on the relevance of the context in which students face the challenges of digitalization directly and intensely. In addition, focusing on this specific case will provide a strong empirical picture of the spiritual resilience of students. The research, which was conducted from 1 to 15 September 2026, will explore data through participant observations and in-depth interviews to reveal how students negotiate their identities as Quran memorizers as well as gamers. In addition, the qualitative approach of case studies is the most appropriate instrument to unravel the complexity of the interaction between religious traditions and digital pop culture in a naturalistic and contextual manner, resulting in comprehensive, authentic, and highly useful findings for the development of pesantren education strategies in the modern era that are increasingly complex and full of various distractions of information technology and digital communication that are developing very rapidly today at the global level (Arifuddin & Sidin, 2025).

The data collection technique is carried out through three main methods, namely interviews, observations, and documentation (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). First, an unstructured interview was conducted with two pesantren caregivers, eight students, and two pesantren administrators with a total time allocation of 120 minutes where each informant was given ten minutes to answer questions. The entire interview process was in Indonesian and recorded via smartphone with the informant's permission for publication purposes, then the recorded results were transcribed into written notes to facilitate the data coding process (Oktaria et al., 2023). Second, participatory observation techniques are applied by utilizing observation instruments that have been systematically prepared and in accordance with the

research objectives to directly observe the interaction of students (Nisa et al., 2025). Third, the documentation technique is carried out by analyzing various photos of students' activities while playing Mobile Legends which are visually indicated to have the potential to hinder the smooth functioning of their Quranic murojaah.

Table 1. Informant Profile

No.	Initials	Age	Departments	Gender
1	P1	54	Caregiver	Male
2	P2	48	Caregiver	Women
3	U1	22	Manager	Male
4	U2	23	Manager	Male
5	S1	20	Stuttgart	Male
6	S2	20	Stuttgart	Male
7	S3	19	Stuttgart	Male
8	S4	21	Stuttgart	Male
9	S5	19	Stuttgart	Male
10	S6	20	Stuttgart	Male
11	S7	20	Stuttgart	Male
12	S8	19	Stuttgart	Male

In this study, the data validation technique is carried out through source triangulation and member checking to ensure maximum information validity (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews between students and administrators with the findings of observations and documentation of Mobile Legends activities. Meanwhile, member checking was applied by reconfirming the interview transcript to the student informants so that there were no misunderstandings in meaning (Birt et al., 2016) . Next, the data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman interactive model which includes three simultaneous activity flows: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The implementation begins with reducing raw data from recordings and field records related to the clash of game playing schedules and murojaah. The data that has been reduced is then presented in a narrative manner to map the negotiation patterns carried out by students in their daily lives. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions to formulate strategies to overcome gaming distractions in order to maintain the discipline of *Tahfidz* optimally (Rachman et al., 2024).

RESULTS

Mobile Legends usage patterns among *Tahfidz* students

The findings of the study revealed that the use of Mobile Legends among *Tahfidz* students of the Oemah *Santri* Semarang Islamic Boarding School took place as an activity that adjusted to the structure of religious activities, not as an activity that stood free outside of it. There are four main things found. First, this game is not a habit born in the pesantren, but an old habit that is formed through the invitation of friends and carried into the lives of students who are now bound by the schedule of adding memorization, murajaah, and deposits. Second, the pattern of playing time is elastic as well as residual, namely shrinking when the pesantren agenda is dense and only fills the gaps left after the mandatory activities

and memorization deposits are completed, so that the pesantren collective schedule works as a limitation of the opportunity to play automatically. Third, the motive of play is compound and includes fun, togetherness with friends, and self-recovery after memorization activities that require concentration. Fourth, the organized pattern is still prone to shifting, because the duration of play often exceeds the initial plan when the game takes place with friends.

Table 2. Mobile Legends game usage patterns

Aspects observed	Observation results
Mobile Legends playtime	Playing activities tend to be done in free time, such as after pesantren activities or after completing memorization deposits.
Interaction patterns while playing	The game is carried out individually or with friends. When playing together, the students seem to communicate and coordinate during the match
Duration of play	Games are a form of entertainment and a means of interaction with friends. This activity is carried out on the sidelines of pesantren activities.
Motivation to play	Games are a form of entertainment and a means of interaction with friends. This activity is carried out on the sidelines of pesantren activities.
The relationship between gaming and *Tahfidz* activities	Play activities take place side by side with *Tahfidz* activities. Students need to adjust the playing time to the deposit and murajaah schedule.

The findings of the study show that the activity of playing Mobile Legends takes place in the structure of *Tahfidz* activities that have been arranged in a standard manner at the Oemah *Santri* Islamic Boarding School in Semarang. The memorization listening ustadz explained that *Tahfidz* activities are carried out through three interrelated components, namely the addition of memorization, murajaah, and depositing to the listener. He explained,

> "*Santri has a schedule to add memorization and perform murajaah. The memorization is then deposited to the ustaz to be listened to and corrected*" (U1 Interview, September 7, 2026).

This structure is the background when digital games enter the daily lives of students. Interestingly, Mobile Legends is not a practice that students only know after they have taken *Tahfidz* education, but a habit that has been formed
previously through friendship relationships. The informant student said, "*I started playing about two years ago, initially because I was invited by a friend*" (S1 Interview, September 5, 2026). This information shows that the starting point of gaming activities does not come from the search for entertainment carried out individually, but from the invitation of the social environment which then develops into a personal habit. Thus, this game is present in the pesantren not as an anomaly that suddenly appears, but as an old habit that must be met with a new routine that demands order. The phenomenon of using Mobile Legends in *Tahfidz* students therefore needs to be read as an encounter between digital habits carried over from previous lives and the pesantren education system that has a rhythm of activities, memorization targets, and evaluation mechanisms that run every day on an ongoing basis. The meeting of these two time orders is the starting point for all usage patterns found in this study, as well as a basis for the discussion of elasticity and the placement of playing time in the next paragraph.

The second aspect that stands out about the pattern of Mobile Legends use is its irregular nature and tends to occupy the remaining time space of mandatory activities. This phenomenon was empirically confirmed through the results of observations carried out on September 5. Observations in the dormitory area showed that students began to open Mobile Legends games only in an empty time gap, namely after the afternoon activities were over and before the time of evening activities or worship arrived. As soon as the time mark for the mandatory activity started or the instructions from the boarding school administrators were heard, the game was immediately stopped and the gadget was saved. This fast "on-off" behavior indicates that access to the game is completely subject to the rhythm of pesantren activities. The elastic time pattern and adapts to the load of this activity is also expressed directly by the students. They do not have a uniform allocation of playing time every day, because the intensity of the game is highly dependent on the density or looseness of the activities that must be carried out. The informant students explained,

"*Not every day with the same time. If there are many activities, it is usually only for a short time, but if it is loose, it can be longer*" (S2 Interview, September 5, 2026).

This elasticity is also related to the difference in character between students in complying with the existing time limit, as expressed by the memorization listening ustadz,

"*In general, it is quite good, but each student has a different level of discipline. Some are consistent and some sometimes need to be reminded*" (U1 Interview, September 7, 2026).

Furthermore, the position of residual playing time that takes place after the pesantren activities and memorization deposits are completed is emphasized by the statement of the informant students, "*Usually after the pesantren activities are completed or after the memorization deposit*" (Interview S5, September 8, 2026). This is corroborated by the statement of the memorization listening ustadz, "*There are several students who play Mobile Legends. Usually they play when there are no mandatory activities or when they have free time*" (U1 Interview, September 7, 2026). The compatibility between the observation findings and the interview information strengthens the analysis that the pesantren collective schedule works as a descriptive framework. This structure automatically closes the playroom when the mandatory activity takes place and reopens it once the activity is over. Thus, the pattern of using Mobile Legends is formed not by personal desires alone, but by the availability of time that has been determined by the structure of the boarding school, a pattern that is a common characteristic of the use of Mobile Legends among *Tahfidz* students.



Figure 1. *Santri* activities playing Mobile Legends games



Figure 2. Mobile Legends Game

The third aspect concerns the reasons that motivate students to choose Mobile Legends among the various forms of entertainment that may be available. The information

of the informant students shows three interrelated motivations, namely the fun offered by the game, being together with friends, and the need to recover after learning and memorizing activities. He explained, "*Because it is fun, it can play with friends, and it becomes entertainment after studying or memorizing*" (Interview S6, September 8, 2026). These three reasons show that Mobile Legends does not just function as a filler of free time, but has a certain use value in the lives of students. The fun dimension is related to the attractiveness of the game itself, the togetherness dimension is related to the need to establish relationships with fellow students in the dormitory environment, while the recovery dimension is related to the cognitive load of *Tahfidz* activities that require concentration and continuous repetition. The recovery function is an explanation why games are often placed right after memorization activities end. After undergoing activities that require precision and memory, students need light and fun activities as a break. These findings show that the motive for students to play cannot be reduced to just addiction or escape from obligations. On the contrary, gaming activities have a functional position that is directly connected to the rhythm of the mental work of *Tahfidz* activities and to the social needs of students as members of the community who live together in one educational environment. Understanding this motive is important because coaching that ignores the need for recovery and the need to relate risks losing relevance for students who undergo a daily memorization routine, as well as being a background for discussions about the vulnerability of this pattern shifting from the original plan when being together with friends also affects the duration of student play.

The fourth aspect shows that the pattern of using Mobile Legends does not always go according to the plan prepared by the students before playing. There is a gap between the initial intention and the duration that is actually used, especially when the game is played with friends. The informant student admitted,

> "*Ever. Sometimes at first I intended to play one or two matches, but because I was still playing with friends, I finally continued again*" (S3 Interview, September 5, 2026).

This information shows that social factors work both ways, namely being the main attraction of the game as well as the main cause of the expansion of the duration. It is at this point that the originally arranged usage pattern can shift unplanned. However, the shift is not automatically considered a violation in the normative framework of the pesantren. The caregiver places the judgment not on the existence of the game, but on the time and consequences it causes. He emphasized,

> "*Playing games alone cannot be immediately said to be something wrong. What needs to be considered is the timing and the impact. If you play until you leave your obligations, that's the problem*" (P2 Interview, September 12, 2026).

The role of friends as an initial trigger as well as a broadener of the duration of play also finds a foothold in the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by Az-Zarnuji, which contains a separate discussion about choosing knowledge, teachers, and friends in seeking knowledge. The existence of this clause shows that friendship is seen as influential for the learning process (Az-Zarnuji, n.d.). The finding that the invitation of friends forms the habit of playing, and the togetherness with friends prolongs its duration, can be read as an illustration of this influence in the lives of *Tahfidz* students. Thus, the description of the phenomenon and pattern of use of Mobile Legends among *Tahfidz* students of the Oemah *Santri* Semarang Islamic Boarding School can be formulated through four characteristics, namely rooted in habits carried over from friendship relationships, elastic and residual following the density of activities, driven by the motives of fun, togetherness, and recovery, and vulnerable to exceeding the plan when the game takes place in an atmosphere of

togetherness. These four characteristics are the basis for the next description of how students bring together the habit of playing with the demands of *Tahfidz* discipline, both through planning and through decisions that must be taken immediately in the midst of an urgent situation.

Negotiation between Mobile Legends playing habits and *Tahfidz* discipline demands

The findings of the study revealed that students do not place gaming and *Tahfidz* discipline as two options that eliminate each other, but manage both through a series of adjustments that take place continuously and are rooted in religious values instilled by Islamic boarding schools through the study of Hidayatul Adzkiya's moral book. Three forms of negotiation were found that work at different times and situations. First, negotiation through the determination of order, namely the obligation to memorize is completed first before playing, a habit that grows from the students' own awareness of the way their minds work when the obligation has not been completed. Second, negotiation in a direct conflict situation, when the time for *Tahfidz* arrives in the middle of an ongoing game and the student chooses to stop to participate in the activity, as a form of instant compliance with the collective schedule of the pesantren. Third, negotiations at the most difficult points and in situations that recur every day, namely when playing with friends and when approaching the deposit time, which is overcome through spontaneous awareness to remember the obligations and time limits that are prepared in advance before playing. All of these forms take place within the framework of values instilled by caregivers through the principles of priority, limitation, and self-control.

Table 3. Negotiating Mobile Legends playing habits

Aspects observed	Observation results
Priority of obligations	It can be seen that the pattern of completing *Tahfidz* activities first before playing. However, this pattern needs to be confirmed through repeated observation of each student.
Game termination	When the game is still ongoing, students may have the desire to finish the game before moving on to other activities.
Timing	Students adjust their playing time to pesantren activities, including deposit and murajaah schedules.
Self-control	When the time for *Tahfidz* arrives, students are faced with a choice between continuing the game and carrying out the obligation to memorize. This situation becomes part of the process of self-negotiation.
Playing intensity adjustment	When memorization is not smooth or the deposit schedule is getting closer, reducing playing time is one form of adjustment that needs to be observed and confirmed.

The negotiation between the habit of playing Mobile Legends and the demands of *Tahfidz* discipline on students takes place through the determination of the order of work, namely the obligation to be completed first before the game is carried out. The informant student explained the mechanism he runs, "*Usually I complete the memorization or deposit first. When I finish it, I play*" (Interview S7, September 8, 2026). What is interesting about this

finding is the reason underlying the order. The arrangement of the order was not solely born from compliance with the rules of the pesantren, but from the student's own experience of how their minds work when the obligation has not been completed. He revealed, "*I finish the memorization first. If you play right away, you usually think about the game and the memorization is not even finished*" (Interview S8, September 8, 2026). This information shows the awareness that games leave a trail of attention that can be carried into memorization activities, so that prioritizing memorization is considered a more effective option. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, this kind of order is in line with the principle of aulawiyat or prioritizing the obligatory over the mubah, a value that is directly taught through the study of Hidayatul Adzkiya as part of the formation of morals and self-control. Negotiation at this stage is therefore calculative as well as religious, namely the student takes into account his own state of attention while placing the obligation of worship in a higher position than pleasure. He reads his tendencies, recognizes the risk of concentration disturbance, and then formulates personal rules that put *Tahfidz* in the first position. This sequence is a form of internal agreement built by students to keep two different interests running without eliminating each other, as well as proof that the values studied theoretically in the book class have moved into real practice in their daily time management.

The next form of negotiation appears in a direct collision situation, namely when the time for the *Tahfidz* activity arrives while the game is in progress. This kind of situation is admitted to have occurred and generally appears when the students are playing with friends. The informant student said,

> "*Ever, especially when I'm playing with friends. When it's time for Tahfidz, I usually stop and take part in activities*" (S4 Interview, September 5, 2026).

This information shows that the collective schedule of the pesantren functions as a marker that forces students to make instant decisions in the midst of ongoing activities. In contrast to the arrangement of the order that can be designed in advance, negotiations in this situation take place suddenly and require a willingness to stop unfinished activities. The solution chosen by the students is to give in to the schedule, namely to leave the game and join the *Tahfidz* activities. This choice shows that in the hierarchy of students' interests, the collective agenda of the pesantren occupies a higher position than the completion of the match. Viewed from the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, this instant obedience is a form of appreciation of the value of obedience and time discipline taught through moral studies such as the book *Hidayatul Adzkiya*' by Sheikh Zainuddin al-Malibari, where students are trained not to delay obligations even though they have to sacrifice the pleasure they are enjoying. This finding also shows that external regulations in the form of schedules do not work as a prohibition that closes access to games, but as a boundary marker that reminds students when entertainment activities must be stopped. Thus, the time structure of the pesantren acts as a supporting framework that helps students to disconnect activities at the right time, while the decision to completely stop remains with the students as the perpetrators who carry it out, as a form of internalization of religious values that have become part of their personal consciousness.

The negotiation dynamics between the motivation to play and the obligation of *Tahfidz* were confirmed through observation on September 3, 2026. When the time for the memorization deposit arrived, the student who was playing Mobile Legends consciously and independently immediately stopped the game and kept his device, even though the match was still ongoing. This behavior shows that the awareness of obligation is able to defeat the urge to play. The most difficult point of this negotiation was indeed acknowledged by the students, especially when playing with friends. The informant student

said that the biggest difficulty arose when he played with friends and the match was still ongoing. He explained,

> "*When you are playing with friends, sometimes it is difficult to stop because you still want to finish the game*" (S2 Interview, September 5, 2026).

To deal with this impulse, students bring back unfulfilled obligations into their consciousness. He said, "*Usually I remember that there is still memorization that must be completed. So I leave the game first*" (S4 Interview, September 5, 2026). The mechanism of remembering obligations in the midst of this urge to play is a concrete form of mujahadah al-nafs, which is an effort to fight the tendency of lust, which is one of the main contents of the study of *the book Hidayatul Adzkiya* in forming the self-control of students. In addition, students also prepare a guardrail before playing, as he explained, "*I try to limit. Usually play after memorization and not until too late at night*" (S6 Interview, September 8, 2026). This form of control is combined with an adjustment of playing intensity that follows the load of *Tahfidz* that is being faced. He said, "*Ever. If the memorization is not smooth or tomorrow there is a deposit, I usually reduce playing*" (S5 Interview, September 8, 2026). This kind of adjustment pattern is also read by ustaz who listens to memorization from the communication that takes place in the deposit activity. He explained,

> "*There is. Some students usually say that they reduce playing when they are close to the time of deposit or when the memorization is not fluent*" (U2 Interview, September 9, 2026).

Thus, control at the time of the urge to peak and adjustment of the playing portion before the deposit work as a mechanism that keeps the urge to play not to defeat the demands of student memorization every day, as well as affirming that the discipline of *Tahfidz* is maintained through spontaneous awareness and the value *of mujahadah al-nafs* embedded through the study of the book of morals.



Figure 3. Recitation of the Book of Hidayatul Adzkiya by the Head of the Islamic Boarding School



Figure 4. A Discussion Session Led by the Headmistress of the Islamic Boarding School

All forms of negotiation take place within the framework of values instilled by the pesantren through the caregiver as a reviewer of *the book Hidayatul Adzkiya*. The caregiver does not place prohibition as a way out, but emphasizes the preparation of priorities and restrictions. He explained,

> "*There must be priorities and limits. Obligations such as Tahfidz must take precedence. After the obligations are completed, free time can be used for entertainment with reasonable limits*" (P1 Interview, September 10, 2026).

This principle is in line with the practice carried out by the students, so that the negotiation of students can be understood as the application of the normative framework of Islamic Religious Education at the daily level, not just the administrative rules of the pesantren. Furthermore, the caregiver associated the moment of stopping the game with the self-control exercise which is the core of the teachings of the book. He stated,

> "*When a person wants to continue playing but it is time to recite or memorize, that is where self-control is needed. He must be able to stop his desire and carry out his obligations*" (P1 Interview, September 10, 2026).

In the framework of the study of the book Hidayatul Adzkiya taught in Islamic boarding schools, the situation is explicitly read through the value *of mujahadah al-nafs*, as explained,

> "*It is relevant, because students sometimes have to fight against their own desires. For example, they are engrossed in playing but have to stop because there are Tahfidz activities. It is part of the exercise of self-control*" (P1 Interview, September 10, 2026).

The caregiver also sets a mark when the negotiation is considered to have failed, namely

> "*If it has made students leave Tahfidz, reduce their study time, lack of sleep, do not participate in pesantren activities, or their obligations are neglected*" (Interview P2, September 12, 2026).

These boundaries become a common reference that gives direction to the daily negotiation of students. With this framework, student negotiation can be understood as a meeting between the values of PAI taught through *Hidayatul Adzkiya* and the personal experience of students in managing their own desires in concrete situations every day. The three forms of negotiation can also be read through one subject in Ta'lim al-Muta'allim, namely seriousness (*al-jidd*), continuity (*al-muwāẓabah*), and noble ideals (*al-himmah*) in learning. The determination of the order reflects the seriousness of prioritizing memorization. The willingness to stop when the *Tahfidz* schedule arrives reflects the continuity of learning that is not allowed to be interrupted. The effort to remember memorization that has not been completed in the midst of the urge to play reflects noble ideals accompanied by efforts as hard as possible. Thus, the negotiation of students is not only in the form of time management, but also the application of the learning ethic of the student.

Students' strategies in maintaining the quality of memorization in the midst of Mobile Legends playing habits

The findings of this study show that students develop a memorization maintenance system that works before, during, and after play activities take place, and the system does not stand separate from the religious values studied in Islamic boarding schools through the book Hidayatul Adzkiya. There are four strategies that support each other. First, securing the murajaah portion, which is doing memorization and repetition first when the attention is still full, so that the basic needs of memorization maintenance are met regardless of the duration of play in the rest of the day. Second, tethering the schedule, which is placing the murajaah at a fixed point of time after Fajr and before the deposit, and inserting repetition in the available free time pieces. Third, layered monitoring that is followed up with corrective actions, namely internal signals in the form of feelings of lack of calm and external feedback from listeners who are then responded to by reducing the portion of play when the quality of memorization is considered inadequate. Fourth, the limitation of duration as a principle formulated by the students themselves and in line with the view of the ustaz of listeners and caregivers, that what determines the quality of memorization is

not the existence or absence of the game, but the consistency of murajaah and the control of time.

Table 4. Strategies of students in maintaining the quality of memorization

Aspects observed	Observation results
Restriction of access to gadgets	Mobile phones are placed away from memorization or not used during murajaah to reduce attention distractions.
Utilization of murajaah time	The time after Fajr or before the deposit can be used to repeat memorization and prepare for the siege.
Memorization repetition	The students repeat the parts of the verses that are not fluent and correct the mistakes before depositing the memorization to the ustaz.
Playtime adjustments	When the murajaah time is felt to be lacking, students can increase the time to repeat memorization on the next occasion.
Preparation before *Tahfidz*	Students need to divert their attention from games to memorization activities, for example by stopping the game and preparing mushaf before murajaah.

The first strategy taken by students to maintain the quality of memorization is to secure the memorization and murajaah portions before their attention is used by the game. The implementation of this priority was confirmed directly through the results of observations on September 8. In the dormitory area, students were seen diligently repeating memorization (murajaah) by carrying the Qur'an mushaf. Only after the memorization target was completed, they orderly saved the mushaf, opened the device, and started playing Mobile Legends. This orderly transition behavior indicates that the obligation has been fulfilled before the fun is pursued. This concrete step was explained by the informant student, "*I try to memorize and murajaah first before playing*" (Interview S8, September 8, 2026). Different from the arrangement of the sequence that functions to prevent schedule clashes, this strategy is oriented towards the quality of memorization, namely ensuring that repetition is carried out in a condition of attention that is still full and undivided. This step is in line with the ability to distinguish obligations and pleasures emphasized in the study of the book of Hidayatul Adzkiya, so that placing murajaah as an obligation in the first place is a tangible form of the PAI value that has been learned by students in book class. The quality of memorization is indeed highly dependent on the condition of concentration when the repetition takes place, so that placing murajaah in the initial order gives a better chance of results than if repetition is done after the students are tired of playing. The effectiveness of this strategy can be seen from the observation of the memorization ustadz who distinguish two groups of students based on the ability to manage time. He explained,

> "*Not all students experience the same thing. Some can still maintain their memorization because they are able to manage time, but there are also those who play for too long become less focused or reduce their time of murajaah*" (U2 Interview, September 9, 2026).

The information emphasizes that what distinguishes the maintenance of the quality of memorization is not the presence or absence of gaming activities, but the success of the students in placing the murajaah in a safe position from disturbances. By doing the repetition first, the students get the assurance that the basic needs of memorization maintenance have been met, as well as showing that the religious values studied

theoretically have been realized in concrete daily habits, whatever then happens to the duration of the game they play the rest of the day.

The second strategy is to anchor the murajaah activity to a fixed time marker so that repetition does not depend on the remaining uncertain time. The informant student mentioned the two time points that he used regularly and his willingness to use free time that appeared outside of the two. He explained,

> "*There is usually time after Fajr and before the deposit. If I have free time, I use it to repeat memorization*" (Interview S5, September 8, 2026).

The selection of time after Fajr provides advantages in the form of a fresh state of mind and an Islamic boarding school environment that is not crowded with activities, while the time before the deposit serves as the final stabilization before memorization is listened to. The tethering at worship time such as after Fajr shows that the management of students' time is not separated from the rhythm of daily worship, a link that is in line with the teaching of maintaining time in the book Hidayatul Adzkiya as part of morals and religious responsibilities. The two points are in a position that does not intersect with the opportunity to play, because Mobile Legends is generally played during the break time after the pesantren activities end. This kind of tethering makes murajaah structurally protected, because repetition has its own place in the daily rhythm of the students. The use of free time outside these two points shows that students view murajaah as an activity that can be inserted in short pieces of time, not just in long scheduled sessions. This strategy shows a layered time management, which is to provide a fixed core schedule while opening up flexible additional space to increase the frequency of repetition without having to completely eliminate entertainment activities, as well as practicing the value of trust over time which is one of the main messages of learning the book of morals in Islamic boarding schools. The tethering of murajaah at this repetitive time is in principle in line with the recommendation in the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* that students of knowledge repeat lessons continuously at the beginning and end of the night. The time point chosen by the students is indeed different, namely after Fajr and before the deposit, but both are based on the same idea, namely repetition needs to have a fixed place in the daily rhythm.

The third strategy combines monitoring the condition of memorization with accompanying corrective actions. Internal monitoring takes place through feelings signals that appear when the portion of murajaah is reduced due to the game. The informant student said, "*Usually they feel less calm because they know that there are still memorizations that have not been repeated*" (S2 Interview, September 5, 2026). In the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, this kind of inner signal can be read as a form of muhasabah or self-introspection that is grown through the study of the book Hidayatul Adzkiya. External monitoring is obtained by students through deposit activities, when the listening ustadz recognizes signs of lack of repetition directly. He explained,

> "*Usually when listened, memorization becomes less fluent, there are many mistakes, or students take longer to remember verses*" (U2 Interview, September 9, 2026).

These two signals, internal and external, are then followed up through corrective actions in the form of reducing the portion of play when the quality of memorization is considered inadequate. The informant student emphasized, "*If the memorization is not fluent, I usually reduce the play because it is better to complete the memorization first*" (S1 Interview, September 5, 2026). This kind of value weighing, which is to place the completion of memorization higher than the pleasure of playing, directly reflects the ability to distinguish obligations and pleasures as taught in Hidayatul Adzkiya. The direction of this action is in

line with the view of the memorization listener about the ideal way for students to place gaming among their obligations. He explained,

> "*The main thing is Tahfidz and the obligation of the pesantren not to be disturbed. Games can be done in their free time after the obligation is completed and there should be a time limit*" (U2 Interview, September 9, 2026).



Figure 5. Activities of Muraja'ah Students Memorizing the Qur'an



Figure 6. Memorization Deposit of Students to Usztadz

Thus, monitoring and correction work as a series that shows that the maintenance of memorization grows from religious awareness, not just compliance with the deposit schedule, but part of the moral development that takes place every day.

The fourth strategy directs the student's assessment of the relationship between the game and the quality of his memorization, as well as summarizes the overall strategy that he has implemented. The informant student does not view Mobile Legends as a direct cause of the decline in memorization, but as an activity whose consequences depend on the management of duration. He concluded,

> "*If the play is short and the time is regulated, I don't think it has much effect. But if it takes too long, it can indeed make the time of murajaah decrease*" (Interview S6, September 8, 2026).

The assessment is in line with the observation of the memorization listener who places the consistency of repetition as the main determinant of memorization quality. He explained,

> "*The quality of memorization depends more on consistency and discipline. Playing games does not automatically make memorization bad, but if the time is not controlled, it can certainly reduce the time to repeat memorization*" (U1 Interview, September 7, 2026).

From this experience, the students formulated a series of strategies that they considered the most effective, namely "*In my opinion, obligations must be completed first. After that, just play and there must be a time limit*" (Interview S7, September 8, 2026). This formula contains the settlement of obligations and duration restrictions, which are basically the concrete application of PAI values instilled through the study of the book Hidayatul Adzkiya. A similar framework was emphasized by the caregiver through the principle of time keeping, "*If there is free time, it is allowed, but entertainment should not take up the time that should be used for obligations*" (Interview P1, September 10, 2026). Thus, the maintenance of the quality of memorization rests on securing the portion of murajaah, tethering the schedule, monitoring accompanied by corrections, and limiting the duration of play, and these four elements work as a series that shows that the moral values of Hidayatul Adzkiya

have become part of the life of students, not just the material memorized in the study of the book, but the values that students practice in their daily lives.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that the use of Mobile Legends among *Tahfidz* students of the Oemah *Santri* Semarang Islamic Boarding School took place as an activity that adjusted to the structure of religious activities, not as an activity that stood freely outside of it. This habit was not born in the pesantren, but was carried over from the invitation of friends and now follows an elastic and residual time pattern, filling the gap after mandatory activities and memorization deposits are completed, with a compound play motif in the form of fun, togetherness, and self-recovery, although these patterns are still prone to shifting from the plan when playing with friends. Faced with these conditions, students do not place gaming and *Tahfidz* discipline as two options that eliminate each other, but negotiate them through three forms of adjustment rooted in the value of the book of Hidayatul Adzkiya, namely the determination of the order of obligations before playing, immediate compliance when the *Tahfidz* schedule clashes directly with the game, as well as spontaneous awareness and time limits to overcome the most difficult points and recurring situations every day, all under the framework of priorities, restrictions, and self-control instilled by caregivers. To maintain the quality of memorization in the midst of these playing habits, students develop four strategies that support each other, namely securing the murajaah portion before playing, anchoring the murajaah schedule at a fixed time after dawn and before deposit, conducting layered monitoring through internal signals and listener feedback which is followed up by reducing the portion of play, and limiting the duration of play as a principle agreed upon by students, ustaz, and caregivers. The three findings show that the discipline of *Tahfidz* for students is not born from the provisions of the pesantren alone, but from the internalization of moral values learned through the book of Hidayatul Adzkiya into time management and daily self-control.

Graph 1. Mobile Legends Use Patterns, *Tahfidz* Discipline Negotiations, and

Strategies to Maintain the Quality of Memorization Based on the Values of the Book of Hidayatul Adzkiya



These findings can be explained through a combination of self-regulation theories (*self-regulation*) and moral education theory in Islam. Zimmerman (2000) explained that self-regulation develops through three phases, namely *forethought, performance*, and *self-reflection*, which allows individuals to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own behavior on an ongoing basis. The elastic and residual pattern of Mobile Legends use in students shows a phase *forethought*, which is the calculation of playing time based on the density of the *Tahfidz* agenda to be undertaken. The negotiations that occur when the schedule clashes reflect the phases *performance*, when students must control the urge to play actively in the midst of real situations that demand instant decisions. Meanwhile, monitoring strategies and corrective actions in maintaining the quality of memorization describe the phases *self-reflection*, namely self-evaluation of the results of the timing that has been carried out previously. The fundamental difference lies in the source of motivation for the regulation, which in the context of this research is not solely secular, but is rooted in the religious values that students study daily. Concept *mujahadah al-nafs* in Hidayatul Adzkiya's book, the work provides a normative framework that explains why students are willing to stop pleasure for the sake of obligation, because the control of lust is understood as part of the formation of morals, not just an instrumental discipline (Al-Malibari, n.d.).

The findings of this study have similarities as well as differences with a number of relevant previous studies. The similarities lie in the shared awareness that Mobile Legends has the potential to affect learning outcomes, as shown by Irawan et al. (2023) and Alfaroji and Puriani (2026) through quantitative and correlational approaches, as well as the common attention to the importance of disciplinary structures in maintaining the quality of memorization as studied by Jannah and Ilahiyah (2026), and to the digital challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools as discussed by Ma'ruf et al. (2024) through the policy of institutionally restricting digital devices. The difference is quite fundamental and is a gap

filled by this study. Irawan et al. and Alfaroji and Puriani place the intensity of play as a variable that measures its influence on achievement in a linear manner, while this study explores the microprocesses behind it, namely how students experience, negotiate, and overcome these clashes qualitatively and contextually on a daily basis. Jannah and Ilahiyah discuss the disciplinary structure of *Tahfidz* without associating it with gaming, while Ma'ruf et al. stop at the level of institutional restriction policies without exploring the self-regulation of students behind it in depth. Wang (2026) has criticized the restriction approach alone, but his study has not touched on the specific context of Qur'anic education. The novelty of this research lies in the combination of the digital framework of self-regulation with the value of Islamic moral education through the book Hidayatul Adzkiya, which shows the process of transformation from external compliance (being regulated) to spiritually charged self-regulation, a process that has never been empirically raised by previous studies that tend to be oriented towards external impacts or restrictions alone.

This research provides important implications for the development of Islamic education policies in Islamic boarding schools, especially in responding to digital challenges without having to sacrifice the tradition of *Tahfidz* discipline. First, these findings offer an empirical basis for the policy shift from a restrictive approach to a self-regulation coaching approach, so that pesantren do not need to rely entirely on the prohibition or confiscation of digital devices, but can design a program to strengthen *mujahadah al-nafs* and awareness of worship priorities as the foundation for controlling students' daily digital behavior. Second, this study shows that classic moral books such as Hidayatul Adzkiya have contextual relevance that can be explicitly integrated into the Islamic boarding school's digital literacy curriculum, not just taught as separate theoretical material, but directly linked to real problems such as the management of online game playing time among students. Third, the role of caregivers and ustaz who listen to memorization can be strengthened not only as supervisors of compliance, but as supervisors of the student muhasabah process, by providing a space for reflective dialogue when students experience failure to control themselves in their daily lives. Fourth, pesantren policies can consider structured but still flexible free time scheduling, considering that the findings show that total prohibition has the potential to ignore the social needs and psychological recovery of students which is also important. Thus, this research contributes to encouraging pesantren to formulate educational policies that are not only protective, but transformative and based on moral strengthening, so that students grow into individuals who are able to regulate themselves independently based on the Islamic values that they have learned throughout their education at the pesantren.

CONCLUSION

This research came to a conclusion that is actually different from the initial assumption that is prevalent in the Islamic education environment, that gaming and *Tahfidz* are two worlds that are impossible to reconcile. The findings actually reveal a surprising thing, Mobile Legends is not present as a threat that damages student discipline, but as an old habit, carried over from the invitation of friends, who actually submit and adjust to the structure of religious activities, not the other way around. Unexpectedly, the collective schedule of the pesantren turns out to work automatically limiting the opportunity to play, making the playing pattern elastic and residual, shrinking when the agenda is busy and only filling in the gaps after the obligation of *Tahfidz* and the memorization deposit is complete, without the need for extra supervision from caregivers. An equally surprising

finding is that the motive for students to play is not an escape from obligation, but a need that actually supports the continuity of the memorization process itself, namely fun, togetherness with friends, and self-recovery after memorization activities that require high concentration every day. However, this study also confirms that this balance remains fragile, because the duration of play often exceeds the initial plan when it takes place with friends, so control is not completely in the hands of individual students.

This research makes an important contribution in the form of a shift in perspective in looking at the relationship between gaming and *Tahfidz* education, from the paradigm of impact and restriction to the understanding of the process of self-regulation that is loaded with Islamic values through the study of *the book Hidayatul Adzkiya*, so that it can be an initial reference for the development of pesantren policies that are more adaptive to digital challenges without sacrificing the tradition of Qur'anic discipline that has been maintained for a long time. However, this research has fundamental limitations in the aspect of data collection, because the entire research process is only carried out in one location, namely the Oemah *Santri* Islamic Boarding School in Semarang, so that the findings produced are contextual and cannot be generalized to other *Tahfidz* pesantren that have different policy characteristics, pesantren culture, and levels of digital supervision. The limitation of this single location has the potential to hide variations in negotiation patterns that may arise in pesantren with stricter or looser rules on the use of daily gadgets. Therefore, further research needs to expand the scope of the research location by involving several *Tahfidz* Islamic boarding schools with different policy backgrounds and geographical areas, so that the findings can be compared cross-case to see patterns that are consistent and specific to certain contexts. In addition, a longitudinal approach can be considered to observe the development of students' self-regulation over time, instead of just capturing a portrait in a short period of time as done in this study.

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