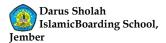


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Revisiting the Learning of Calligraphy at School: A Study of Khat Learning in Islamic Junior High School

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Abstract

Khat in Islamic calligraphy represents a visual journey through the intricate and magnificent scripts that have adorned Islamic art for centuries. The diverse styles of khat, developed over time, showcase the skill, creativity, and cultural exchange inherent in Islamic calligraphy. From Thuluth's elegance to Diwani's ornamental intricacy, khat scripts embody the beauty and richness of Islamic culture and continue to captivate and inspire audiences around the world. This study aims to describe and identify the khat learning in Darus Sholah Islamic Junior High School. Implementing qualitative research approach, the research focus is going to presented comprehensively based on the actual learning process taking place. The data were collected through in-depth interview, observation, and document review. Miles Hubberman and Saldana Analysis was carried out as it includes some stages such as the data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusion. To have a valid data, source and technique triangulation was used. The results of the research suggested that there are three types of khat learning taking place in Darus Sholah Islamic Junior High School, they are:

Key words: Calligraphy learning, *Khat*



INTRODUCTION

Islamic calligraphy holds a prominent place in the Islamic world, embodying the aesthetic beauty, cultural heritage, and spiritual significance of the Islamic faith (Alashari, 2022). Beyond its visual appeal, Islamic calligraphy has also garnered the attention and admiration. Islamic calligraphy, with its elegant curves and flowing lines, has captivated and inspired viewers for centuries. Kattan (2020) suggest that, it is a unique art form that not only serves as a means of written communication but also holds deep religious and cultural significance within the Islamic world.

Islamic calligraphy finds its roots in the early days of Islam when the revelations of the Quran were brought forth by Prophet Muhammad. Alashari (2020) says that as literacy was not widespread in the Arabian Peninsula during that time, oral transmission played a crucial role in the dissemination of Islamic teachings. However, with the growing Muslim community and the need for written documentation, the art of calligraphy emerged to facilitate the preservation of the Quranic verses.

The development of Islamic calligraphy was greatly influenced by diverse cultural and artistic traditions (Gadheb, 2023). Initially, Arabic script served as the foundation, but various scripts and styles evolved over time. The Kufic script, characterized by its angular and bold letterforms, dominated during the early centuries of Islam. It exemplified simplicity and legibility while adhering to a strict geometric structure. As Islamic civilization expanded, calligraphy absorbed elements from Persian, Byzantine, and Chinese artistic traditions. The Persian influence introduced flowing, cursive scripts like Naskh, which emphasized fluidity and ease of reading (Zahra and Shahir, 2023). The Chinese influence, particularly during the Mongol period, introduced vertical scripts and the use of a reed pen, which further expanded the repertoire of calligraphic styles.

Some of the common widely-known calligraphic visuals are found in architecture. However, Islamic calligraphy goes beyond mere decorative art; it carries deep symbolism and spiritual significance (Alshari, 2021). The text, often verses from the Quran, serves as a visual representation of the divine word. Calligraphers skilfully manipulate the shape, size, and arrangement of letters to convey the rhythm and melody of the recitation. The aesthetic beauty of Islamic calligraphy lies in its balance between ornamentation and legibility. Calligraphers explore innovative ways to harmonize form and function, creating visually captivating compositions that engage and inspire the viewer. The intricate interplay of positive and negative space, the graceful curves, and the intricate details all contribute to the mesmerizing allure of Islamic calligraphy.

Islamic calligraphy is revered by scholars as more than just an artistic endeavour; it is seen as a powerful medium of spiritual expression. Islamic scholars believe that the art of calligraphy allows one to engage with the divine word, facilitating a deeper connection to Allah (God) and enhancing one's spiritual journey. The act of meticulously writing the sacred texts serves as an act of devotion, and the visual representation of the words of the Quran becomes a tangible form of worship. Islamic calligraphy predominantly revolves around the verses of the Quran, which are considered the literal words of Allah. Islamic scholars emphasize the sanctity and importance of preserving and beautifying the written form of the Quran through

calligraphy. They view calligraphers as scribes of the divine, entrusted with the responsibility of accurately transcribing the verses and conveying their spiritual essence through their artistic skill.

Islamic scholars recognize the inherent harmony between the form and content of Islamic calligraphy. They view the intricate designs and elaborate letterforms as symbolic representations of the divine message. The fusion of aesthetics and meaning within calligraphy is seen as a reflection of the perfection and beauty of Allah's words. Scholars appreciate how calligraphy engages both the visual and intellectual senses, allowing the viewer to experience the beauty and profoundness of the Quranic verses simultaneously. Nevertheless, among the various forms of calligraphy, the intricate and ornate scripts known as "khat" have played a significant role in shaping the aesthetics and visual appeal of Islamic calligraphy.

Khat, which translates to "line" or "letter" in Arabic, refers to the distinct scripts and styles used in Islamic calligraphy. It encompasses a wide range of writing techniques, each with its own unique characteristics, proportions, and artistic expressions. The evolution and development of khat over time have given rise to numerous distinctive styles, including Thuluth, Naskh, Diwani, Ruq'ah, and Kufic, among others (Ahmad, 2020). The development of khat in Islamic calligraphy has been influenced by diverse artistic traditions and regional variations. Islamic calligraphers drew inspiration from pre-Islamic Arabic scripts, Persian calligraphy, Chinese brushwork, and other cultural influences encountered during trade and intellectual exchange. These cross-cultural interactions fostered innovation and experimentation, resulting in the evolution of various khat styles. Some of the well-known khats in Islamic calligraphy are as follows:

- a. Thuluth: Known for its elongated and graceful letterforms, Thuluth is characterized by its curvilinear nature and the interplay of thick and thin strokes. This script is often used for decorative purposes, such as inscriptions on buildings, mosques, and Qur'an manuscripts.
- b. Naskh: Naskh is a cursive script with rounded letterforms, allowing for easier readability. It became the standard script for copying the Qur'an due to its legibility and clarity. Naskh scripts are widely used in everyday writing, including books, official documents, and personal correspondence.
- c. Diwani: Diwani script is renowned for its complexity and decorative flourishes. It features highly stylized, interwoven letters that are often arranged in intricate patterns. Diwani is commonly employed in calligraphic compositions, royal decrees, and certificates.
- d. Ruq'ah: Ruq'ah is a simplified script characterized by its compact and angular letterforms. It is often used for fast writing and is prevalent in everyday contexts such as notes, manuscripts, and correspondence.
- e. Kufic: Kufic script, with its square, bold, and angular forms, originated in the early Islamic period. It was widely used for architectural inscriptions, epitaphs, and early Qur'anic manuscripts. Kufic scripts embody a sense of strength and stability.

Becoming a skilled khat practitioner requires years of practice, patience, and discipline. Traditionally, apprenticeship played a crucial role in transmitting the art of khat from master to student. Aspiring calligraphers would learn the rules and techniques under the guidance of a master, gradually honing their skills and

developing a deep understanding of the intricacies of each khat style. The mastery of khat extends beyond technical proficiency; it encompasses a spiritual connection with the written word and a deep appreciation for the aesthetics and symbolism inherent in each script.

Furthermore, Islamic scholars emphasize the importance of calligraphy education and transmission to preserve and promote this sacred art form. They encourage the teaching of calligraphy in religious institutions, where aspiring calligraphers can learn not only the technical aspects of the various scripts but also the spiritual and philosophical dimensions underlying the art (Wulandari and Sihombing, 2023). Moreover, according to Nasution and Harni (2023), by nurturing a new generation of calligraphers, the tradition can be preserved and expanded, ensuring its continuity in the Islamic world. Hence, the learning of khat is very significant to be taught to the students in school.

One of the schools that has taught Islamic calligraphy, even it is considered to the be the must-taken subject, is Darus Sholah Islamic Junior High School. Darus Sholah is Islamic-based Boarding School which implement both Islamic-based and formal educational curriculum. As a result, there are two kinds of school format offered, the full time and full day school. Full time means that the students need to stay at the boarding school 24 hours, while full day requires the students to attend the school for approximately 10 hours, starting from 06.00 am in the morning up to 05.00 pm in the afternoon. Having both formats, the students will not only learn about Islamic teaching but also the formal education. This is where it gets interesting. In general, the learning of Islamic calligraphy should be exclusively for the full-time students. However, the principal insists that the full day students should have the same opportunity to learn the Islamic calligraphy. Due to this reason, the learning of Islamic calligraphy is also included within the formal educational curriculum in the form of learning various khats. This study, in particular, aims to describe the learning of khats within Darus Sholah Islamic Junior High School.

METHODS

This research focuses on aspects of calligraphy taught in junior high schools, SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember. The case study method used in this study. The data was analysed descriptively by describing the types of calligraphy taught in calligraphy subjects at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember. The discussion was carried out by identifying the types of calligraphy taught.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Calligraphy Learning at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember

Calligraphy Teaching and Learning Activities at SMP Plus Darus Sholah are classified into two different activity sections. They are:

1. Intra-Curricular Activities

Calligraphy lessons are subjects that are officially determined by the school in terms of time and learning materials for students to follow during the learning process as local content lessons.

2. Extracurricular activities

Calligraphy lessons are a forum for those who have interest and talent in the world of calligraphy to be prepared to become athletes or artists calligraphy with achievement targets ranging from district to national, even international classes. This activity is carried out outside of intra-curricular activity time.

B. Types of Calligraphy in Calligraphy Subjects

1. Tahsin Kitabah

According to one of the teacher, *Tahsin Kitabah* is considered to be beautiful *hijaiyah* written letters using ballpoint with the *hamidi* method. This method was initiated by Syech Belaid Hamidi, namely *al-thariqah al-Hamidiyah fi tahsin al-kitabah al-i'tiyadiyah*. The characteristic of this method is that it teaches writing Arabic letters not based on the usual *hijaiyyah* letters order, from *alif* to *ya'*. However, based on groups of letters that are written in the same way, clockwise, counter-clockwise, and vertically. This method makes understanding in writing Arabic letters easier because they are grouped based on their writing characteristics. *Tahsin kitabah* is taught in class 7, Semester 1 of SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember as a basis or initial foundation before being introduced to other types of khat.

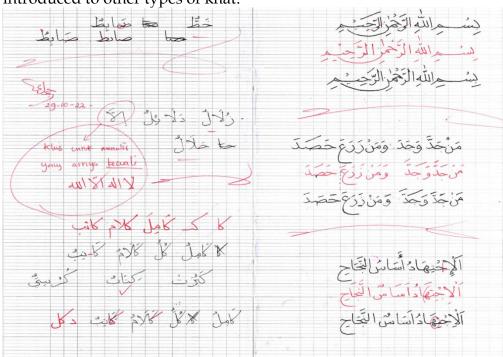


Figure 1.1 Students' Tahsin Kitabah Practice Book

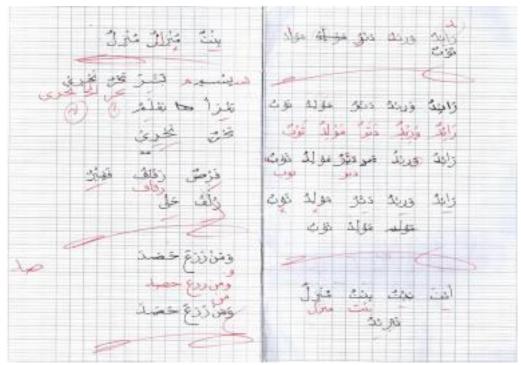


Figure 1.2 Students' Tahsin Kitabah Practice Book



Figure 1.3 Students' Tahsin Kitabah Practice Book

As seen in figure 1.1 to 1.3, the writing in red ink is the teacher's writing and the one with black ink is student's writing. Calligraphy learning using the *Tahsin Kitabah* in class begins with writing *basmalah*, so that the students can get blessings for learning calligraphy. Then proceed with writing of *mahfudzot* choices that aims to motivate students to be enthusiastic and have a strong desire to improve their writing. In those practice books, there are also

explanation of the evaluation for the student's writing along with examples of the correct writing according to the *Hamidi* method.

2. Khat Naskhi

Khat Naskhi is taught in class 7 in the second semester and class 8 in the first semester at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember. The basic writing of this khat usually uses a Makita pencil that has been sharpened with a slanted tip.



Figure 2.1 A pencil used to write calligraphy

Another way to wirte the *khat naskhi* is by using *handam*. *Handam* is traditional calligraphy pen which comes from a type of fern with its Latin name or scientific term *dicranopteris linearis*, which has been processed, sharpened and polished using certain techniques and used as a tool for making calligraph. To write with *handam*, it must be dipped into *hibror* ink and then applied to paper. To make it clear, look at the following picture:



Figure 2.2 Handam, a pencil used to write calligraphy

The writing of *Khat* is usually applied in books or lined folio paper or picture books outlined using a pencil to make it easier for students to write the *Khat Naskhi*.



Figure 2.3 Teacher's work (as an example for students)



Figure 2.3 Student's Work

3. Khat Tsulus

Khat Tsulus is taught in class 8 in the second semester, SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember.



Figure 3.1 Teacher's work (as an example for students)



Figure 3.2 Student's Work

4. Khat Farisi

The teaching of khat farisi is done in class 8 in the first semester at SMP Plus Darus Sholah.



Figure 4.1 Teacher's work (as an example for students)

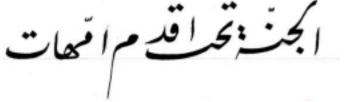


Figure 4.2 Student's Work

5. Khat Diwani

Khat Diwani is taught in class 8 in the second semester at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember.



Figure 5.1 Teacher's work (as an example for students)



Figure 5.2 Student's Work

CONCLUSION

Calligraphy learning at SMP Plus Darus Sholah is classified into two activities; Intra-Curricular Activities, participated by all students and Extra-Curricular Activities participated by students who have interest and talent in the calligraphy writing to be prepared to become athletes or calligraphy artists. The *Khat* taught in calligraphy learning at SMP Plus Darus Sholah are: (1) *Tahsin Kitabah* which is taught in the first semester of Class 7; (2) *Khat Naskhi*, which is taught in the second semester of Class 8; (3) *Khat Tsulus*, which is taught in the second semester of Class 8; (4) *Khat Farisi* which is taught in the first semester of Class 9; and (5) *Khat Diwani* which is taught in the second semester of Class 9.

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