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## **ANALYSIS OF WRITING SKILLS (MAHĀRATUL KITĀBAH) IN MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH LEVEL LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE ABSENCE OF CALLIGRAPHY SUBJECTS AT MTSN BINJAI**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Mahāratul kitābah* has several approaches, one of which is the art of calligraphy where the mahāratul kitābah is one of the four *mahārah* that are essential in the study of Arabic language. Therefore, it is important for Arabic learners to learn and master this art of calligraphy. In fact, the majority of schools from elementary to upper secondary schools do not give special attention to calligraphy subjects so that it affects the student's writing form that does not comply with the rules in force. The method used in this research is library research in which data is obtained from the library to provide arguments. The result of this study is that the school must give its own time for these calligraphy subjects so that the students of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri Binjai can write Arabic characters well and correctly that correspond to the rules of writing.

**Keywords:** Caligraphy, *Mahāratul kitābah*, Absence



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## Introduction

Arabic is one of the most popular languages in the country and around the world. This is natural because Arabic is not only the language of Islam, which is the second most practiced religion in the world. (Rainer, 2023) Arabic is also the richest language in the world with a very large number of vocabulary, the widest meaning as expressed by the Professor of Arabic Education at the University of Muhammadiyah West Sumatra, Prof. Dr. Mahyudin Ritonga, S.Pd.I, MA. (Padang, 2024).

In relation to the Arabic language, there are several branches of knowledge that require Arabic learners to learn, namely *mahārah al-arba'*. *Mahārah al-arba'* are four skills in the study of Arabic that can significantly help the procession of learning Arabic. The skills in question are, *mahāratul istima'* (listening ability), *mahāratul kalām* (speaking ability), *mahāratul qirā'ah* (reading ability), *mahāratul kitābah* (writing ability). These four skills are central to learning Arabic. *Mahāratul kitābah* or writing skills have several approaches to study, one of which is calligraphy. Calligraphy lessons are lessons in writing Arabic script beautifully and in accordance with the rules of Arabic writing. In other words, this lesson is very *urgent to* learn if you want to explore and hone *mahāratul kitābah*.

Ironically, calligraphy lessons are still considered a trivial and underestimated issue in formal education institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs starting from elementary school to high school. There are several reasons for the absence of calligraphy subjects in formal religious-based educational institutions. In fact, if viewed from a religious perspective, then religious-based educational institutions should be at the forefront of teaching the art of calligraphy because Islam and the Qur'an were revealed using Arabic as stated in the Qur'an surah Yusuf verse 2, **إِنَّا نَعْلَمُونَ أَنزَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لَّعَلَّكُمْ** (RI, 2019), (٢٠١٩).

For centuries, the art of calligraphy, which is essentially the art of beautiful writing, has been an important part of culture and education in many societies around the world. However, in recent decades, the amount

of calligraphy incorporated into the formal education curriculum has drastically decreased, even being removed altogether from some education systems.

Calligraphy is part of a nation's cultural heritage and identity more than just the art of writing. Over the years, calligraphy has been used to convey religious teachings, important documents, and classic works of literature. Calligraphy is considered one of the highest types of art that reflects spirituality and beauty in East Asia, such as China, Japan and Korea. Verses of the Qur'an and other religious texts are visually represented in Arabic calligraphy in Islamic societies.

Education has experienced a shift in focus from the humanities and arts to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) in many countries, especially in the Western world and much of Asia. This has happened in response to the growing job market need for experts in science and technology. Hence, arts fields such as calligraphy are often considered unimportant or irrelevant to modern needs.

The overall outlook of how one interacts with writing and art has been altered by advances in digital technology. New alternatives for making and creating art, including calligraphic forms, have emerged as a result of advances in computers, graphic design software, and digital printing. This has resulted in a lack of impetus to maintain traditional calligraphy techniques as there are now faster and easier ways to create similar works of art.

In addition to changes in education and technology, changes in cultural values also contributed to the removal of calligraphy from the school curriculum. In contemporary society, individual achievement in academics and careers is valued more than acquiring artistic skills or activities that are considered to contribute less directly to such achievement.

In this study, the author provides research limitations, namely analyzing the impact of the absence of calligraphy on students and a number of information related to *mahāratul kitābah* and calligraphy.

## Research Methods

The method that the author uses in this study is the *library research* method. This method takes data and references from libraries related to this study, namely Analysis of Writing Skills (*mahāratul kitābah*) at Madrasah Level Learners: A Case Study of the Absence of Calligraphy Lessons at MTsN Binjai. Mirzako in Arum said that *library research* is a method used in research that aims to collect data and information into an argument. (Arti et al., 2024). The *library research* method can be in the form of books, magazines, scientific journals, theses, and dissertations. (Arti et al., 2024).

## Results and Discussion

### A. *Mahāratul Kitābah* and Calligraphy

As it is well known that *mahāratul kitābah* cannot be separated from the four *mahārahs* that must be known and learned by Arabic language learners. Rusyana commented in Hardiyanti about *ta'rif mahāratul kitābah* as a skill in utilizing language patterns as a medium to convey certain messages and intentions. (Hardiyanti, 2022). Another opinion comes from Tarigan in Hardiyanti that *mahāratul kitābah* is a stage in describing a language with the aim that the message the writer wants to convey can be conveyed to the reader. (Hardiyanti, 2022). From the two opinions above, they both focus on the utilization of language in conveying intentions and goals. So *mahāratul kitābah* is a skill in writing something in the process of using certain symbols and patterns with the intention that the reader is able to understand the author's intention.

As mentioned earlier that *mahāratul kitābah* is one of the essential elements in Arabic language learning, the other three elements are: *First*, *mahāratul istima'* is the ability to listen to Arabic conversation. *Second*, *mahāratul kalām* is the ability to speak Arabic symbols and conversation in general, *Third*, *mahāratul qirā'ah* is the ability to read a text or discourse in Arabic, *Fourth*, *mahāratul kitābah*. (Oktovan et al., 2020).. Of course, these four skills must be considered so that Arabic language learning can be structured and systematic. *Mahāratul arba'* is also very central in helping someone to obtain and convey information. Etymologically, *mahāratul kitābah* is two words that have the same origin. *Mahārah* is derived from the verb ماهر - يمهّر, which then from this verb has the masdar مهارة which means

skill. (Al-Maani, 2024). *Kitābah* is derived from the verb يكتب - كتب which means to write, which in turn has the masdar كتابة (Al-Maani, 2024).

Calligraphy is an activity of *kitābah* and is one of the methods in improving *mahāratul kitābah*. Calligraphy is a term used to refer to the way of writing of the language used. (Mulyadi & Taran, 2024). So the number of calligraphy is as many as the number of languages that exist in this world. Etymologically, *calligraphy* comes from two syllables as stated by Kriya in Mulyadi, namely *Callos* which means beautiful and *Graphien* which means writing (Mulyadi & Taran, 2024). (Mulyadi & Taran, 2024). So, calligraphy is an aesthetic-oriented script or beauty that has certain patterns and writing rules based on the origin of the language used in the calligraphy. When someone hears the word calligraphy, the first thing that comes to mind is the beauty of Arabic characters and the words of Allah Swt. (B. Khairani & Ichsan, 2023)..

Departing from the etymology of the word calligraphy above, it can be understood that calligraphy is an *al-fann* in describing something with beautiful writings using a tool as a channel for the creativity of a calligraphy artist in accordance with the rules of calligraphy writing. *Mahāratul kitābah* does not mean writing without rules, but writing with a specific purpose that the writing can be read by the reader. It is the same with the art of calligraphy. Not all scribbles can be called calligraphy.

The question then arises, is there a fundamental difference between calligraphy and khat? Calligraphy and khat have a similar purpose, which is to discuss the layout, method of forming letters and writing which then becomes an artistic script. As for the fundamental difference between the two, calligraphy has a more general scope of expertise that is not limited to Arabic script alone but extends to Latin letters. Whereas khat, as the term comes from Arabic, the scope of khat is also about Arabic script, letter formation and Arabic writing.

Calligraphy is one of the branches of art that is carried out by calligraphers and people who have a high artistic spirit by relying on their creativity to produce a beautiful work of writing. Calligraphy writing also has elements that must be considered. These elements include, *First*, knowing in depth how to form hijaiyah letters properly, *Second*, knowing what letters can be connected both before and after and letters that cannot be connected, *Third*, knowing the letters that lie above the line and below the line. In other words, the art of calligraphy or khat cannot be

underestimated and done without any knowledge but a branch of science that has its own rules that require calligraphers to apply it so that then a beautiful work will be created.

In Arabic calligraphy, there are three symbolic characters as revealed by Hasnawati and Huzairin in Khotimah (Khotimah, 2023) *First*, horizontal writing results from writing movements, *Second*, vertical writing results from the letters alif and lam, *Third*, circular movements which can be symbolically interpreted as a circle.

The relationship between *mahāratul kitābah* and calligraphy is very strong. The more one studies calligraphy, the better one's *mahāratul kitābah* becomes. Because one of the purposes of honing *mahāratul kitābah* is so that a writing from the writer can be read well, clearly and regularly by the reader. The author's argument is also supported by Abdurrahman in his research where Abdurrahman said that *mahāratul kitābah* aims to help a writer polish his writing so that it becomes organized and readable by anyone who wants to read it. (Abdurrahman et al., 2024)..

## **B. School Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri Binjai**

Binjai State Madrasah Tsanawiyah School or commonly abbreviated as MTsN Binjai was established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Binjai City in 1993 AD as an initiative from the Government to build a madrasah in Binjai city where at that time there was no public madrasah school. In the early days, the madrasah was filled with approximately ten educators, two study rooms and had seventy-eight students. Before becoming a state madrasah, the name of this madrasah was Madrasah Tsanawiyah Persiapan Negeri from 1993 to 1995 AD.

During the pioneering period, the madrasah was located on Jalan Ir. H. Juanda, East Binjai. In 1995 AD, Madrasah Tsanawiyah Persiapan Negeri changed to Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri which then some students and educators were transferred to a new location on Pakan Baru road, South Binjai. After the completion of all infrastructure and administration, all teaching and learning activities were transferred to the new location, namely in South Binjai until now.

## **C. The Relationship Between Calligraphy and Mahāratul kitābah**

The relationship between *mahāratul kitābah* and calligraphy is very close because both are related to the ability to write in Arabic. calligraphy is the art of writing Arabic letters beautifully and correctly in accordance with applicable writing rules. While *mahāratul kitābah* or writing proficiency is the ability to express, pour and explain ideas, ideas then perspectives in written form. (Arti et al., 2024). In terms of the art of writing and the ability to write beautifully, calligraphy and *mahāratul kitābah* are closely related. In Islamic art, calligraphy refers to the art of writing beautiful and aesthetic Arabic letters. It is the art of beautifying writing, especially by using certain techniques and styles. In contrast, *mahāratul kitābah* refers to one's ability to write well and beautifully.

Good *mahāratul kitābah* is very important in Islamic calligraphy. One must write correctly and regularly using position, proportion, emphasis and rhythm. Mastering *mahāratul kitābah* is the key to mastering the art of calligraphy. A proficient calligrapher is not only skilled in good lettering techniques, but also understands the characteristics of each calligraphic style and is able to express them with beauty and precision. A calligrapher who has good *mahāratul kitābah* can produce calligraphic works that are harmonious, symmetrical and aesthetic. *Mahāratul kitābah* and calligraphy function together in this regard.

In *kitabah* or beginner writing lessons provide a technical basis for calligraphy. The existence of calligraphy art is needed so that the written work produced can express beauty and convey the desired message. Thus, calligraphy learning can help improve *mahāratul kitābah* because students not only learn the technique of writing letters correctly, but they are also trained to create beautiful writing. (Ni'ma, 2022). Calligraphy has a deep meaning in Islamic culture and religion besides being a visual art form. Every stroke of the pen, every layout of the letters, and every carefully chosen movement of the pen, has a deep symbolic meaning. For example, the letters used in Arabic calligraphy often have a spiritual connection, symbolizing the attributes of Allah or other religious concepts.

Calligraphy is also used as a way to honor and remember prophets and religious figures, often depicting beautiful writings of their hadith or wise sayings. This shows Islam's appreciation of words as an important tool for conveying moral and religious messages. One of the foundations of Islamic calligraphy is *mahāratul kitābah*, or the skill of writing beautiful Arabic. Without strong *mahāratul kitābah*, a calligrapher cannot produce high-



quality work. *Mahāratul kitābah* includes the ability to use the pen correctly, understand the layout of letters correctly, and develop a unique and recognizable writing style.

A skilled calligrapher is not only adept at lettering, but also understands letterforms, proportions, and prevailing aesthetic standards. To achieve the level of expertise respected in the Islamic calligraphy community, continuous practice and dedication is required. Calligraphy is seen in Islamic culture as an expression of cultural and religious identity in addition to being a visual art. Due to its strong association with holy verses and religious values, calligraphy is considered a pure and fine art form in Islam. Since calligraphy is widely used in art, architecture and decoration throughout the Muslim world, it is a symbol of cultural integration. By writing calligraphy indirectly makes the calligrapher and the viewer appreciate their culture and support the arts allowed in Islam.

Not only a visual art, calligraphy influences the daily lives of Muslims. An example is the use of calligraphy in decorative arts in homes, mosques and other religious places. This shows the important role calligraphy plays in conveying moral and spiritual messages to readers as well as shaping the aesthetics and spiritual atmosphere in physical spaces. As we know, calligraphy is one of the arts that is loved by many people in Indonesia. The field of art in general also has a large number of enthusiasts around the world. In addition to being a place of creativity, a field of money, it turns out that art also has a major effect in treating mental illness. In a study conducted by Hu and friends, it was shown that there were positive results on people with mental illness and that art therapy could gradually and successfully reduce the suffering of people with mental illness. (Hu et al., 2021).

#### **D. The Effect of Calligraphy Art on *Mahāratul Kitābah***

In practice, calligraphy art has a massive influence on a person's *mahāratul kitābah*. It was explained by Ismi in Ni'ma in her research which revealed the benefits that calligraphy art brings in supporting *mahāratul kitābah* so as to improve *mahāratul kitābah*. The benefits in question are, *First*, learners must practice precision and accuracy in writing Arabic letters so that the resulting writing is in accordance with the specified standards. *Secondly*, to improve their hand motor skills, learners should practice



precise and smooth hand movements to create beautiful and neat letter shapes. *Thirdly*, their understanding of shapes should be strengthened. *Fourth*, calligraphy strengthens the connection with the Quran and hadith by teaching writing skills in addition to prioritizing beauty and aesthetics in writing Arabic letters, thus increasing learners' creativity in writing and producing beautiful writing. Fifth, increasing creativity and beauty in writing, calligraphy often uses the holy verses of the Qur'an and hadith as learning materials, by involving themselves in the procession of calligraphy formation. this is very useful in building learners' closeness to the Qur'an and Hadith. (Khairani et al., 2023).. It can be seen that the art of calligraphy has a number of great benefits towards improving mahāratul kitābah.

According to the author, the contribution of calligraphy to the improvement of one's mahāratul kitābah is, *First*, improving one's quality. Calligraphy helps learners in writing good and correct Arabic letters and improving the overall quality of writing. *Second*, Improving the ability to write. Calligraphy involves the ability to produce writing that is clearly legible and of good quality in general. By developing and improving mahāratul kitābah as a result of learning good calligraphy, it can improve overall writing ability. *Third*, it improves communication skills. Calligraphy plays a role in the aspect of conveying information and ideas through writing. So if one's *mahāratul kitābah* is good then communication in writing can be conveyed well too. *Fourth*, practicing concentration. In calligraphy lessons, students are required to always focus and be careful in writing calligraphy. this means that the calligraphy produced from this caution and concentration can be of high value. Students' concentration is also well trained in writing calligraphy because if it is neglected, calligraphy writing becomes imprecise.

### **E. The Impact on *Mahāratul Kitābah* of the Absence of Calligraphy Subjects**

There is no *doubt* that the impact of the absence of calligraphy subjects on *mahāratul kitābah* is very clear. It is undeniable that there are several elements that hinder students' *mahāratul kitābah*. Through direct observation, the author sees a big difference between students who learn calligraphy and students who have never "tasted" calligraphy lessons in order to hone their *mahāratul kitābah*.

In Arabic writing, there are elements that must be considered by learners and observers of Arabic, one of which is harakat. Harakat is a punctuation mark in Arabic writing. Harakat is a central aspect in an Arabic word because with harakat a meaning can change and not according to the author's intention. So the author needs to emphasize that the harakat plays a very central role in conveying the author's intention to the reader.

A common difficulty among learners, especially those who are not from Arab countries ('*Ajam*) in learning calligraphy is the rule that applies in Arabic itself which starts from right to left. This rule is certainly very contradictory, especially among students in Indonesia, where writing starts from left to right, so it makes students who are learning calligraphy say that calligraphy and Arabic in general are difficult. Of course, as someone who is involved in the world of Arabic, you definitely want to make Arabic a subject that is loved by everyone. Therefore it is important to know Arabic well. If the view of students who think Arabic is difficult is not handled immediately, it will have an impact on other Arabic sub-sciences including the art of calligraphy. No one wants that to happen.

The impact of the absence of calligraphy lessons in the classroom on students' *mahāratul kitābah* according to the author's analysis is as follows: *First*, poor skills. Without calligraphy lessons, students will not have the ability to write well, including in terms of mastery of language, structure and spelling. *Second*, ineffective communication skills. The absence of calligraphy lessons can hinder learners' ability to communicate ideas clearly and effectively through writing. *Third*, less prominent creativity skills. Calligraphy helps creativity in writing so the absence of calligraphy lessons can hinder students' ability to find, collect, process and organize information properly. *Fourth*, poor language skills. The absence of calligraphy lessons can hinder students' ability to speak well, including in terms of reading, writing and speaking. *Fifth*, lack of stability in personality aspects. Calligraphy helps improve moral skills, such as patience, accuracy, and awareness so that the absence of calligraphy lessons has an impact on students' ability to cultivate their personality. If examined carefully, the actual impacts of the absence of calligraphy on students' *mahāratul kitābah* are the opposite of the benefits of calligraphy itself on students' *mahāratul kitābah*. So it is important for someone who is involved in the Arabic language to pay close attention to this aspect. Pay special attention to the benefits of calligraphy.

## F. Solutions to Educational Institutions in Improving Mahāratul Kitābah

The solution that the author offers to education officials is to give more attention to calligraphy learning in schools. Because in theory and practice it is proven that calligraphy can help students' mahāratul kitābah. Calligraphy lessons can be integrated with other lessons such as cultural arts and Indonesian language. The next solution is to make a special activity such as calligraphy extracurricular activities outside of teaching and learning activities. With the calligraphy extracurricular activities, it can improve the mahāratul kitābah of the students. Another important element is the willingness of the school and parents. The school must make direct observations by looking at the students' Arabic writing so that it may be a reason to create a special room both during teaching and learning activities and outside teaching and learning activities for calligraphy lessons.

## Conclusion

The absence of calligraphy in a school has had a significant impact on students' mahāratul kitābah (writing skills). Calligraphy as an art of beautiful and structured writing, not only teaches visual beauty but also hones the skills of accuracy, concentration and patience. Without adequate exposure to calligraphy in the educational curriculum, learners lose the opportunity to develop their writing skills in a more aesthetic and organized way. The integration of calligraphy into the educational curriculum can benefit learners' mahāratul kitābah. It will not only improve the physical quality of learners' writing but also develop mental skills and artistic spirit that can help learners in various aspects of life. Through the teaching of calligraphy, schools can ensure that learners not only acquire basic writing skills, but also appreciate the beauty and brilliance in every expression of their writing.

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