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The Ethics of Competitive Recognition in Indonesia's Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an

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ABSTRACT

Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) joins Qur'anic cultivation to competitive achievement, public recognition, and rewards. Existing scholarship explains how devotion and competition coexist, but it does not yet specify how to judge whether an institution's developmental rationale is justified. This article combines a qualitative documentary analysis of national regulation and official accounts of Aceh's 2025 provincial MTQ, with a limited comparison from Central Java, and a contextual normative reading of al-Ghazālī's writings on recitation, standing, intention, and sincerity. The documents preserve religious objectives, educational provision, and instrumental justifications for rewards. Together these show a conditional alignment between recognition and cultivation. Yet activity indicators and competitive results record narrower achievements than sustained devotional formation. Al-Ghazālī's distinctions allow limited instrumental standing, restrict the use of worship for esteem, and keep sincerity as an inward orientation that administrative certification cannot reach. Applied to institutions, these distinctions separate arrangements compatible with those goods, conceptual vulnerabilities, and the limits of documentary evidence. The article sets out four responsibilities: identifying the achievement being recognized, justifying the educational suitability of support, distinguishing promised from delivered provision, and limiting success claims to what the evidence supports. It advances a Sufi ethical account of institutional answerability, in which public recognition is judged by the religious goods it invokes and by the conditions it sustains for Qur'anic learning.

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Introduction

Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) gives Qur'anic learning a prominent institutional setting in Indonesia. Reciters prepare, judges assess performances, governments recognize achievement, and regional delegations compete for distinction, all within an explicit religious mandate. Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 15 of 2019 lists knowledge, understanding, appreciation, practice, and dissemination of the Qur'an and hadith among MTQ's objectives, and it also provides for adjudication, competitive results, and oversight.[1] The ethical question arises from the combination of purpose and organization. A competition may encourage disciplined learning, and public recognition may help sustain educational support. Yet the relationship between an accomplished performance and the wider purposes of Qur'anic life still needs explaining. A regional success has real value, but it shows only part of what the institution aims to cultivate. The issue matters because organizers allocate resources and confer public authority on particular descriptions of achievement, and those choices help determine which accomplishments receive attention and which recede from the public account. An ethical inquiry must therefore examine the reasons connecting recognition with the religious goods that justify it. The inquiry concerns the institution's responsibilities for its arrangements and representations. Participants' inward motives cannot be read from the presence of an audience, a trophy, or a prize.

Existing scholarship has already complicated the simple opposition between devotion and competition. Studies of Indonesian recitation situate aesthetic accomplishment, learning, and public religious life within overlapping practices. Most directly, Iskandar and Arzam's Kerinci study explains how actors justify competition through its relation to religious ends, collective benefit, and intention. They also examine regional prestige, consider the risk of political rationalization, and recommend placing competitive targets within a developmental framework.[2] The question that follows is narrower: what justifies an institution's claim that a particular reward or competitive achievement serves that wider development? A religious rationale establishes the purpose invoked, but its adequacy also depends on what is recognized, how the arrangement can serve that purpose, and what the available evidence shows. The analysis joins those questions to al-Ghazālī's distinctions between inward recitation and outward accomplishment, instrumental standing and attachment to esteem, and professed purpose and actual intention. These distinctions make the justification of recognition more exacting: an institution must explain the relationship between the accomplishment it honors, the learning it supports, and the success it reports. This article specifies those relationships within an existing account of piety and prestige.

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[1] Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Peraturan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 15 Tahun 2019 tentang Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an dan Seleksi Tilawatil Qur'an*, 2019, art. 2 and preamble; arts. 13, 15 and 37–41, https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/130623/peraturan-menag-no-15-tahun-2019.

[2] Nuzul Iskandar and Arzam, "Toward a Fiqh of Religious Competition: A Qualitative Study of Negotiating Piety and Performance in Kerinci's Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an," *Religia* 29, no. 2 (2026): 278–284, https://e-journal.uingusdur.ac.id/Religia/article/view/16204; Anne K. Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), publisher's synopsis, https://www.ucpress.edu/books/women-the-recited-quran-and-islamic-music-in-indonesia/paper.

The study asks how *Sufi* ethics can evaluate the alignment between MTQ's Qur'anic objectives and its arrangements for competition, achievement, and rewards. Three linked questions organize the investigation: how do national regulation and selected official documents articulate these objectives and arrangements; which principles concerning inward recitation, sincerity, ostentation, and attachment to status emerge from al-Ghazālī's moral thought; and how do those principles support an evaluation of institutional alignment, tensions, and responsibilities? Aceh's thirty-seventh provincial MTQ in 2025 supplies the principal documentary context; Central Java's thirty-first provincial MTQH (Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an dan Hadis) in the same year supplies a limited comparison. National materials establish the common institutional framework, while provincial documents show particular accounts of planning, achievement, and continuation. The questions connect the interpretation of institutional records with the reconstruction and contemporary application of *Sufi* ethical principles. Their institutional focus concerns arrangements that organizers can authorize, explain, and revise. Individual competitors are relevant as recipients of recognition and educational provision, but their psychological states are outside the evidence collected. The assessment asks what these arrangements can justifiably claim to achieve and what further support their religious purposes would require.

The central proposition is that institutions invoking Qur'anic cultivation to justify competitive recognition owe a purpose-specific account of that recognition. Such an account identifies the accomplishment being rewarded, explains how the associated arrangements support the religious purpose invoked, and confines claims of success to the evidence available. Al-Ghazālī provides substantive reasons for these demands. His account of recitation gives attention and understanding a place that vocal skill cannot fully supply. His treatment of standing allows limited instrumental need while condemning deception and the pursuit of esteem through worship. His analysis of sincerity preserves the moral importance of inward orientation without making it publicly ascertainable.[3] Applying these principles to institutions requires one further premise: organizers take on responsibilities through the purposes they declare and through their control over criteria, resources, publicity, and support. Their responsibility concerns the exercise of institutional authority, while sincerity is a quality of persons. This approach yields conditional judgments about educational provision, preventive limits on what awards may represent, and explicit uncertainty about spiritual effects. It also gives institutions real work to do. A defensible account connects recognition with opportunities for Qur'anic engagement and can be revised when its educational rationale is poorly supported. Questions about these responsibilities connect the ethics of recitation with wider accounts of recognition, religious practice, and institutional authority.

Research on recitation shows how public performance can be educational and devotional before any institutional arrangements are judged. Gade's study situates

[3] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1356–1357 AH / 1937–1938), *Kitāb Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*, pt. 3, 506–513; *Kitāb Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, pt. 10, 1851–1853; *Kitāb al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*, pt. 14, 2699–2700, 2722–2725, https://aco.dlib.nyu.edu/book/columbia_ac0003578/1.

Qur'anic learning, emotion, and competition within Indonesian religious revitalization; Rasmussen's work brings institutional learning, festival settings, women's participation, and religious nationalism into a shared field of inquiry. Both situate skilled recitation within the social relationships through which Qur'anic learning becomes publicly visible.[4] The broader emphasis on scripture's oral dimensions in Graham and the differentiation of recitational practices in Nelson likewise cautions against identifying religious seriousness exclusively with private or silent reading.[5] These perspectives establish a productive starting point: technical skill, public listening, and communal organization can belong to religious practice. What matters ethically is the quality of that relationship, not visibility alone. The institutional issue becomes sharper when performance receives prizes, governmental sponsorship, or regional prestige, since these arrangements connect a practice's value to public judgments of success. Recitation scholarship identifies the practices whose meaning would be lost in a simple account of spectacle; ethical analysis asks how institutions should organize and describe their support. Read together, they turn the educational character of recognition into a question about the conditions of practice and the purposes institutions serve.

Direct MTQ research presents competing assessments of governance, religious legitimacy, and social benefit. Azwar's published abstract proposes reconstruction in response to alleged manipulation and weaknesses in adjudication. This places organizational integrity at the center of the scholarly debate. Salamah and colleagues examine Misbah Musthofa's criticism of MTQ and offer a contextual reply to concerns that include ostentation. Their reading places the dispute within Qur'anic interpretation, while Azwar's reforms direct attention to organizational integrity. Ronaldi, Subhan, and Zamhari's Jambi study, by contrast, emphasizes educational and social functions and so offers a different basis for evaluating organized competition.[6] These arguments differ in both their object and the evidence they can support. Criticism of a governance arrangement may justify closer investigation without establishing that every event shares the defect. Evidence of educational benefit in one setting also leaves room to question

[4] Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai' Press, 2004), publisher's synopsis, https://uhpress.hawaii.edu/title/perfection-makes-practice-learning-emotion-and-the-recited-quran-in-indonesia/; Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, publisher's synopsis and contents.

[5] William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), preface x, https://assets.cambridge.org/97805214/48208/frontmatter/9780521448208_frontmatter.pdf; Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001), excerpts reproduced in Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, "Hearing the Qur'an in Jakarta," https://asia-archive.si.edu/podcast/hearing-the-quran-in-jakarta/.

[6] Alfi Julizun Azwar, "Gagasan Rekonstruksi Tradisi Musabaqah Tilawatil Quran (MTQ) dalam Perspektif Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin," *Jurnal Ilmu Agama: Mengkaji Doktrin, Pemikiran, dan Fenomena Agama* 19, no. 1 (2018), abstract, https://doi.org/10.19109/jia.v19i1.2379; Ika Hilmiatus Salamah, Ahmad Ainul Yaqin, Sulaiman, and Nasihun Amin, "Counter-Extremes Against of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) in Tafsir Al-Iklīl fī ma'āni al-Tanzīl," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 14, no. 2 (2025): 429–433, https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/journal-of-quran-and-hadith/article/view/46570; Abon Ronaldi, Arief Subhan, and Arif Zamhari, "Implikasi Dakwah Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an dalam Pembangunan Masyarakat Qur'ani," *Anida (Aktualisasi Nuansa Ilmu Dakwah)* 23, no. 1 (2023): 7–18, https://doi.org/10.15575/anida.v23i1.22518.

another arrangement's rationale or implementation. Together, the studies distinguish legitimacy, organizational integrity, and educational benefit as related but separable grounds of assessment. Each needs evidence suited to its own setting; a favorable or unfavorable verdict cannot simply be carried from one event to another. The useful question is which features support the religious purpose claimed, and which require explanation or additional evidence.

Recognition also has an organizational form that can affect what institutions attend to. Espeland and Stevens describe commensuration as comparison through a common metric. Espeland and Sauder examine how public rankings can reshape conduct in law schools. Such mechanisms make the institutional effects of assessment a relevant question for MTQ, which must be examined in its own setting. Meyer and Rowan distinguish formal structure from ongoing activity. Their point is a complementary warning: a public commitment does not show that implementation has happened just because it appears in an institutional account.[7] The distinction directs attention to how an account relates to the activity it describes, including what the genre leaves out. MacIntyre distinguishes the goods of a practice from external goods such as money and status. Moore examines how that distinction applies to organizations. Together these clarify why institutions that support a practice still matter ethically.[8] External resources can sustain activity even as their pursuit creates competing demands. These comparisons help formulate questions about the organization of recognition. They cannot define Qur'anic cultivation or decide whether a prize is permissible. That evaluative content must come from the reconstructed religious framework. So the two literatures are used selectively: organizational analysis explains why criteria and representations deserve attention, and Ghazalian ethics gives the reasons for judging what they should serve.

Research on motivation limits what can responsibly be inferred from the existence of material rewards. Ryan and Deci distinguish intrinsic interest from externally prompted activity that may become internalized. Deci, Koestner, and Ryan show that reward effects depend on the type of reward and its contingency. Cerasoli, Nicklin, and Ford find that incentives and intrinsic motivation can jointly predict performance. Frey and Jegen examine when rewards crowd out or crowd in motivation, and Bénabou and Tirole analyze the information that incentives may convey.[9] These distinctions make a deterministic

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[7] Wendy Nelson Espeland and Mitchell L. Stevens, "Commensuration as a Social Process," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1998): 313–343, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.313; Wendy Nelson Espeland and Michael Sauder, "Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds," *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 1 (2007): 1–40, https://doi.org/10.1086/517897; John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (1977): 340–363, https://doi.org/10.1086/226550.

[8] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), chap. 14, https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268035044/after-virtue/; Geoff Moore, "On the Implications of the Practice–Institution Distinction: Macintyre and the Application of Modern Virtue Ethics to Business," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (2002): 19–32, https://doi.org/10.2307/3857646.

[9] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68–78, https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.55.1.68; Edward L. Deci, Richard Koestner, and Richard M. Ryan, "A Meta-Analytic Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation," *Psychological Bulletin* 125, no. 6 (1999): 627–668, https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.6.627; Christopher P. Cerasoli, Jessica M. Nicklin, and Michael T. Ford, "Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Incentives Jointly

explanation of prizes inadequate. They also leave the religious question open. Intrinsic enjoyment, autonomous motivation, and *ikhlāṣ* describe different evaluative objects: enjoyment of an activity cannot establish devotion to God, while religious commitment may sustain difficult activity that brings little immediate enjoyment. Applying these findings to provincial MTQ would require evidence about participants' motivations and the conditions attached to rewards. Within the present documentary inquiry, motivation scholarship clarifies the range of plausible relationships. It identifies alternatives to the assumption that payment displaces devotion and indicates questions for subsequent research about recipients' interpretations, coaches' expectations, and continued engagement. Textual interpretation of sincerity addresses a further question: the moral orientation that gives religious action its purpose.

Al-Ghazālī's moral thought gives the evaluation a substantive center without supplying a ready-made theory of contemporary organizations. Griffel's account places his work within philosophical theology, while Garden's introduction questions an exclusively reclusive or narrowly *Sufi* interpretation of the Revival. Vasalou's introductory discussion places moral beauty within the intersection of ethical and aesthetic judgment. These contextual resources discourage separating inward formation from every outward or social concern.[10] The selected primary books then address different parts of the problem. *Kitāb Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān* examines reception of the Qur'an through outward observances and inward acts; *Kitāb Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ* analyzes the desire for standing in others' hearts; *Kitāb al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq* explains intention and sincerity. Their relationship supports a careful inquiry into excellence, visibility, and purpose. In particular, the limited usefulness of standing has to be read alongside the warning against making worship a means of gaining esteem. The analysis of sincerity also distinguishes being unmixed in a relative sense from religious sincerity directed toward God, preventing purity of motivation from becoming a morally empty description. These qualifications preserve the framework's demanding character. Institutions may organize support for a religious practice, but their declared purposes or reported achievements cannot settle the inward value of the worship conducted within it.[11]

The literature thus presents a question about the justification of recognition within organized religious life. Asad's discussion of discursive tradition directs attention to historically situated authority and practice; Mahmood and Hirschkind place ethical formation within embodied and auditory activity. Teeuwen, Sen, and Rots examine public

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Predict Performance: A 40-Year Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 140, no. 4 (2014): 980–1008, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035661; Bruno S. Frey and Reto Jegen, "Motivation Crowding Theory," *Journal of Economic Surveys* 15, no. 5 (2001): 589–611, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6419.00150; Roland Bénabou and Jean Tirole, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation," *Review of Economic Studies* 70, no. 3 (2003): 489–520, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-937x.00253.

[10] Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195331622.001.0001; Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–9, https://academic.oup.com/book/11386; Sophia Vasalou, *Al-Ghazālī and the Idea of Moral Beauty* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), introduction, 1–2, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003196556.

[11] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*, pt. 3, 509–513; *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, pt. 10, 1851–1853; *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*, pt. 14, 2722–2725.

festivals through the relations among piety, patronage, and play.[12] These perspectives resist reducing public religion either to private belief or to concealed interest. The need to judge the reasons offered for particular institutional choices remains. Across these perspectives, religious goods acquire practical form through relations of authority, learning, and support. Recognition becomes ethically consequential because it shapes those relations and offers a public account of their value. Institutional assessment can ask what recognition certifies, how support serves Qur'anic learning, and what evidence justifies a claim of success. These connected questions give the documentary comparison a normative purpose beyond listing official statements. They also constrain the assessment: the presence of a religious justification is relevant evidence, while the sincerity of its speaker and its practical effectiveness are separate questions. Institutional answerability concerns this public relationship between a stated religious good and the choices made in its name.

Method

The unit of analysis was the institutional arrangement linking competition, public recognition, rewards, and Qur'anic development in selected official documents. National MTQ regulation and guidance established the common framework; Aceh's thirty-seventh provincial MTQ in 2025 provided the principal context. Its work plan and accountability report could be read alongside contemporary event reports and subsequent recognition. Central Java's thirty-first provincial MTQH in the same year provided a limited comparison, particularly through statements connecting achievement with further coaching. Because the records differed in genre and detail, the comparison was contextual, not balanced. A separate Central Java communication concerning national Seleksi Tilawatil Qur'an dan Hadis (STQH) was included as evidence of institutional religious messaging, with its event context kept distinct from provincial MTQH. The focus was the relation between public commitments and arrangements under institutional control. Close reading of recitation ethics supplied the principal normative perspective, while MTQ's other Qur'anic and hadith branches remained part of the wider institutional setting. The investigation concerned official accounts of purposes, provision, and achievement; participants' inward states and lived educational experiences lay beyond this documentary evidence.

Qualitative documentary analysis was combined with contextual interpretation of *Sufi* ethical texts. Bowen's account of document analysis and Prior's treatment of documents as socially active material informed the reading of official sources as situated institutional

[12] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 20, https://doi.org/10.5250/quiparle.17.2.1; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvctoocf; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-ethical-soundscape/9780231138192/; Mark Teeuwen, Moumita Sen, and Aike P. Rots, "Festivals in Asia: Patronage, Play, and Piety," *Religion* 53, no. 3 (2023): 387–405, https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721x.2023.2211395.

representations.[13] A regulation could establish an authorized purpose, a work plan a proposed activity, and an event report an institutional account of implementation. The design preserved these differences before evaluating their ethical significance. Textual interpretation reconstructed the relevant goods and restrictions in al-Ghazālī's discussions of recitation, standing, intention, and sincerity. Normative comparison then examined the reasons connecting documented arrangements with those goods. The institutional application rested on an explicit premise: organizers' public commitments and control over criteria, resources, publicity, and support make those choices answerable to the purposes invoked. This premise connects personal ethical concepts with institutional responsibility without attributing a single inward intention to an organization. The design thus permitted assessment of the suitability of recognition and educational provision, while distinguishing that judgment from evidence of their effects. Supporting scholarship contextualized the primary texts, situated the argument within existing MTQ research, and supplied alternative explanations of the relationship between rewards and religious practice.

Sources were selected purposively for their relevance to the three research questions and their identifiable provenance. The institutional corpus comprised eleven documents: the national regulation, the 2025 musabaqah handbook, six Aceh documents, and three Central Java reports. The Aceh materials included the final-draft work plan, accountability report, advance schedule, opening and closing reports, and reward communication. The Central Java materials concerned closure, results, and sincerity messaging at the separate national event. Together, these sources enabled comparison of institutional purposes, competitive arrangements, reported achievement, and planned continuation. Their status as official documents established provenance, not independent confirmation of every reported activity.[14] The primary ethical sources were *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*, *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, and *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq* within the *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, read in the Cairo 1356–1357/1937–1938 edition preserved by Columbia University Libraries and digitized through Arabic Collections Online.[15] Six selected passages and their surrounding sections addressed inward recitation, audible reading, permissible and prohibited standing, intention, and sincerity. Secondary scholarship supplied context and conceptual comparison. Where access was limited to an abstract, introduction, synopsis, or reproduced excerpt, interpretation remained confined to that material; no chapter-level findings were inferred from bibliographic descriptions.

Documents and texts were identified through targeted searches in Indonesian, English, and Arabic and examined through official institutional sites, publisher records, and library collections. Selection followed the connection between national rules, the

[13] Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–32, https://doi.org/10.3316/qrj0902027; Lindsay Prior, *Using Documents in Social Research* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2003), https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020222.

[14] John Scott, *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), https://www.wiley-vch.de/en/areas-interest/humanities-social-sciences/a-matter-of-record-978-0-7456-0070-3.

[15] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*, pt. 3, 506–513; *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, pt. 10, 1851–1853; *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*, pt. 14, 2699–2700, 2722–2725.

provincial events, and accounts of subsequent recognition or coaching. Institutional identity, document title, publication information, and the relationship between a report and the event it described were checked against the source itself. Plans, announcements, and retrospective reports were read according to their different purposes. Within Aceh's work plan, historical data and forecasts were distinguished from activities proposed for 2025; the event chronology was compared across contemporary reports and the accountability document. Arabic electronic texts assisted passage location, after which the selected wording and immediate context were compared with original printed scans. Citations follow continuous printed pagination. Close attention was paid to restrictions on instrumental standing and to the distinction between relative purity and religious sincerity. Scholarly publications were identified through publisher or registration records, with library records used for the primary edition. Claim support was checked in the accessible text. These procedures produced a verified corpus, selected purposively, for documentary description and ethical interpretation.

Analysis proceeded through directed qualitative coding, contextual textual reading, and normative comparison. Twenty-one selected documentary passages were organized under categories covering religious objectives, education, competition, rewards, prestige, governance, and evaluation or continuity. A statement could receive more than one category where, for example, it connected a reward with continued learning. The categories organized the interpretation of meaningful passages; they did not estimate how often each theme occurred.[16] The primary texts were read for the relationship between each ethical proposition and its surrounding qualifications. The comparison then distinguished three kinds of judgment. Conditional alignment identified an arrangement or rationale compatible with a reconstructed good at the level evidenced. Conceptual vulnerability identified a potential ethical error, such as treating performance as proof of spiritual superiority. Evidentiary limitation identified a question beyond what the records established. A reporting contradiction was treated separately as a problem of documentary interpretation. Developmental guidance, educational provision, reward rationales, oversight, and sincerity messaging were examined as counterevidence to an exclusively prestige-centered interpretation. The resulting account linked each judgment to a source, an ethical reason, and the scope of the inference. This made it possible to affirm institutional strengths and identify questions of responsibility within the same analytical framework.

Results

Qur'anic cultivation remained an explicit institutional purpose across the national and Aceh materials. The national regulation states objectives extending beyond performance, and the 2025 handbook directs Lembaga Pengembangan Tilawatil Qur'an (LPTQ) beyond event organization toward literacy, appreciation, and Qur'anic practice. Aceh's final-draft work plan places MTQ-related provision within a wider program of understanding and

[16] Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1277 (abstract), https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687.

applying the Qur'an, with planned support for personnel, institutions, and training.[17] These documents establish a developmental mandate and planned activities against which institutional arrangements can be considered. The religious purposes against which competition can be judged are already present in institutional policy itself. Their documentary functions differ: legal authorization, guidance, and planning do not by themselves establish delivered education. A chronological inconsistency qualifies the event record: an advance announcement scheduled November 1–8, 2025, and contemporary reports identify ceremonies on November 1 and 7, while the accountability report gives October 2–8.[18] This discrepancy affects reconstruction of the administrative chronology. The ethical finding rests on the documented relationship between the developmental mandate and the activities planned to support it, as summarized in Table 1.

Competitive recognition combined assessment, regional distinction, and officially stated educational purposes. The national handbook assesses *tajwīd*, *faṣāḥah*, melody, and voice in recitation, with penghayatan included within melody criteria. Expressive engagement appears in the assessment framework, although its score cannot establish sincere intention. Regulation authorizes adjudication and determination of results.[19] Provincial communications show how achievement receives wider public value. Aceh Besar's reward report describes money and umrah gifts for successful competitors, explicitly presenting support as encouragement for continued Qur'anic learning and dissemination. The report establishes a symbolic handover and an official rationale; it does not independently verify every transfer or how the money was later used. Central Java's closing report links an ambition to become national overall champion with announced reselection and centralized coaching; a separate official report records regional results.[20]

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[17] Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Peraturan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 15 Tahun 2019 tentang Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an dan Seleksi Tilawatil Qur'an*, art. 2; Direktorat Penerangan Agama Islam, Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Buku Pedoman Musabaqah Al-Qur'an dan Al-Hadis Tahun 2025*, 2025, iii–iv, https://lptq.jatengprov.go.id/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-Buku-Pedoman-MTQ-25-April.pdf; Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, *Rancangan Akhir Rencana Kerja Tahun 2025*, 2024, 34, 42–43, https://dsi.acehprov.go.id/media/2025.06/rankhir_renja_20251.pdf.

[18] Kantor Wilayah Kementerian Agama Provinsi Aceh, "MTQ Aceh XXXVII 1–8 November, Ini Lokasi Lombanya," October 6, 2025, https://aceh.kemenag.go.id/baca/mtq-aceh-xxxvii-1-8-november-ini-lokasi-lombanya; Polda Aceh, "Kapolda Aceh Hadiri Pembukaan MTQ ke-XXXVII di Pidie Jaya," November 2, 2025, https://tribratanews.aceh.polri.go.id/kapolda-aceh-hadiri-pembukaan-mtq-ke-xxxvii-di-pidie-jaya/; Kantor Wilayah Kementerian Agama Provinsi Aceh, "Kakanwil Kemenag Hadir, Wagub Menutup MTQ Aceh ke 37, Ini Juara 10 Besar," November 8, 2025, https://aceh.kemenag.go.id/baca/kakanwil-kemenag-hadir-wagub-menutup-mtq-aceh-ke-37-ini-juara-10-besar; Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, *Laporan Keterangan Pertanggung Jawaban Tahun 2025*, 2026, 2–4, https://dsi.acehprov.go.id/media/2026.02/lkpj_dsi_2025_11.pdf.

[19] Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Peraturan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 15 Tahun 2019 tentang Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an dan Seleksi Tilawatil Qur'an*, arts. 1 and 15; Direktorat Penerangan Agama Islam, Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Buku Pedoman Musabaqah Al-Qur'an dan Al-Hadis Tahun 2025*, 38–39.

[20] InfoPublik, Pemerintah Kabupaten Aceh Besar, "Bupati Aceh Besar Serahkan Bonus dan Hadiah Umrah bagi Juara MTQ Provinsi Aceh 2025," March 2026, https://infopublik.id/kategori/nusantara/962274/index.html; LPTQ Provinsi Jawa Tengah, "Baru Saja Ditutup, MTQH Jateng Langsung Panaskan Mesin Menuju MTQ Nasional," November 13, 2025, https://lptq.jatengprov.go.id/baru-saja-ditutup-mtqh-jateng-langsung-panaskan-mesin-menuju-mtq-nasional/; Sekretariat Daerah Kabupaten Tegal, "Kota Semarang Raih Juara Umum MTQH Jateng 2025,"

These materials show recognition embedded in a proposed sequence of preparation, competition, reward, and further learning. The sequence has an intelligible educational rationale, but its existence in public statements leaves delivery and effects to be established separately. Winning is an explicit aim in that account. That alone does not show it is the institution's only purpose. This distinction makes the rationale assessable without attributing an inward motive to those receiving recognition.

The documents made different kinds of accomplishment visible, each with its own scope as evidence. Aceh's plan includes participation and training outputs, alongside an agency-level Qur'anic-literacy indicator. Its accountability report presents regional results and preparation for a separate national STQH event. Central Java announces coaching following its provincial competition. [21] These features complicate any claim that institutional evaluation consists only of rankings. Participation may indicate access or provision; literacy addresses a particular competence; competitive rank expresses comparative achievement under an assessment scheme. These indicators describe particular achievements, leaving the relationship between delivered activities and sustained attention, understanding, or Qur'anic practice open. Table 1 identifies the reach of the public account: teaching and devotional formation may extend beyond what an activity report records. The finding concerns what these sources establish about the link between objectives and accomplishments. Nothing here shows that regional prestige has replaced devotion. The difference between an activity indicator and a claim about formation gives ethical assessment a precise object: the explanation connecting an institutional accomplishment to the wider religious purpose it is invoked to serve.

Table 1. Institutional purposes, arrangements and documentary limits

Document/context	Purpose and provision	Recognition and reporting	Evidence limit
National regulation and handbook	Qur'anic knowledge, appreciation and practice; wider LPTQ remit	Assessment includes penghayatan; results and oversight	Design and guidance; implementation differs by event
Aceh final-draft work plan	Personnel, institutions and training; agency literacy indicator	Participation and service targets	Plans, historical data and 2026 forecasts kept distinct
Aceh accountability report	Qur'anic purpose; separate national-event preparation	Provincial results and preparation reported	Dates conflict with contemporary reports; scope limited to reported activities
Aceh Besar reward report	Continued learning and syiar invoked	Money and umrah recognition reported	Symbolic handover; delivery and later use not independently verified

November 14, 2025, https://setda.tegalkab.go.id/2025/11/14/kota-semarang-raih-juara-umum-mtqh-jateng-2025.

[21] Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, *Rancangan Akhir Rencana Kerja Tahun 2025*, 19, 42–43; Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, *Laporan Keterangan Pertanggung Jawaban Tahun 2025*, 2–4; LPTQ Provinsi Jawa Tengah, "Baru Saja Ditutup, MTQH Jateng Langsung Panaskan Mesin Menuju MTQ Nasional."

Document/context	Purpose and provision	Recognition and reporting	Evidence limit
Central Java provincial reports	Reselection and coaching announced	National championship target; provincial results	Coaching announced; delivery lies beyond this report
Separate Central Java STQH message	Sincerity, calm and mutual support	Competition addressed through religious counsel	Contextual message; no provincial MTQH implementation inference

Sources: Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 15/2019, arts. 2, 13, 37–41; Buku Pedoman Musabaqah (2025), iii–iv, 38–39; Aceh work plan, 19, 42–43, and accountability report, 2–4; provincial reports cited in the accompanying notes.

In *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*, al-Ghazālī presents recitation as a practice in which outward observance and inward reception have distinct responsibilities. Chapter 3 lists ten inward acts, including presence of heart, reflection, and understanding; the surrounding discussion differentiates attending to the Qur'an from merely hearing oneself recite it. The preceding chapter's treatment of audible recitation is expressly conditional. Quiet reading is preferable where display is feared, while audible reading may benefit listeners, encourage attention, and sustain practice when it does not disturb another worshipper.[22] The textual result is a qualified account of publicity: its religious value depends on its relation to the act and its circumstances. Public skill can participate in Qur'anic engagement without exhausting what that engagement requires. For an institution claiming to support the practice, the relevant contemporary inference concerns the opportunities it creates for learning and attention. Technical instruction, occasions for listening, explanation of meaning, and reflective engagement can each be considered for their suitability to that purpose. The text establishes the goods that make such questions relevant; it does not prescribe a modern competition curriculum. Nor does the distinction authorize judges to score the heart. Educational arrangements can be assessed institutionally, while the inward quality of a particular recitation exceeds the performance evidence available to them.

In *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, al-Ghazālī permits limited standing while imposing demanding restrictions on its pursuit. In the section on commendable and blameworthy love of *jāh*, al-Ghazālī allows the standing needed in relations with a helper, companion, teacher, or protecting ruler. The specified desire for standing in a service relationship is "not blameworthy," because its object is the limited assistance needed for ordinary life. He then rejects love of standing for its own sake or beyond what is needed, condemns obtaining it through false attribution of qualities, and explicitly warns against reaching it through worship where that constitutes *riyāʾ*.[23] These qualifications prevent converting instrumental utility into a general endorsement of prestige. The resulting institutional question concerns the object and use of recognition. An award for demonstrated recitation skill can accurately name that accomplishment; a claim to personal sanctity would require a different and unavailable justification. The distinction marks a boundary for the

[22] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*, ch. 2, ninth observance, pt. 3, 506–508, and ch. 3, pt. 3, 509–513.

[23] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, "*Bayān mā Yuḥmad min Ḥubb al-Jāh wa-mā Yudhamm*," pt. 10, 1851–1853, especially 1852. Translations from Arabic are supplied here.

interpretation of awards. Table 2 treats spiritual superiority as a conceptual vulnerability; the examined records establish recognition of achievement. Support intended to make further learning possible has a potentially legitimate rationale, but useful consequences cannot retrospectively purify the performer's motive. The textual distinction preserves both the possibility of justified support and the personal moral risk of seeking esteem through worship.

In *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*, al-Ghazālī locates intention in the movement toward a purpose, which a verbal declaration can only partly show. Its account distinguishes knowledge, will, and capacity, and then examines single and combined motivating factors. The discussion of sincerity adds a qualification especially relevant to public religious language: purity can first denote an unmixed motive relative to its object, but religious usage specifies freedom from admixtures in the purpose of drawing near to God. A single ostentatious motive is condemned despite being unmixed in the relative descriptive sense.[24] Institutional statements about religious goals accordingly cannot settle the inward orientation of speakers or recipients. The contemporary application follows from a different responsibility. Organizers control criteria, resources, publicity, and educational provision, and their public commitments give reasons for assessing those choices. That assessment neither attributes literal *ikhlāṣ* to an organization nor exempts its arrangements from scrutiny. It asks whether the choices are suitable for the goods invoked and whether their public description is defensible. Personal spiritual work is still indispensable within the primary framework, including attention to motives that outsiders cannot establish. Institutional responsibility concerns the conditions and representations around that work. Confusing these levels would either turn administration into an examination of hearts or allow appeals to private intention to answer questions about public decisions they cannot resolve.

Educational provision and instrumental reward rationales support conditional alignment at the level shown by the sources. The national developmental mandate, Aceh's planned support, its reported national-event preparation, and Central Java's announced continuing coaching all identify activities that can sustain engagement with a demanding practice. The explicit justification of rewards in Aceh Besar, framed as encouragement for continued learning, supplies a particular reason for connecting recognition with cultivation.[25] The basis for alignment is the intelligible relationship between the support envisaged and the stated goods. Delivery and sustained benefit are distinct objects of assessment. The account of recitation supplies reasons to value educational opportunity; the analysis of standing restricts the role of standing; the treatment of intention and sincerity prevents the rationale from certifying the participant's motive. Other contextual

[24] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn, al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*, "*Bayān Ḥaqīqat al-Niyyah*," pt. 14, 2699–2700, and "*Bayān Ḥaqīqat al-Ikhlāṣ*," 2722–2725.

[25] Direktorat Penerangan Agama Islam, Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Buku Pedoman Musabaqah Al-Qur'an dan Al-Hadis Tahun 2025*, iii–iv; Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, *Rancangan Akhir Rencana Kerja Tahun 2025*, 42–43; Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, *Laporan Keterangan Pertanggung Jawaban Tahun 2025*, 3–4; LPTQ Provinsi Jawa Tengah, "Baru Saja Ditutup, MTQH Jateng Langsung Panaskan Mesin Menuju MTQ Nasional"; InfoPublik, Pemerintah Kabupaten Aceh Besar, "Bupati Aceh Besar Serahkan Bonus dan Hadiah Umrah bagi Juara MTQ Provinsi Aceh 2025."

evidence also weakens a purely acquisitive reading. Central Java's separate national STQH communication urges sincerity, calm, mutual support, and freedom from excessive target anxiety.[26] As a communication about a separate national event, that message shows part of the institution's public religious language; it is not evidence of how provincial MTQH XXXI was run. Table 2 attaches each evaluation to its object: a compatible purpose or support rationale, an announced arrangement, or an inward effect that remains unknown.

The principal vulnerability concerns extending the meaning of competitive achievement beyond what it demonstrates. If an institution treated rank, a reward ceremony, or participation totals as sufficient proof of sustained Qur'anic cultivation, the resulting claim would exceed its evidence. The danger has ethical force because his account of inward recitation identifies goods that performance alone cannot exhaust, while his treatment of standing rejects acquiring standing through the appearance of qualities one lacks. The provincial documents report performance and support at a more limited level, without claiming winners' spiritual superiority or fulfillment of the whole religious mission.[27] The conceptual vulnerability concerns whether an expanded claim is justified; the documentary limit concerns how much the account actually covers. A wider claim of educational benefit could be supported through an account of what teaching was offered, who could access it, how promised support was delivered, and why these arrangements were suitable for continued engagement. Such evidence would address opportunities and implementation, leaving sincerity outside its reach. Administrative brevity, reporting conventions, and educational activity that was never recorded are credible alternatives to institutional neglect. The evaluation directs attention to the connection between recognition, provision, and the reasons offered for a wider educational judgment.

The integrated assessment differentiates the responsibility to organize support from the responsibility to describe its achievement. Aceh Besar's reward rationale offers a concrete example. Encouraging continued learning is a reason compatible with the reconstructed goods; the symbolic handover provides evidence of public recognition; whether recipients obtained usable support and continued learning is a further question. The announcement of coaching in Central Java likewise identifies a prospective connection between recognition and preparation, and its delivery cannot be inferred from the ambition to win.[28] Table 2 brings these different objects of judgment into a common evaluative account. Institutions should identify what an award recognizes, justify the suitability of associated support, distinguish promises from delivered provision, and keep public claims within what their evidence establishes. Supported alignment can coexist

[26] LPTQ Provinsi Jawa Tengah, "'Kalau Dia Bisa, Saya Pun Bisa!' – Petuah KH. Darodji yang Menggetarkan Kafilah Jateng di Kendari," 2025, https://lptq.jatengprov.go.id/kalau-dia-bisa-saya-pun-bisa-petuah-kh-darodji-yang-menggetarkan-kafilah-jateng-di-kendari/.

[27] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*, pt. 3, 509–513; *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, pt. 10, 1852–1853; Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, *Rancangan Akhir Rencana Kerja Tahun 2025*, 19, 42–43; Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, *Laporan Keterangan Pertanggung Jawaban Tahun 2025*, 2–4.

[28] InfoPublik, Pemerintah Kabupaten Aceh Besar, "Bupati Aceh Besar Serahkan Bonus dan Hadiah Umrah bagi Juara MTQ Provinsi Aceh 2025"; LPTQ Provinsi Jawa Tengah, "Baru Saja Ditutup, MTQH Jateng Langsung Panaskan Mesin Menuju MTQ Nasional."

with a limited account of implementation, while an ethically significant risk can be identified without declaring an institution culpable.

Table 2. Ghazalian principles and differentiated institutional evaluation

Textual basis	Institutional object	Assessment	Warrant and boundary
Inward recitation and conditional audibility — *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*	Developmental mandate and education	Conditional alignment	Educational suitability; sustained formation lies beyond the record
Standing as a restricted means — *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*	Reward rationale of further learning	Conditional alignment	Rationale must concern the means and support; motive unknown
Truthful attribution — *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*	What a performance award establishes	Conceptual vulnerability	Recognition of skill provides no warrant for attributing sanctity
Inward acts and religious sincerity — *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*; *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*	Broad cultivation inferred from outputs	Conceptual vulnerability	Activity outputs provide a limited basis for claims about cultivation
Intention and religious sincerity — *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*	Prizes, motives and spiritual effects	Evidentiary limitation	Public records cannot identify inward orientation
Institutional application of the texts	Purpose, support, delivery and claims	Normative responsibility	Public commitments and control ground duties concerning support and claims

Sources: al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, *Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qurʾān*, pt. 3, 506–513; *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, pt. 10, 1851–1853; *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*, pt. 14, 2699–2700, 2722–2725; official documents in Table 1. Institutional applications and assessments are the present analysis.

Discussion

Even where the religious legitimacy of competition is accepted, the findings make justification a substantive ethical question. Demonstrated skill gives organizers something real to value, and support for study can be beneficial without depending on a recipient's competitive rank. The difficulty arises when these different reasons stand in for one another: winning is taken to validate a developmental program, or an announced educational purpose is treated as proof that development occurred. The reconstructed texts give reason to resist that substitution. Recitation's inward responsibilities exceed the qualities publicly assessed, and standing is ethically conditioned by what it represents and serves. An adequate account should explain the connection that matters without demanding a numerical indicator for every religious good. That explanation may point to a curriculum, continuing access to teachers, or the delivery of support promised for further study. Its value lies in making the institution's practical reasoning open to scrutiny, and in showing where the evidence runs out even when an arrangement's educational rationale is sound. This is a constructive account of responsibility: institutions answer for the conditions they organize. Avoiding exaggerated claims and urging sincerity are part of that task, but they are not all of it.

This article extends Iskandar and Arzam by making their evaluation more specific, while staying close to their argument. Their Kerinci study examines how actors negotiate means, ends, benefit, and intention. It explicitly considers whether religious reasoning can rationalize political and institutional interests. Its conclusion already recommends embedding competitive targets within a developmental framework.[29] This also brings four distinctions into focus. The first is the accomplishment being recognized. The second is the reason that links support to a religious good. The third is the delivery the record actually establishes. The fourth is how far a resulting success claim can reach. Ghazalian textual analysis gives these distinctions their ethical content and preserves the restrictive warning about worship used for esteem. The provincial documents then show how conditional compatibility and uncertainty about the evidence can coexist within a single arrangement. The focus moves from explaining actors' justifications to evaluating how a justification relates to the arrangements offered in support of it. Evidence favorable to institutional purposes matters as much as evidence that constrains a claim. This adds one more task to the existing discussion of religious competition. It asks what would make the developmental rationale adequate in a given account.

The Ghazalian framework also explains why institutional adequacy cannot absorb the whole moral life of a religious practice. A program may provide teaching, allocate support fairly, and describe achievements accurately, yet these features cannot establish that a particular person acts for God. Conversely, a person's sincere orientation cannot by itself show whether public arrangements are well justified. The warning in *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ* about seeking esteem through worship stays personal and demanding even where recognition has an educational rationale. The distinction in *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq* between relative unmixedness and God-directed sincerity also rules out assuming that a consistent purpose is for that reason a good one.[30] These points keep responsibility from becoming a substitute for spiritual discipline. They also explain the need for historical restraint. Garden's reconsideration of the Revival resists isolating al-Ghazālī's moral project within private withdrawal. Vasalou's introduction opens the relation between ethical and aesthetic judgment. Together, these contextual perspectives preserve a conception of formation richer than organizational compliance. Moore's discussion shows why movement from a practice to its supporting institutions requires an additional argument. [31] Here that argument concerns public commitments and controllable conditions. The religious substance is the quality and orientation of engagement. Its inward realization can be supported institutionally, but it cannot be certified administratively.

Accountability in this argument has both a practical object and an epistemic boundary. Its object is the exercise of authority over assessment, resources, publicity, and educational continuation. Its boundary is the difference between evidence of provision or performance and judgment of inward religious worth. Bovens's account of accountability, narrowly

[29] Iskandar and Arzam, "Toward a Fiqh of Religious Competition," 278–284.
[30] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, *Dhamm al-Jāh wa al-Riyāʾ*, pt. 10, 1851–1853; *al-Niyyah wa al-Ikhlāṣ wa al-Ṣidq*, pt. 14, 2722–2725.
[31] Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 1–9; Vasalou, *Al-Ghazālī and the Idea of Moral Beauty*, introduction, 1–2; Moore, "On the Implications of the Practice–Institution Distinction."

understood, involves an actor obliged to explain conduct to a forum that can question and judge it, with possible consequences.[32] The duty proposed here concerns the reasons institutions owe for the developmental rationale of recognition. Formal accountability would additionally require an identifiable forum with the power to question and judge. A suitable account would enable questions about the educational purpose invoked, the means chosen, their delivery, and the interpretation of results. It could be revised when support proved inaccessible or a claim exceeded the record. Scholarship on commensuration and ranking warns that the form of an evaluation can itself redirect attention.[33] Answerability has to respect the goods being examined. Narrative explanation, records of educational access, and opportunities to question public claims can address institutional choices without converting the heart into an indicator. The conceptual result is a limited duty. Institutions must justify their recognition in terms of the religious goods it invokes. The justification should match what they can actually organize and know.

Existing MTQ guidance gives these responsibilities a starting point. The national handbook's developmental remit and the regulation's fairness and oversight provisions provide resources for examining the connection between recognition and cultivation.[34] Organizers could connect reward announcements with a clear account of the accomplishment recognized and the learning opportunities the support is intended to enable. Where further coaching is promised, later reporting could distinguish selection, access, delivery, and continuing participation. The relevant question is whether the provision described gives practical substance to the educational rationale. Such review should also allow recipients and teachers to question whether support fits actual educational needs, including needs outside the circle of winners. Curriculum descriptions and voluntary accounts of learning could inform that judgment without being used as compulsory declarations of spiritual purity. The Aceh and Central Java records show why timing matters. A symbolic reward ceremony and an announcement of coaching each establish a particular act. Their wider benefits require additional inquiry.[35] A proportionate approach would use evidence institutions can reasonably provide, attend to the burdens of reporting, and preserve teaching time. Its value lies in improving the reasons and conditions supporting Qur'anic engagement while keeping reporting proportionate to that purpose.

A competition's wider educational life also goes beyond its official reports. Administrative documents may omit reflective learning because their genre favors activities, expenditure, and results. Coaching can combine technical competence and

[32] Mark Bovens, "Analysing and Assessing Accountability: A Conceptual Framework," *European Law Journal* 13, no. 4 (2007): 447 (abstract), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0386.2007.00378.x.
[33] Espeland and Stevens, "Commensuration as a Social Process"; Espeland and Sauder, "Rankings and Reactivity."
[34] Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Peraturan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 15 Tahun 2019 tentang Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an dan Seleksi Tilawatil Qur'an*, arts. 13 and 37–41; Direktorat Penerangan Agama Islam, Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Buku Pedoman Musabaqah Al-Qur'an dan Al-Hadis Tahun 2025*, iii–iv, 2–3.
[35] InfoPublik, Pemerintah Kabupaten Aceh Besar, "Bupati Aceh Besar Serahkan Bonus dan Hadiah Umrah bagi Juara MTQ Provinsi Aceh 2025"; LPTQ Provinsi Jawa Tengah, "Baru Saja Ditutup, MTQH Jateng Langsung Panaskan Mesin Menuju MTQ Nasional."

devotional attention in ways that a closing report never describes. Material support may enable further study for participants who otherwise lack resources. Research on motivation shows several possible links between incentives and sustained activity. Scholarship on piety and public festivals warns against treating public recognition as a sufficient explanation of hidden self-interest.[36] These alternatives place interpretation within the wider educational life that official reports only partly describe. An institution may have good reasons and effective practices that still need examination; a more complete account could strengthen, qualify, or overturn the present assessment of particular arrangements. Transfer to another religious setting would likewise require reconstruction of its goods, authoritative concepts, organizational controls, and what counts as adequate evidence. The proposed questions can guide that work without transferring a judgment about spiritual integrity. The wider point is the link between interpretation and responsibility. Ethical evaluation should help identify what sustains a religious practice, and it should keep the grounds of institutional judgment open to examination.

Conclusion

The documentary and textual findings point to a qualified relationship between competitive recognition and Qur'anic cultivation. National and provincial documents keep Qur'anic objectives alongside assessment, regional achievement, recognition, and educational provision. They support compatible purposes and reported or announced support, but sustained formation remains incompletely evidenced. Al-Ghazālī's accounts of recitation, standing, and intention separate inward recitation from outward accomplishment, limited instrumental standing from attachment to esteem and deception, and professed purpose from actual intention. Applied to contemporary institutions, these principles support conditional alignment in particular educational features and reward rationales. They also identify a conceptual vulnerability: extending the meaning of achievement beyond what it demonstrates. The institutions examined, however, did not claim their winners were spiritually superior, and the effects on sincerity remain unknown. The ethical relationship between competition and cultivation therefore depends on how recognition is justified, supported, and represented. Institutions can answer for the purpose of an award, the suitability and delivery of educational support, and the scope their claims can justifiably have. Individual devotion keeps a distinct moral significance that public ranking cannot settle. These results allow criticism and affirmation at the level the evidence supports, while preserving the educational and communal possibilities that give MTQ its religious importance.

The scholarly contribution is a Ghazalian account of institutional answerability within an established debate on piety, competition, and prestige. Its added value lies in distinguishing the object of recognition, the means that support cultivation, and the evidence used to describe success. It makes the rationale for recognition assessable

[36] Cerasoli et al., "Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Incentives Jointly Predict Performance"; Frey and Jegen, "Motivation Crowding Theory"; Teeuwen et al., "Festivals in Asia"; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape*.

through institutional choices, while keeping sincerity a distinct personal obligation. The familiar point that winning does not prove devotion is extended into concrete responsibilities: explain why the chosen support serves the purpose invoked, establish what provision has been delivered, and revise claims or arrangements when the connection is inadequate. The primary texts supply the religious goods and restrictions that make these responsibilities consequential, and the documentary comparison shows how compatibility, vulnerability, and uncertainty can coexist within one account. The proposal has limits. It specifies necessary considerations for defending recognition through Qur'anic cultivation, but not sufficient conditions for the moral legitimacy of every MTQ practice. It supports criticism of success claims that lack justification, and it also recognizes institutional strengths under the same requirement: an adequate account of how public achievement serves learning and devotion.

The conclusions concern a purposively selected documentary corpus with unequal provincial coverage. Official reports show how institutions represent themselves and what activities they report. Lived formation and the effects of support require other forms of inquiry. The textual interpretation is based on selected passages and their context in one printed edition, rather than a comprehensive collation of the *Iḥyāʾ* or its manuscript witnesses. Access to some secondary books was limited to introductory material or descriptions, restricting their use to contextual orientation. Future research could follow promised support through delivery and use, examine learning opportunities for unsuccessful as well as successful participants, and compare institutional accounts with teachers' and learners' experiences. Longitudinal inquiry could investigate how coaching, access to teachers, and material assistance sustain engagement over time. Interviews and observation would illuminate these processes without making self-reported devotion a measure of sincerity. Examining how institutions respond when educational needs differ from competitive priorities would also test the practical force of the proposed responsibilities. Such research would deepen the ethical account of public recognition by showing how its justification is sustained, revised, or challenged in the continuing life of Qur'anic learning.

Declarations

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The authors used ChatGPT/Codex (OpenAI) as a technical aid for language editing, structural refinement of the manuscript, and reformulation of sentences. The tool did not generate any research data. The authors reviewed and independently verified all references, substantive descriptions, and interpretations in the manuscript. AI is not listed as an author. The authors bear full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, academic integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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