

Semiotics of Qur'anic Rhetoric in Ustadz Adi Hidayat's Da'wah on Early Childhood Tahfidz: A Roland Barthes Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose - This study aims to analyze the representation of early-age Qur'anic memorization (tahfidz) messages delivered by Ustadz Adi Hidayat through the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotics.

Method - The research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative design. Data were collected through online observation of sermon videos, purposive sampling for data selection, and documentation in the form of transcripts and screenshots. Data analysis was conducted by identifying denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings based on Barthes' semiotic framework.

Findings - The findings reveal that at the denotative level, the da'wah messages explicitly encourage parents to introduce and habituate Qur'anic memorization from an early age. At the connotative level, tahfidz is interpreted as a symbol of religious identity formation and a spiritual investment for the future of children and their families. At the myth level, the messages construct a collective belief in the ideal Muslim generation grounded in the Qur'an and capable of bringing honor to their families. The integration of these three levels of meaning within digital media strengthens the internalization of religious values through widespread dissemination and active audience engagement. Future research is recommended to combine semiotic analysis with audience reception studies or digital ethnography to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital da'wah on society.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of Islamic education is to cultivate a generation that is faithful, knowledgeable, and of noble character. One of its essential dimensions is the cultivation of Qur'anic literacy from early childhood. However, contemporary realities reveal a significant challenge in the digital era, where many young children are vulnerable to deficiencies in foundational religious literacy, particularly Hijaiyah illiteracy, resulting from changing lifestyles and the limited contextual stimulation of Islamic values within the family environment. This phenomenon has serious implications for children's future development, as it may weaken self-regulation, moral formation, and the establishment of a strong spiritual foundation from the earliest stages of life (Wardana & Mustofa, 2025). Qur'anic literacy extends beyond the ability to read and memorize the Qur'an; it also encompasses understanding, internalizing, and practicing Qur'anic values in everyday life (Mukaromah et al., 2023). Within this context, the concept of early childhood tahfidz education becomes increasingly relevant, considering that childhood represents the golden period for character formation and optimal knowledge acquisition (W., 2022). Meanwhile, the digital era has fundamentally transformed patterns of religious information consumption, as society, particularly younger generations, is now more frequently exposed to religious values through cyberspace than through conventional religious gatherings (Rachmah, 2026).

The urgency of introducing Qur'anic memorization from an early age is reinforced by studies in Islamic education demonstrating that tahfidz programs contribute substantially to the continuous development of students' religious character. Their impact extends beyond memorization achievements to the internalization of faith, piety, honesty, discipline, perseverance, and responsibility as core values of Islamic character education (Azizah & Murniyetti, 2023). Within formal educational institutions, strengthening religious character has also emerged as a response to the contemporary crisis of values caused by the predominance of cognitive achievement over affective and moral development (Maulana & Ismail, 2025). Structured tahfidz activities—including *murāja'ah* (systematic revision), memorization submission, and periodic evaluation—have been shown to foster consistent worship habits, time discipline, and personal responsibility in preserving memorization (Wijayanti & Kurniawan, 2025). Consequently, the habitual practice of reading, memorizing, and implementing the Qur'an contributes directly to strengthening religious character as the foundational virtue supporting the development of other positive characteristics.

In the Indonesian context, Qur'anic tahfidz programs have become strategic instruments for reinforcing religious character in both formal and non-formal Islamic educational institutions. Previous literature emphasizes that tahfidz education is not merely oriented toward memorization outcomes but also serves as a medium for internalizing Qur'anic values such as discipline, responsibility, and the practical implementation of Islamic teachings in daily life (Azizah & Murniyetti, 2023). Through tahfidz, learners are encouraged not only to read and memorize the Qur'an but also to cultivate Islamic character and strengthen their faith in Allah SWT. The internalization of Qur'anic values promotes Islamic behavior while preventing reprehensible conduct (Utami & Fathoni, 2022). Furthermore, the continuous habit of reading and memorizing the Qur'an nurtures consistent religious practices, positioning tahfidz as both an educational activity and a foundation for character development (Sari et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these studies

predominantly focus on educational implementation and outcomes, leaving unexplored the ways in which the discourse of early childhood tahfidz is rhetorically and symbolically constructed through Qur'anic da'wah. This gap constitutes the primary focus of the present study.

This study aims to uncover the construction of meaning embedded in Qur'anic da'wah messages concerning early childhood tahfidz as conveyed in the sermons of Ustadz Adi Hidayat through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. Specifically, it seeks to identify da'wah messages at the denotative and connotative levels while revealing the mythical meanings produced through these messages in constructing the ideal image of the Muslim generation. Barthes' semiotic perspective is employed because it conceptualizes da'wah as a system of signs that communicates not only literal meanings but also ideological meanings that become naturalized as social truths. Within the field of da'wah communication, semiotic analysis enables researchers to investigate how messages of *aqīdah* and *akhlāq* are constructed and positioned as dominant meanings through a two-stage process of signification. Accordingly, this research not only describes the content of da'wah on early childhood tahfidz but also explains how Qur'anic meanings and myths are produced and disseminated through da'wah as a form of symbolic communication.

This study argues that Qur'anic da'wah concerning early childhood tahfidz functions not merely as the normative transmission of religious teachings but also as a rhetorical system of signs that shapes meaning, value orientation, and the ideology of Islamic education. Da'wah messages do not simply communicate religious doctrines; they also construct religious meaning structures within society through symbolic communication (Fasadena, 2020). Within this process, tahfidz is no longer understood solely as an individual act of worship but is transformed into a social identity and an ideal standard of successful Islamic education (Samad et al., 2023). At the second level of signification, Qur'anic myth naturalizes early childhood tahfidz as a superior and comprehensive educational model capable of addressing the moral challenges faced by contemporary youth. Barthes' semiotic approach to Qur'anic texts further suggests that Qur'anic meaning extends beyond literal interpretation, as connotation and mythologization generate ideological meanings accepted as social truths within religious practice (Wijaya, 2021). Thus, early childhood tahfidz da'wah may be understood as a symbolic communicative practice that ideologically reproduces Qur'anic meaning while contributing strategically to the orientation of contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia. The novelty of this research lies in applying Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to dismantle the audiovisual sign system of digital da'wah, thereby revealing how the discourse of early childhood tahfidz is naturalized into a social myth and positioned as the ideal standard of the contemporary Muslim generation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to understand and interpret the meanings embedded within a communication phenomenon. A qualitative approach enables an in-depth exploration of symbolic meanings, social contexts, and ideological constructions represented in media texts (Nisa, 2015). Descriptive research is appropriate because it systematically and factually describes phenomena without manipulating the object of investigation (Tinarbuko, 2017). In this study, the qualitative descriptive design is particularly suitable for analyzing the visual and verbal

signs contained in Ustadz Adi Hidayat's da'wah through Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective. Data were collected through online non-participant observation of sermon videos accessed from digital platforms, primarily YouTube, and subsequently analyzed using Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth. The naturalistic characteristics of qualitative research, which emphasize profound understanding of social phenomena, further justify the selection of this methodological approach (Yusanto, 2020).

The object of this research is the digital da'wah content delivered by Ustadz Adi Hidayat, specifically videos published on the official YouTube channel @AdiHidayatOfficial. The analysis focuses on a sermon discussing methods of memorizing the Qur'an, selected because the channel represents a credible and influential source of digital Islamic preaching with extensive audience reach (Adi Hidayat, n.d.; Yusanto, 2020). The theme of early childhood tahfidz was chosen due to its central relevance to Qur'anic education for young children. The research object was determined through an initial exploration of available online da'wah content, followed by purposive sampling based on thematic relevance, viewership, and alignment with the research objectives (Haryono, 2020). Three specific audiovisual segments were selected as the units of analysis, corresponding to the timestamps 1:48, 3:53, and 4:15. These duration-based units delimit the scope of observation to the sermon fragments richest in rhetorical expressions, symbolic representations, and communicative signs relevant to the study's objectives.



Figure 1. Adi Hidayat Official YouTube Channel

The subject of this study is the da'wah message delivered by Ustadz Adi Hidayat through video content published on the official Adi Hidayat Official YouTube channel. The selection of this research subject is based on the preacher's active role in utilizing digital media to disseminate Islamic messages to a broader audience, making it highly relevant for the study of da'wah communication in the digital era (Rani, 2023). Furthermore, advances in communication technology have transformed patterns of social interaction and positioned digital media as a primary space for communication. Consequently, da'wah content distributed through online platforms constitutes an important object of analysis within contemporary Islamic communication studies (Prasanti, 2017).

Data collection was conducted through online non-participant observation and documentary analysis of da'wah videos published on the official Adi Hidayat Official YouTube channel. Non-participant observation was employed because it enables researchers to examine communication phenomena without directly engaging in the observed activities, thereby ensuring

that the collected data remain naturalistic and objective (Fadli, 2021). Documentary analysis was used to gather video recordings, sermon transcripts, and relevant screenshots, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the meanings embedded in the da'wah messages (Hasanah, 2017). The data collection process consisted of four stages: (1) identifying videos using relevant keywords, (2) selecting videos through purposive sampling, (3) archiving video links as research documentation, and (4) transcribing the sermon content, which was subsequently categorized according to Barthes' semiotic framework of denotation, connotation, and myth.

In addition, the data analysis was informed by the concept of Qur'anic communication (Khiyaroh, 2024). The primary analytical indicators include the clarity of message delivery and the manner in which Islamic values are introduced to viewers. This concept is applied to examine how Ustadz Adi Hidayat strategically combines verbal expressions and visual representations to evoke parents' emotional engagement, ultimately persuading them that teaching children to memorize the Qur'an is an ideal educational choice. The study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, as this approach facilitates the interpretation of both verbal and visual signs embedded in digital da'wah concerning early childhood tahfidz. Barthes' model emphasizes three levels of meaning, denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1988), which explain how media messages communicate not only literal meanings but also ideological values and social constructions (Nahda et al., 2024). This approach is therefore particularly appropriate for interpreting the symbolic meanings represented within digital Islamic preaching (Kevinia et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings demonstrate that, at the denotative level, Ustadz Adi Hidayat's da'wah on early childhood tahfidz emphasizes the importance of introducing and habituating children to the Qur'an from an early age as the foundation of Islamic education. The sermon is delivered through clear, systematic, and accessible language, enabling audiences to understand its literal meaning without requiring complex interpretation. Within the analyzed video segments, Ustadz Adi Hidayat explicitly encourages parents to begin introducing Qur'anic memorization during children's early cognitive development. He also outlines practical steps, including exposing children to Qur'anic recitation, establishing the daily habit of reading the Qur'an, and creating a Qur'an-centered family environment. Visually, his calm facial expressions, gentle vocal intonation, and deliberate hand gestures reinforce the literal meaning of the message. Likewise, the religious setting of the sermon and the enthusiastic audience further clarify that the communicative context is educational Islamic preaching. Thus, at the denotative level, the da'wah directly represents an invitation for society, particularly parents, to instill Qur'anic values through early childhood tahfidz as a fundamental component of Islamic education.

At the connotative level, the message extends beyond Qur'anic memorization to symbolize the formation of children's religious character and spiritual identity. This connotative meaning emerges through motivational narratives, analogies, and emotional emphasis that associate tahfidz with the hope of a better future for both children and their families. Throughout the sermon, tahfidz is portrayed not merely as a spiritual benefit for children but also as a source of honor and divine

blessing for the family. Such expressions generate powerful emotional resonance, enabling audiences to experience the message affectively as well as rationally. Inspirational stories of young Qur'an memorizers who grow into accomplished and morally exemplary individuals further strengthen this symbolic meaning. Audience responses—including nodding, smiling, and expressions of deep emotion—indicate that the sermon successfully establishes emotional engagement. Consequently, at the connotative level, early childhood tahfidz is represented as a symbol of successful Islamic education and a means of cultivating a generation distinguished by noble character, rather than simply an activity of memorizing sacred scripture.

At the mythical level, the da'wah constructs a collective belief that children who memorize the Qur'an embody the ideal image of an excellent and divinely blessed Muslim generation. This myth is produced through repeated religious narratives linking tahfidz to spiritual promises, including honor in both this world and the Hereafter, as well as elevated status for the families of Qur'an memorizers. In the analyzed sermon, Ustadz Adi Hidayat emphasizes that parents who accompany their children throughout the memorization journey will receive blessings and honor. The symbolic narrative of the "Crown of Honor" bestowed upon parents becomes a powerful representation of this myth, gradually accepted within society as a shared religious truth. Moreover, the depiction of the hafidz child as intelligent, morally virtuous, and a potential future leader reinforces the broader social myth surrounding the superiority of the Qur'anic generation. The continual repetition of these messages in sermons and their widespread circulation through digital media further intensify the internalization of this meaning among audiences. Therefore, at the mythical level, early childhood tahfidz is understood not only as an educational practice but also as an ideological symbol representing society's aspirations for the emergence of the ideal Muslim generation.

The integration of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in Ustadz Adi Hidayat's da'wah illustrates the significant role of digital media in expanding and reinforcing religious messages. Delivering sermons through digital platforms enables da'wah to reach audiences across spatial and temporal boundaries. The analyzed data indicate that the sermon videos attract substantial viewership and generate positive audience engagement through comments expressing support, prayers, and personal experiences related to children's Qur'anic education. These responses suggest that the messages are not only individually understood but also contribute to a broader social discourse concerning the importance of early childhood tahfidz. Furthermore, the audiovisual format, integrating verbal and visual elements, enhances both message clarity and audience engagement. The accessibility of digital content also allows viewers to revisit the sermons repeatedly, thereby strengthening the process of meaning internalization. Accordingly, the convergence of these three layers of signification demonstrates that digital tahfidz da'wah functions not only as an informative medium but also as a transformative force shaping religious understanding and practice within contemporary Muslim society.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings

No.	Unit of Analysis	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Mythical Meaning	Timestamp
1	Commitment to Qur'anic memorization	Memorizing the Qur'an requires dedication, consistency, and motivation.	A symbol of spiritual commitment and cooperation between parents and children in pursuing a shared religious goal.	Motivation is believed to cultivate perseverance and enthusiasm for tahfidz.	01:48
2	The importance of introducing the Qur'an from early childhood	Children are introduced to and habituated with the Qur'an from an early age.	An effort to construct children's religious identity during their formative years.	A Qur'anic child is believed to bring blessings upon the family.	03:53
3	Educational strategy and method	Children learn the Qur'an naturally, without coercion, in ways appropriate to their developmental world.	Qur'anic learning should be enjoyable and adapted to children's needs.	A gentle educational approach is regarded as the ideal method for nurturing righteous children.	04:15

The table above presents a summary of the semiotic analysis of Ustadz Adi Hidayat's da'wah messages. The interpretation of the three levels of meaning, denotation, connotation, and myth, for each unit of analysis is derived from selected sermon segments that comprehensively represent the intended message. The visual evidence supporting each level of meaning is presented in the following sections.

- Unit of Analysis 1 (01:48): This segment illustrates the importance of dedication and motivation in memorizing the Qur'an as a manifestation of spiritual commitment.



- Analysis Unit 2 (Minute 3:53): Presents a message about the importance of introducing the Qur'an from an early age to shape religious identity and bring blessings to the family.



- Analysis Unit 3 (Minute 4:15): Presents an explanation of enjoyable and gentle learning methods as an ideal way to educate children.



Based on the video excerpts in the points above, it can be seen how each unit of analysis operates at three levels of meaning. At the denotative level, the messages conveyed are explicit and easy to understand, such as an invitation to introduce the Qur'an to children from an early age. This meaning serves as the basis for the audience's understanding of the message being conveyed. At the connotative level, the message shifts from merely a technical instruction to a form of profound spiritual and emotional commitment between parents and children. The introduction of the Qur'an and enjoyable learning methods are interpreted as conscious efforts to shape children's religious identities and character in the future. Meanwhile, at the level of myth, these values develop into a collective belief within society that children who memorize the Qur'an are a source of blessings for their families. The myths of the "pious child" and the "Qur'anic family" reinforce the ideology that religious education from an early age through a gentle approach is the most ideal way to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter.

DISCUSSION

The presentation of the data shows that the da'wah message concerning tahfidz from an early age emphasizes the importance of introducing the Qur'an to children as a foundation of Islamic education, conveyed explicitly and easily understood. This denotative meaning is related to the first level of signification, which functions to convey messages directly to the audience without requiring complex interpretation. This understanding is consistent with semiotic studies explaining that denotation serves as the foundation of the meaning-making process before developing into deeper levels of meaning. Regarding the importance of analyzing this meaning-making process (Barthes, 1988), in his book he states, "I was dazzled by this hope: to give my denunciation of the self-proclaimed petit-bourgeois myths the means of developing scientifically; this means was semiology or the close analysis of the processes of meaning... semiology appeared to me, then, in its program and its tasks, as the fundamental method of an ideological critique." This statement demonstrates that, for Barthes, semiology is not merely the study of signs, but a scientific tool for examining how meaning is produced and managed within society. This reinforces the finding that denotative da'wah messages constitute a crucial initial step. An article discussing Roland Barthes's thought emphasizes that denotation plays a foundational role in understanding meaning in cultural communication (Huppatz, 2011). Research on visual communication demonstrates that the combination of verbal and visual elements can enhance message clarity and the effectiveness of conveying literal meaning to audiences (Aiello, 2006). In the context of religious communication, digital media also serves as an important agent in clarifying and expanding the dissemination of religious messages to society (Hjarvard, 2008). Thus, the consistency between the research findings and these theories demonstrates that the denotative meaning in early-age tahfidz da'wah functions as the primary foundation for developing the audience's understanding of the religious message being conveyed.

At the connotative level, the findings show that tahfidz from an early age is interpreted as a symbol of religious character formation and a spiritual investment for the child's future. The narrative conveyed does not merely function as a practical invitation to memorize the Qur'an, but also constructs emotional associations that connect tahfidz with the blessings of life, family honor, and hopes for salvation in the hereafter. This shift in meaning demonstrates how a sign operates at a deeper level, as explained by (Barthes, 1988): "Semiology appeared to me, then, in its program and its tasks, as the fundamental method of an ideological critique; and it was at this moment that I began to take an interest in the second language of the sign (the language of connotation), which is also the language of social and cultural myths." Barthes's statement emphasizes that connotation functions as a second language that carries social and cultural myths into a message. In this context,

Ustadz Adi Hidayat's da'wah does not merely convey information, but also constructs a cultural myth concerning the nobility of families whose members memorize the Qur'an. This finding is consistent with research by (Woo-young & Park, 2012), which explains that religious leaders in the digital era have the ability to construct symbolic authority through new media, so that the messages conveyed are not only understood informatively but also interpreted emotionally and spiritually by audiences. In addition, the study by (Van Dijk, 2006) on the development of Islam in cyberspace emphasizes that digital media constitutes a strategic environment for shaping religious identities and strengthening the symbolic meanings of Islamic teachings, in which religious messages disseminated online can create a sense of community attachment and deepen individuals' spiritual experiences. Another study by (Campbell, 2012a) also demonstrates that religious interactions in a networked society enable a deeper process of meaning construction, in which technology-mediated religious practices not only transmit information but also shape personal and collective religious experiences. The consistency between the research findings and these three international theories demonstrates that the connotative meaning in early-age tahfidz da'wah functions as a symbolic mechanism that strengthens religious identity, enhances the legitimacy of the preacher's authority, and encourages the emotional engagement of society in internalizing Qur'anic values.

In addition to the connotative meaning that shapes religious symbols and identities, the analysis shows that this da'wah message also contains mythical meanings that construct a shared belief concerning the ideal Muslim generation. This myth is no longer merely a symbol, but has become a general view regarded as a natural truth within society. The belief that children who memorize the Qur'an will attain honor and bring honor to their parents in the hereafter becomes a strong reason encouraging parents to implement these religious values within their families. (Barthes, 1988), in *Mythologies*, explains that myth works by naturalizing cultural concepts; it transforms history into nature, making socially constructed meanings appear to be something given and universally indisputable. This finding is consistent with the perspective of (Couldry & Hepp, 2013), which explains that the process of mediatization enables media to shape social reality through the production and reproduction of meanings that are subsequently accepted as part of everyday life. In this context, media does not merely convey da'wah messages but also contributes to constructing collective beliefs that reinforce religious ideology within society. In addition, a study in the journal (Bystad et al., 2020) shows that technology-mediated practices, although situated in a different context, still have the ability to influence how individuals understand reality and shape recurring patterns of thought and perception in everyday life. Another study by (Hjarvard, 2011) also emphasizes that media functions as an agent of social change that normalizes religious values and practices, allowing widely disseminated religious narratives to develop into shared beliefs within society. Thus, the consistency between the research findings and these international theories demonstrates that mythical meaning in early-age tahfidz da'wah functions as an ideological mechanism that normalizes religious values, shapes collective perceptions of the ideal Muslim generation, and strengthens society's belief in the importance of Qur'anic education from an early age.

As a continuation of the mythical meaning that shapes collective beliefs, the presentation of the data shows that the integration of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in early-age tahfidz da'wah is further strengthened through the use of digital media, which enables messages to be disseminated widely and repeatedly. In this context, da'wah messages are not only conveyed as information but also undergo a continuous process of meaning reproduction through audience interactions in digital spaces, thereby strengthening understanding and belief in the values being conveyed. This is consistent with research by (Weber & Monge, 2011), which explains that the flow of information within digital media networks forms complex patterns of meaning distribution, in

which audiences are not only recipients of messages but also agents of information dissemination. In addition, (Campbell, 2012b) emphasizes that religious practices in a networked society enable the integration of online and offline religious experiences, so that religious messages conveyed through digital media have a deeper impact on shaping individuals' understanding and religious practices. (Lövheim & Campbell, 2017) show that digital media plays an important role in shaping religious public spheres that enable the collective negotiation of religious meanings and identities. Thus, the integration of these three levels of meaning demonstrates that early-age tahfidz da'wah disseminated through digital media not only expands the reach of the message but also contributes to the process of social and religious transformation within society.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a highly significant finding: the da'wah message concerning memorizing the Qur'an from an early age is not merely an ordinary invitation to learn, but also forms a complex construction of meaning through three levels of signification, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the da'wah message represents an explicit recommendation for parents to introduce the Qur'an from an early age. At the connotative level, tahfidz is interpreted as a symbol of religious identity formation and a spiritual investment for the future of children and their families. Meanwhile, at the mythical level, this study finds that narratives concerning the virtues of children who memorize the Qur'an have developed into collective beliefs that naturalize the concept of the ideal Muslim generation within society. Most importantly, digital media is found not merely to function as a tool for disseminating da'wah, but also as an agent that strengthens and reproduces these social myths through repeated exposure and audience interaction, thereby giving da'wah messages significant transformative power in society. The novelty of this study lies in the use of Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis to examine contemporary digital da'wah, particularly in understanding how the theme of memorizing the Qur'an from an early age shapes religious identity within society. In addition, this study demonstrates how da'wah in digital media can transform religious messages into shared beliefs recognized by many people.

Although this study provides an important contribution to understanding the semiotic meanings of early-age tahfidz da'wah, several research gaps remain to be addressed. Most previous studies have tended to focus on aspects of tahfidz education or the effectiveness of da'wah in general, while studies integrating semiotic analysis with the context of digital da'wah remain relatively limited. In addition, this study has several limitations, including the use of data sources limited to video lecture content on digital media without directly involving audience perspectives through interviews or surveys, so that understanding of the reception and impact of da'wah messages has not been explored in depth. This study also focuses on a single preacher, meaning that the generalizability of the findings to broader da'wah contexts remains limited. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the research object by involving various preachers and digital media platforms, as well as combining semiotic approaches with other methods, such as audience reception studies or digital ethnography, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of da'wah on society. Future research may also explore cross-cultural or cross-national comparisons to examine how the construction of meaning surrounding early-age tahfidz develops within different social contexts.

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