

## Operant Behavior Principles in the Qur'an and Their Implementation in Pesantren Education: A Study at Pesantren Al-Husainy, Bima City

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**Abstract:** This article examines the application of the principle of Operant Behavior in the Qur'an and its implementation at Pesantren al-Husainy in Kota Bima. This principle encompasses positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and punishment as methods for shaping behaviour. The research employs a qualitative approach, using library research and living Quran methods to analyse relevant Qur'anic verses and observe their application to the pesantren. The findings indicate that the principle of Operant Behavior aligns with the teachings of the Qur'an, where positive reinforcement is reflected in the promise of rewards, negative reinforcement is embodied in the concept of taklif, which adjusts duties according to individual capability, and punishment serves to reduce undesirable behaviours and uphold justice. At Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy, this principle is applied through the recognition of academic and non-academic achievements and the implementation of punishments based on the severity of the violation. This study asserts that the implementation of Operant Behavior at the pesantren is consistent with the teachings of the Qur'an and contributes to the development of positive behaviour among students within the context of Islamic education.

**Keywords:** Operant behaviour, reinforcement, punishment, pesantren education, Living Qur'an

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini mengkaji penerapan prinsip *Operant Behavior* dalam al-Qur'an dan implementasinya di Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy Kota Bima. Prinsip ini mencakup penguatan positif, penguatan negatif, dan hukuman untuk membentuk perilaku. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode *Library Research* dan *Living Qur'an* untuk menganalisis ayat-ayat al-Qur'an serta mengobservasi penerapannya di pesantren. Hasil penelitian



menunjukkan bahwa prinsip *Operant Behavior* sejalan dengan ajaran al-Qur'an, di mana penguatan positif tercermin dalam janji pahala, penguatan negatif melalui konsep taklif yang menyesuaikan kewajiban dengan kemampuan, dan hukuman bertujuan untuk mengurangi perilaku buruk serta menegakkan keadilan. Di Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy, prinsip ini diterapkan melalui apresiasi untuk prestasi akademik dan non-akademik, serta penerapan hukuman berdasarkan tingkat pelanggaran. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa implementasi prinsip *Operant Behavior* di pesantren sejalan dengan ajaran al-Qur'an dan mendukung pembentukan perilaku positif santri dalam konteks pendidikan Islam.

**Kata kunci:** *Operant behavior*, penguatan, hukuman, pendidikan pesantren, living Qur'an

**Abstract:**

**Keywords:** Operant Behavior, Quran, Islamic Boarding School

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## Introduction

The principle of operant behaviour is a psychological theory developed within the behaviourist school of thought, which emphasises the importance of observable behaviour in understanding individuals and the learning process (Pasiska & Alisyahbana, 2020). At the same time, this theory was pioneered by Western scholars such as B.F. Skinner, the concept of operant behaviour has broad relevance and can be applied in the lives of Muslims, particularly within the context of Islamic education. The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teachings, conveys values that can be used to understand and shape good behaviour and strengthen obedience to Allah.

It is essential to study the principle of operant behaviour in the Qur'an, as this principle can provide a deeper understanding of behaviour formation based on stimulus and response and how it relates to existing educational approaches in Islam. This approach also has the potential to assist Muslims,

especially students in Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren), in understanding and internalising religious values more comprehensively.

Islamic boarding schools play a central role in the development of Muslims in Indonesia. With over 36,600 pesantren nationwide and more than 3.4 million students (Ramadhani, 2022), pesantren have become critical educational institutions for shaping character and behaviour. One such institution studied in this article is Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy in Kota Bima, known for its emphasis on character building and the study of Qur'anic memorisation and recitation.

Pesantren al-Husainy, founded by TGH. Ramli Ahmad, in 1996, produced many successful generations in the field of Qur'anic knowledge (Ganiz, 2023). However, with the increasing complexity of the modern world, there is a need to develop effective methods and approaches for shaping students' behaviour in line with Qur'anic values. This article aims to explain the application of the principle of operant behaviour in pesantren education, focusing on Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy, Bima City and how Qur'anic verses address and apply these principles within the context of pesantren education.

Although several studies have applied the principle of operant behaviour in Islamic education, few have specifically examined its implementation with a focus on the Qur'an as the primary source. Previous research has discussed operant conditioning theory in the context of Islamic education, such as Ary Asyari's (2020) study on the implementation of operant conditioning in Qur'anic memorisation in Yogyakarta and Tri Marfianto et al.'s (2019) research exploring its use in the development of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in schools. Other studies, such as those by Setyo Pambudi and Nur Hoiriyah (2020), have explored the application of operant conditioning in PAI teaching, with results showing the theory's effectiveness in changing students' behaviour.

However, unlike these studies, this article focuses on how the principle of operant behaviour can be explicitly and implicitly explained in the Qur'an and

how it can be applied in the educational system of pesantren. This article aims to fill this research gap by providing a new analysis of psychological concepts in the Qur'an and offering insights into applying operant behaviour principles in shaping students' behaviour at Pesantren al-Husainy, Bima City.

Through this approach, this article will significantly contribute to the development of psychology in Islamic education and offer a new perspective on how operant behaviour principles can be implemented within the pesantren environment while remaining firmly grounded in the teachings of the Qur'an.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach (Moleong, 2016, p. 5) with two main methods: Library Research (Mardalis, 1995, p. 28; Pringgar & Sujatmiko, 2020, p. 320) and Living Qur'an (Junaedi, 2015, pp. 172–173). Library Research is used to analyse Qur'anic verses related to operant behaviour principles, including relevant tafsir, to understand values such as positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and punishment. The Living Qur'an approach is applied to interpret the implementation of operant behaviour principles in the education of pesantren, specifically at Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy in Kota Bima. This approach also involves direct observation and interviews with the management and teachers of the pesantren regarding implementing these principles in the students' daily activities, such as learning *tahfidz* and *tilawah*.

Data is collected through a literature review of existing sources and interviews with the management and teachers at Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy in Kota Bima. Additionally, this research includes document analysis and direct observation of applying these principles in *tahfidz*, *tilawah*, and other daily activities at the pesantren. By employing this approach, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of implementing operant behaviour principles in pesantren education based on the teachings of the Qur'an.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Operant Behavior Principles in the Qur'an**

Operant behaviour, or operant conditioning, is a concept developed by B.F. Skinner (1938) explains how an organism's behaviour can be controlled through reinforcement within a relatively free environment. This concept involves regulating behaviour through consequences (Pierce & Cheney, 2008). Skinner emphasised that the consequences of behaviour can influence the likelihood of its recurrence, using rewards and punishments to control behaviour (Skinner, 2014).

This principle aligns with the teachings in the Qur'an, which also emphasise the importance of stimulus and response in human behaviour. For example, in Surah Al-Zalzalah, verses 7-8, the Qur'an states that every action will be rewarded according to its deed, no matter how small. This reflects the basic principle of operant behaviour, where reinforcement is given based on the actions performed.

### **Principle of Reinforcement**

*Reinforcement* is the process that strengthens or increases the likelihood of a behaviour occurring. Skinner categorised reinforcement into two types: positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement provides a pleasant consequence to increase behaviour, such as rewards or praise. In contrast, negative reinforcement involves removing or avoiding unpleasant conditions to strengthen the desired behaviour (Baharudin & Wahyuni, 2015).

The Qur'an illustrates positive reinforcement through various rewards or compensation for positive behaviour. Verses that reflect this include Surah Al-Baqarah, verses 25, 155, and 274, and Surah An-Nahl, verses 97, which promise rewards for those who do good deeds. A reward for those who read and understand the Qur'an is also mentioned in Surah Taha, verse 114 (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

Meanwhile, negative reinforcement in the Qur'an can be seen in the concept of *taklif* (obligatory duties). Allah does not burden His servants with obligations beyond their capacity, as explained in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 286, and Surah At-Taghabun, verse 16. This reflects the principle of negative reinforcement, which is to avoid imposing burdens beyond an individual's ability.

### **Principle of Punishment**

In addition to reinforcement, there is the principle of punishment, which reduces the likelihood of undesirable behaviours being repeated. Punishment is given as a response to undesired behaviour, aiming to weaken or halt the behaviour (McLeod, 2015).

The Qur'an also provides many examples of punishment for those who violate rules, such as in Surah Al-Maidah, verse 38, which addresses the punishment for theft, and in Surah An-Nisa, verses 14 and 93, which pertains to punishments for violators of Islamic law. Punishments involving torment and Hell are also detailed for those who neglect prayer or commit sinful acts, as stated in Surah Al-Mudassir, verses 40-47.

Overall, the principles of reinforcement (both positive and negative) aim to strengthen desired behaviour, while punishment aims to diminish or reduce undesired behaviour. Both principles work together to regulate and shape individual behaviour in the context of Qur'anic teachings and operant behaviour theory.

### **Implementation of Operant Behavior Principles in the Education System at Pesantren Al-Husainy, Bima City**

The Kyai or Nyai leads the management of the Islamic boarding school (Supriatman, 2017), followed by other figures such as the Head of Madrasah, Heads of Divisions/Departments, Ustadz/Teachers, and Mentors. Together, they work to educate the students (*santri*) and implement various approaches

within the pesantren's educational system, one of which is the principle of Operant Behavior or Operant Conditioning.

The implementation of this principle at Al-Husainy Islamic Boarding School can be seen through several forms, as outlined below:

### **Implementation of Positive Reinforcement**

#### *Academic Appreciation of Santri at the Madrasah*

Santri with the best average grades—those within the top ten of their class—have their names announced during the distribution of academic results each semester (report cards) (J. Mirdat & S. Sulaiman, personal communication, 2023). This appreciation aims to acknowledge the perseverance and dedication of the students in their studies and encourage them to overcome laziness and continue striving to achieve excellence in their pursuit of knowledge (Septiana, 2021, p. 24). This aligns with Islamic teachings, where students must focus and be earnest in their quest for knowledge to achieve the best possible outcomes (Khasanah, 2021, pp. 304–305).

#### *Appreciation of Santri in the Pesantren's Program/ Curriculum*

The pesantren holds special ceremonial events to award santri who have completed the memorisation of the 30 Juz of the Qur'an. These events aim to elevate the recognition of the santri's achievements as sacred moments, motivating them to work diligently and complete the memorisation. This is important, as not all students can memorise all 30 Juz perfectly (M. Hisyam, personal communication, 2023b). This recognition is consistent with the explanation in Surah Fatir, verse 29:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً يَرْجُونَ تِجَارَةً لَّن تَبُورَ.

Meaning: “Those who rehearse the Book Of God, establish regular Prayer, And spend (in Charity) Out of what We have provided For them, secretly and openly, Hope for a Commerce That will never fail” (Yusuf Ali, 2004, p. 1110).

This verse explains that Allah rewards those who constantly read and implement the teachings of the Qur'an in their daily lives. They will be blessed with provisions from Allah SWT, without loss, and their rewards will be perfected and increased (Sihab, 2005, p. 469).

The virtues of memorising the Qur'an include a high status in the sight of Allah, multiplied rewards, and the title "Ahlullah" (People of Allah). Those who memorise the Qur'an are also among those who preserve its purity, and by consistently reviewing the Qur'anic verses, they become righteous and pious individuals. They will receive help from the Qur'an on the Day of Judgement due to their commitment to revising (muraja'ah) their memorisation (Sholeha & Rabbanie, 2020, pp. 3–4). This is because, although the Qur'an is made accessible to memorise, it can be forgotten quickly if a hafizh does not maintain memorisation through continuous review (Zakariya, 2019, p. 79).

#### *Non-Academic Appreciation of Santri*

Santri, who excels in non-academic fields, such as in competitions participated in by the students, receives recognition from both the madrasah and the pesantren management. This appreciation is given by announcing the names of the achievers during the weekly flag ceremony held every Monday. According to Jamal, when their names are announced by the Head of Madrasah Aliyah/Tsanawiyah, the participants—whether teachers or other students—applaud as a form of recognition (J. Mirdat & S. Sulaiman, personal communication, 2023). A similar statement was made by Areis, the Head of Madrasah Aliyah (A. Munandar, personal communication, 2023).

This recognition aligns with how Allah rewards knowledgeable people, as explained in Surah al-Mujadalah, verse 11. Islam greatly honours those knowledgeable, and as stated in the verse, Allah will elevate the ranks of those

who are faithful and knowledgeable (Arum Sari & Retnaningsih, 2023, pp. 125–127). To elevate the status of the knowledgeable, recognition is given by showcasing the achievements of the santri in front of their peers, serving as a motivation to continue learning and striving for excellence.

### **Implementation of Negative Reinforcement**

The process of negative reinforcement in managing the pesantren is rarely observed. The last time this principle was applied was in the 2019-2020 academic year, when santri enrolled in the Bait al-Huffadz special programme were given flexibility in their academic classes at the madrasah. However, they still had to meet the memorisation standards. The goal of this programme was for the santri to memorise the entire Qur'an (30 Juz) within three years. However, this goal was not achieved as the programme lasted only two semesters (one year). The programme was unsuccessful due to various implementation challenges (Hisyam, personal communication, 2023b).

Furthermore, to achieve optimal results in Qur'anic memorisation, the santri in this unique programme required the approach used in that year. This is evident when compared to the current implementation, where the santri are still required to follow regular madrasah classes like other students (Hisyam & Nurilfayati, personal communication, 2023).

Fundamentally, Allah does not burden His servants with hardship in worship and in doing good deeds, as explained in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 286:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۗ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ ۗ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا  
إِن نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا ۗ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إِيْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ ۗ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِنَا ۗ  
رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ ۗ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا ۗ أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا  
فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

Meaning: On no soul doth God place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns and it suffers every ill that it earns. (Pray): “Our Lord! condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which

Thou didst lay on those before us; Our Lord! lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. Thou art our Protector; help us against those who stand against faith.” (Yusuf Ali, 2004, p. 120).

This verse explains that in order to achieve the purpose of life, Allah gives each individual burdens in accordance with their capacity. They will be rewarded beyond what they have done, and will receive punishment equivalent to their misdeeds. The deeds required of an individual are only those that are within their ability. Islam is a religion that does not impose complex or heavy burdens on its followers. Ease, lightness, and non-restriction are the fundamental principles of Islam.

Allah's words also affirm this: "And He has not made for you in the religion any difficulty" (Surah al-Hajj, 22:78). Allah wishes to ease things for you, for man was created weak (Surah an-Nisa, 4:28). Allah desires ease for you and does not wish for hardship for you (Ministry of Religious Affairs RI, 2010, p. 446).

### **Implementation of the Punishment Principle**

Implementing the punishment principle to shape students' behaviour at Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy in Kota Bima is based on the rules set by the pesantren's management. These rules are outlined in the *Pedoman Tata Tertib Pondok Pesantren Al-Husainy Yayasan Nurul Qur'an Bima*, 2021. This guideline references the pesantren's management, such as teachers, mentors, and facilitators, in applying the regulations and punishments when students violate the established rules (Hisyam, personal communication, 2023b).

According to Hisyam, punishment is one of the most influential factors in improving positive behaviour or reducing, even eliminating, damaging behaviour in students, compared to applying reinforcement principles (Hisyam, personal communication, 2023a). Rahman, who works as a dormitory supervisor and interacts directly with students when applying the

pesantren's regulations, shared similar views. He mentioned that the intensity of negative behaviour tends to decrease or even disappear with consistent application of punishment and the memory of previous punishments for past violations (Rahman & Fitriani, personal communication, 2023).

The following outlines the application of punishment for students who commit violations, from minor to severe infractions. According to the *Pedoman Tata Tertib Pondok Pesantren*, Chapter 7, Article 1, violations are any attitudes, actions, words, or statements, whether intentional or accidental, that contradict the principles of Islam, local customs, and the pesantren's rules (Tim Penyusun, 2021).

#### *Punishment for Minor Violations:*

This category of punishment is applied when a student commits a minor violation, as outlined in the *Pedoman Tata Tertib Pesantren*, Article 2, Category 1, Points 50-95 (Tim Penyusun, 2021, p. 15). In practice, some dormitory supervisors do not always follow the standard punishments outlined in the guidelines. They tend to improvise in administering punishment according to the context of the violation. For example, when a student is late to attend a halaqah or congregational prayer, the dormitory supervisor asks the student to choose one of the available forms of punishment (Rahman & Fitriani, personal communication, 2023).

#### *Punishment for Moderate Violations*

This category is applied when a student commits a moderate violation, as described in *Pedoman Tata Tertib Pesantren*, Article 2, Category 2, Points 5-45 (Tim Penyusun, 2021, p. 17). The punishment is implemented in the same manner as for minor violations.

#### *Punishment for Serious Violations*

This category is applied when a student commits a serious violation as outlined in *Pedoman Tata Tertib Pesantren*, Article 2, Category 3, Points 100-150

(Tim Penyusun, 2021, p. 15). This punishment is administered by the pesantren's management or senior teachers. For example, suppose a student smokes within the pesantren's premises. In that case, they will be subjected to physical punishment and must promise not to repeat the offence (Fuad, personal communication, 2023).

#### *Punishment for Very Serious Violations*

This category applies when a student commits a grave violation, as detailed in *Pedoman Tata Tertib Pesantren*, Article 2, Category 4, Points 155-120 (Tim Penyusun, 2021, p. 18). In such cases, the student will be given the maximum punishment, as outlined in the guidelines, which includes expulsion without prior notice or warning (Tim Penyusun, 2021, p. 19). This has occurred with two students in the past two years. According to Hisyam, although this decision is difficult, it must be enforced to maintain the integrity of the pesantren system and the well-being of other students (Hisyam, personal communication, 2023a).

The Qur'an explains in Surah Al-Maidah, verse 90, that consuming alcohol, gambling, sacrificing for idols, and using arrows for divination are abominations and acts of Satan. Therefore, Muslims are instructed to avoid these practices in order to attain prosperity (Sihab, 2005, pp. 191–192). As such, the penalty for a student committing a severe violation, such as smoking within the pesantren grounds, is expulsion from the pesantren.

The application of this punishment has proven effective in deterring repeated offences. The students become more cautious and reluctant to repeat the same violation. For example, after a student was punished for smoking, they refrained from doing so again, and the pesantren management assigned another student to monitor their behaviour (Hisyam et al., personal communication, 2023). In contrast to minor or moderate violations, students tend to repeat the same offence if punishment is not applied consistently and regularly.

Before any punishment is implemented for violations in all categories, whether by dormitory supervisors or pesantren management, the students responsible for the violation are asked to clarify their actions. This is by the explanation in Surah An-Nisa, verse 112:

وَمَنْ يَكْسِبْ خَطِيئَةً أَوْ إِثْمًا ثُمَّ يَرْمِ بِهِ بَرِيئًا فَقَدِ احْتَمَلَ بُهْتَانًا وَإِثْمًا مُّبِينًا

Meaning: But if anyone earns a fault or a sin and throws it on to one that is innocent He carries (on himself) (both) a falsehood and a flagrant sin (Yusuf Ali, 2004, p. 251)

Sihab explains that the term *kbathi'ah* is usually interpreted as an unintentional mistake. However, since the verse above uses the word *yaksib*, meaning "to commit," it indicates that such an unintentional mistake is made due to carelessness or a lack of attention and responsibility on the perpetrator's part. Some also interpret *kbathi'ahas* a sin that does not directly harm others, such as neglecting the obligations of prayer or fasting, or engaging in something forbidden, such as consuming prohibited food. Meanwhile, the term *istmanj* refers to a sin that affects others, such as murder or theft (Sihab, 2005, p. 582).

According to Hamka, in Surah An-Nisa, verse 112, Allah explains that anyone who accuses an innocent person with falsehood bears a great sin. This highlights the importance of justice in judgment and punishment, avoiding unfounded accusations. In this context, the act of accusing someone without clear evidence, such as accusing an innocent person, is a grave sin, and the accuser is held accountable. For example, in certain cases, if someone falsely accuses an innocent Jew of a particular act, the accuser, namely Thu'mah and his people, is the guilty one (Amrullah, 2015, p. 1421).

Indeed, Allah is All-Hearing and All-Seeing. For this legal judgment to be carried out justly, obedience to the one who establishes the law is required. This verse instructs Muslims to comply with legal rulings, beginning with the laws established by Allah (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2004, p. 197).

## Conclusion

The principle of Operant Behavior aligns with Islamic teachings in the Qur'an regarding reinforcement and punishment. The Qur'an teaches that every action will be rewarded or punished according to its consequences, reflecting both positive and negative reinforcement in the theory of Operant Conditioning. Positive reinforcement is evident in the promise of rewards, while negative reinforcement is reflected in the concept of *taklif*, which adjusts obligations according to an individual's capacity. The principle of punishment in the Qur'an aims to reduce undesirable behaviour and uphold justice, which is in line with Operant Behavior, which seeks to diminish violations.

At Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy, positive reinforcement is implemented through appreciation for academic, non-academic, and memorisation achievements. Negative reinforcement was applied in the Bait al-Huffadz programme in 2019. Punishment is administered based on the severity of the offence, ranging from minor to major violations, according to the Qur'anic teachings on punishment and retribution.

This study shows that implementing the Operant Behavior principle at Pondok Pesantren al-Husainy is consistent with the teachings of the Qur'an, linking these principles to the Islamic education system through the *Living Qur'an* approach.

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