



Enhancing Quranic Literacy and Religious Character through the BRUS Program in Vocational Schools

Agung Asril Putra¹, Ilham Qadri¹, M. Andhika Ramadhan¹, Fatmi Fauzani Duski¹, Rahmanita Raja¹, Saparia Fitriani¹

¹STIT Syekh Burhanuddin Pariaman, Indonesia

 qadriilham49@gmail.com*

Abstract

This study addresses the low level of Quranic literacy among first-year vocational school students as a key challenge in strengthening religious education. To overcome this issue, a school-based program, *Bina Remaja Usia Sekolah* (BRUS), was implemented through collaboration with local religious authorities. This study aims to examine the implementation of the BRUS program and analyze its impact on students' Quranic literacy and religious character. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through observations, interviews, and documentation involving teachers, religious counselors, and students. The findings reveal that the BRUS program significantly improves students' ability to read the Quran, enhances their religious understanding, and fosters positive religious character. In addition, institutional support and continuous mentoring contribute to the effectiveness and sustainability of the program. This study highlights the role of structured religious development programs as an effective model for strengthening Quranic literacy and character formation in vocational education.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of rapid technological and educational development, schools are expected not only to produce academically and vocationally competent graduates but also individuals with strong moral and spiritual foundations. This challenge is particularly evident in vocational schools, where the dominance of practical learning often limits opportunities for strengthening students' character and religious values (Maulidin, 2024). As a result, the development of religious literacy requires more structured and intentional interventions. Religious literacy extends beyond cognitive understanding of religious teachings to include the internalization of values in daily behavior (Hannam et al., 2020). One of its fundamental indicators is Quranic literacy, particularly students' ability to read and write the Quran. However, previous studies indicate that Quranic literacy among secondary school students remains uneven, with a significant proportion failing to achieve basic competencies (Hayi et al., 2025; Hidayat et al., 2018). This issue is more pronounced in vocational education settings, where students come from diverse backgrounds and educational priorities are

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primarily oriented toward technical skill development (Engkizar et al., 2025; Oktavia et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025).

To address this challenge, schools need structured religious development programs that align with the characteristics of vocational education. The *Bina Remaja Usia Sekolah* (BRUS) program represents one such initiative, designed to enhance students' Quranic literacy while fostering religious understanding and character formation (Sikumbang, 2026; Toha et al., 2024). Through collaboration with religious institutions, such programs aim to integrate spiritual development into the broader educational framework (Abishev et al., 2025; Eltoukhi et al., 2025; Kaema & Ulwi, 2025; Putri et al., 2025).

Despite the growing implementation of religious development programs in schools, existing studies largely focus on Quranic literacy programs in general education contexts and tend to emphasize instructional outcomes rather than program design and institutional collaboration (Engkizar et al., 2025). Limited attention has been given to how structured programs, particularly those involving partnerships between schools and religious authorities, contribute to both literacy improvement and character formation in vocational education settings.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to examine the implementation of the BRUS program in a vocational school and analyze its impact on students' Quranic literacy and religious character. In addition, the study explores the role of institutional collaboration and continuous mentoring in supporting program effectiveness. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of a sustainable model for integrating religious literacy and character education within vocational schools.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the implementation of the BRUS program and its impact on students' religious literacy in a vocational school context. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of social and educational phenomena within their natural setting (Chand, 2025). The participants of this study included BRUS program facilitators, religious counselors from the Office of Religious Affairs, and first-year students. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the program, including teachers, active student participants, and school stakeholders responsible for religious development activities (Bishop & Kuula-Lummi, 2017; Monica, 2023; Savin-Baden & Major, 2025).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to capture participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the implementation of the program. Observations were carried out during several BRUS sessions to examine instructional practices and student engagement. Documents such as program records, mentoring journals, and students' religious evaluation reports were analyzed to support and validate the findings (Lungu, 2022; Parry et al., 2014; Uiboleht et al., 2016).

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis involved coding and categorizing data to identify patterns related to the development of students' religious literacy. The process was conducted iteratively to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings. To ensure data trustworthiness, this study applied triangulation of methods and sources, as well as member checking with selected informants (Lungu, 2022; Seers, 2012; Volmar & Eisenhardt, 2020). An audit trail was also maintained to enhance the dependability and confirmability of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Program Implementation and Institutional Collaboration

Findings indicate that the BRUS program is implemented in a structured and systematic manner through collaboration between educational institutions and religious authorities. The implementation is supported by formal agreements that regulate program activities, stakeholder roles, and mechanisms for religious mentoring (Engkizar et al., 2022, 2023; Engkizar et al., 2025). Technically, the program is conducted regularly on a weekly basis using a structured mentoring approach. Each session begins with Quranic literacy (reading and writing the Quran), adjusted to students' ability levels. Students are grouped into basic and advanced categories. At the basic level, instruction focuses on recognizing Arabic letters, correct pronunciation (*makhrāj*), and reading fluency. At the advanced level, the focus shifts to tajwid application, fluency in longer verses, and overall reading quality (Azizah et al., 2021; Nasution, 2026; Nurbaiti et al., 2021; Oktarina, 2020).

The program is collaboratively managed by teachers and religious counselors. This collaboration emerges as a strategic response to limited human resources in vocational education settings. Observations reveal effective coordination, reflected in active involvement, institutional support, and consistent program delivery. These findings suggest that cross-institutional collaboration plays a critical role in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of religious education programs. This supports Maulidin (2024), who emphasizes the importance of institutional support in strengthening religious culture within educational environments.

Initial Condition of Students' Quranic Literacy

Initial findings reveal that students' Quranic literacy levels vary significantly. While some students demonstrate adequate reading ability, others still struggle with basic recognition of Arabic letters and correct pronunciation. These differences are largely influenced by prior educational experiences and varying exposure to religious learning (Dahlan et al., 2025; Rambe et al., 2025). Limited practice in family and social environments contributes to low reading frequency, while psychological factors such as lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes further hinder student participation. As a result, some students experience delays in mastering foundational Quranic literacy skills.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating uneven Quranic reading abilities among secondary-level students due to differences in background and learning exposure (Hakim et al., 2022). The absence of structured and continuous religious mentoring prior to program implementation further highlights the need for systematic interventions in vocational education contexts.

Impact on Quranic Literacy and Religious Character

Participation in the BRUS program leads to significant improvements in students' Quranic literacy. Improvements are observed in letter recognition, reading fluency, and pronunciation accuracy. Students at intermediate levels demonstrate better mastery of tajwid rules, while advanced learners show increased confidence in reading longer and more complex verses. The grouping strategy based on ability levels proves effective in addressing diverse learning needs. This approach aligns with differentiated learning principles, which emphasize adapting instruction to student characteristics (Abishev et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Ismail et al., 2019).

Beyond technical improvements, the program also influences affective dimensions. Students become more confident, actively engage in learning, and develop independent reading habits. Increased motivation and positive attitudes toward religious learning are reflected in their participation in religious activities. These findings indicate that the program impacts not only cognitive skills but also religious character development. This is in line with Ben-Eliyahu (2019); Guo et al (2020); Phillips-Pula et al (2011), who argue that religious literacy encompasses

cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.

Thus, the program can be understood as a comprehensive intervention that integrates literacy development with character formation. This extends existing perspectives by showing that structured religious programs can simultaneously strengthen skills and internal values in vocational education settings.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Several supporting factors contribute to the effectiveness of the program, including formal institutional agreements, policy support, and active collaboration between educators and religious counselors. These elements strengthen program legitimacy and facilitate implementation (Siregar et al., 2024). However, challenges are also identified, such as tight academic schedules, student absenteeism, and varying initial ability levels. These constraints highlight the need for flexible scheduling and adaptive instructional strategies. Despite these challenges, effective management strategies such as regrouping students and adjusting learning approaches enable the program to continue effectively (Htay et al., 2025; Kassymova et al., 2025). This indicates that program success depends not only on design but also on institutional adaptability in responding to contextual challenges (Engkizar et al., 2023; Nasir et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the BRUS program functions as an effective platform for strengthening students' Quranic literacy and religious character in vocational education settings. Through structured mentoring, ability-based grouping, and collaborative interaction between educators and religious counselors, students show significant improvement not only in technical reading skills but also in their confidence, motivation, and religious attitudes. The effectiveness of the program is further supported by institutional collaboration and policy support, which ensure the sustainability and consistency of its implementation. These findings indicate that structured and contextually relevant religious programs can facilitate both cognitive and affective development in students.

This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the role of collaborative and adaptive religious education programs in integrating literacy development with character formation, particularly in vocational education contexts. Therefore, such programs can serve as a practical model for strengthening religious literacy and fostering students' spiritual development in similar educational settings.

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