

Schooling Pathways and Qur'anic Reading Competence among Pre-Service Teachers: A Mixed-Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

The ability to read the Qur'an correctly is an essential dimension of character formation and religious moderation among pre-service teachers, as mandated by national education policy for teacher professional development. Prior studies on Qur'anic literacy have largely focused on instructional strategies and program interventions, leaving the association of secondary school background largely unexamined among pre-service teachers. This study examines the relationship between secondary school background, namely senior high school (SMA), vocational high school (SMK), Islamic senior high school (Madrasah Aliyah), and Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren), and the Qur'anic reading competence of 855 students from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Samudra, batch 2025. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design combined descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, chi-square test, and ordinal regression with qualitative interviews to elaborate the findings among low-competence students. Results show a significant association between school background and Qur'anic reading competence (chi-square = 93.220, df = 12, $p < .001$), though the relationship was weak (Cramer's $V = .191$). Ordinal regression confirmed a significant association (chi-square = 67.667, df = 3, $p < .001$; Nagelkerke R-squared = .081), with Islamic boarding school graduates consistently more likely to achieve higher competence levels. Qualitative findings revealed four explanatory themes: learning duration confined to elementary school, the absence of formal academic requirements except in boarding schools, reluctance to relearn basic reading at an adolescent age, and insufficient parental attention. These findings indicate that school background was significantly associated with Qur'anic reading competence, underscoring the need for differentiated, stigma-free remedial programs for pre-service teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious literacy is an important dimension of teacher preparation because teachers are not only responsible for transmitting disciplinary knowledge but also participate in shaping students' values, attitudes, and social relationships. For prospective teachers, therefore, religious competence should not be regarded as an incidental outcome of higher education but as part of the broader preparation required for responsible professional practice. Previous scholarship has emphasized the relationship between teacher education, religious literacy, and the moral dimension of teaching, particularly because teachers inevitably model values through their professional practice (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011; Soules & Jafralie, 2021). Within Islamic education, Qur'anic literacy constitutes an important component of religious competence because students' engagement with the Qur'an involves not only reading the text but also understanding, appreciating, and applying its teachings (Ma'arif et al., 2024; Rahmat et al., 2019; Zarkasi et al., 2024). Consequently, developing adequate Qur'anic competence among prospective teachers is relevant not only to their personal religious development but also to their capacity to participate in value-oriented education.

In Indonesia, the importance of religious and ethical competence in teacher preparation is reflected in the broader national framework for education and professional development. Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers emphasizes professional development grounded in democratic, just, non-discriminatory, and sustainable principles while upholding religious and cultural values, national pluralism, and professional ethics. This orientation is also consistent with the national development agenda, which emphasizes harmonious social relations and interreligious tolerance (Peraturan Presiden Nomor 12 Tahun 2025; Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Tahun 2005 Tentang Guru dan Dosen). These policy directions provide an important contextual basis for considering religious competence in teacher education. However, policy expectations alone do not explain how such competence develops. An important empirical question is therefore how students' prior educational experiences contribute to differences in religious competence when they enter higher education.

Within the broader concept of Qur'anic literacy, the present study focuses specifically on Qur'anic reading competence, defined as the ability to recite Qur'anic text accurately in accordance with the principles of *tahsin* and *tajwid*. This distinction is important because Qur'anic literacy is a multidimensional construct that may include reading ability, comprehension, appreciation, and the application of Qur'anic values in everyday life (Hamzah et al., 2023; Muhd Syahazizamir bin Sahmat & Zamri, 2024; Sulianti et al., 2018). The present study does not directly measure comprehension, value internalization, or religious attitudes. Instead, it examines reading competence as a foundational and measurable component of Qur'anic literacy. Adequate reading ability provides an important basis for further engagement with the meaning and content of Qur'anic texts. Previous studies have also demonstrated that students' Qur'anic reading competence is related to factors such as the duration of learning, learning environment, instructional quality, and consistency of practice (Jaeni et al., 2019; Supriadi et al., 2022).

One potentially important source of variation in these learning experiences is secondary school background. Different educational settings may provide students with different levels of exposure to Qur'anic learning, opportunities for structured practice, institutional expectations, and continuity of instruction. Educational environments in which Qur'anic learning is routinely practiced and formally evaluated may provide more sustained opportunities for students to develop and maintain reading skills. Conversely, when Qur'anic instruction is peripheral to the school experience, students may depend more heavily on informal learning through family or community settings. In this sense, secondary school background should not be interpreted as a direct cause of Qur'anic reading

competence. Rather, it can be understood as a structural proxy for accumulated learning exposure and habituation before students enter higher education, consistent with findings that the place and duration of Qur'anic learning are important factors associated with student competence (Jaeni et al., 2019).

This issue is particularly relevant at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Universitas Samudra, where students enter higher education with diverse secondary educational backgrounds. The 2025 cohort includes graduates from senior high schools (SMA), vocational high schools (SMK), Islamic high schools (MA), and pesantren-based educational settings. These backgrounds differ not simply in formal curriculum but also potentially in the learning environments in which students encounter Qur'anic instruction. SMA generally represents the general secondary education pathway, SMK emphasizes vocational preparation, MA provides a stronger formal orientation toward Islamic education, while pesantren-based settings may integrate formal education with residential religious learning, regular worship, and sustained interaction with Qur'anic studies. Accordingly, comparing these backgrounds provides an opportunity to examine whether differences in prior educational environments are associated with differences in Qur'anic reading competence among prospective teachers.

Previous studies provide relevant but incomplete evidence for this comparison. Jaeni et al. (2019), for example, examined Qur'anic reading and writing competence among students at Islamic universities in Indonesia and identified the place and duration of Qur'anic learning as important factors associated with competence. Hakim et al. (2022) investigated Qur'anic reading and writing strategies among prospective Islamic Education teachers and reported continuing competence gaps among university students. Supriadi et al. (2022) demonstrated the importance of structured programs and clear evaluation in improving Qur'anic reading skills, while Subki (2025) highlighted the role of systematic learning management in the implementation of the Qiroati method. Other studies have emphasized habituation, institutional support, and learning communities as important conditions for developing a culture of Qur'anic literacy (Sulianti et al., 2018). Collectively, these studies indicate that Qur'anic competence is shaped by learning exposure and institutional conditions, but they do not directly establish how students from different secondary educational backgrounds compare in their Qur'anic reading competence when entering teacher education.

This creates an important empirical gap. Existing research has predominantly examined instructional methods, intervention programs, Qur'anic literacy cultures, or specific learning models, while comparatively less attention has been given to differences in Qur'anic reading competence across secondary school backgrounds among pre-service teachers. In particular, there is limited evidence directly comparing SMA, SMK, MA, and pesantren-based educational backgrounds within the same higher-education population. Moreover, quantitative comparisons alone cannot fully explain why students from particular backgrounds may exhibit different levels of competence. Understanding students' prior learning experiences, continuity of Qur'anic instruction, learning environments, and perceived barriers can provide a more contextualized explanation of the observed quantitative patterns.

Therefore, this study examines the association between secondary school background and Qur'anic reading competence among Muslim students in the 2025 cohort of FKIP Universitas Samudra. The quantitative phase compares competence levels across four educational-background categories and uses ordinal logistic regression to examine the association between school background and the ordered competence outcome. The qualitative phase then explores the prior Qur'anic learning experiences of students with low and very low competence in order to contextualize the quantitative findings. The study addresses two research questions: (1) Is secondary school background significantly associated with Qur'anic reading competence among FKIP students? and (2) How do students' prior Qur'anic learning experiences help contextualize the observed differences in competence across

educational backgrounds? By combining quantitative comparison with qualitative elaboration, this study contributes empirical evidence on the role of prior educational environments in shaping students' Qur'anic reading competence and provides a basis for developing differentiated support and remedial programs within teacher education.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative approaches were implemented in sequence. The quantitative phase was prioritized and bore the primary responsibility for addressing the research objectives, while the qualitative phase served to elaborate and explain the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; John W. Creswell & Vicki L. Plano Clark, 2018). This was followed by a qualitative phase employing in-depth interviews with purposively selected participants from the very low and low competence groups across all school background categories, in order to explore the duration of their Qur'anic learning, their learning motivation and environment, and the last time they engaged in formal Qur'anic reading instruction. The qualitative sample was deliberately restricted to these two groups because the study's central concern was to understand the barriers underlying insufficient Qur'anic reading competence, rather than to compare pathways of success and difficulty; participants at higher competence levels would not have direct experience of the obstacles the remedial programs proposed in this study are intended to address.

Research Context and Respondent

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Universitas Samudra, Aceh, Indonesia. This context was selected because FKIP students are prospective teachers who are expected not only to master pedagogical and professional competencies but also to demonstrate foundational religious literacy, including the ability to read the Qur'an correctly. In this setting, Qur'anic reading competence is particularly relevant given that students enter the faculty with diverse secondary school backgrounds, which may have shaped their prior exposure to Qur'anic learning, religious instruction, and school-based Islamic literacy practices.

The study participants comprised the entire population of Muslim students in the FKIP batch 2025 at Universitas Samudra, totaling 855 students. Because the Qur'anic reading assessment applies specifically to Muslim students, non-Muslim students enrolled in the same batch were not part of the target population and were therefore not included in this count. Operationally, the four school background categories were defined based on institutional status and learning environment rather than curriculum type alone. Pondok Pesantren category encompasses all levels and forms of formal or integrated education including any SMA, SMK, or MA equivalent institution situated within, and administratively or pedagogically integrated with, a Pondok Pesantren's residential learning environment. Students who completed their secondary education within such an integrated pesantren setting were classified as Pondok Pesantren graduates regardless of the formal curriculum designation (general, vocational, or Islamic) carried by their diploma. In contrast, SMA, SMK, and MA graduates in this study refer to students who completed their secondary education at standalone institutions operating outside a pesantren's residential and pedagogical structure. This classification rule was applied consistently based on students' self-reported educational history to avoid ambiguity between formal curriculum type and the intensity of the religious learning environment actually experienced.

The largest group consisted of SMA graduates, with 600 students (70.2%), followed by MA graduates with 116 students (13.6%), SMK graduates with 94 students (11.0%), and Islamic boarding school graduates with 45 students (5.3%). This imbalance reflects the actual population composition

rather than a sampling artifact, since the study constitutes a census of all Muslim FKIP batch 2025 students rather than a drawn sample. It is consistent with the regional pattern already noted, in which SMA graduates substantially outnumber other secondary school types across Aceh and North Sumatra (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2025). Nevertheless, the comparatively small size of the Pondok Pesantren group ($n = 45$) warrants caution: smaller subgroup sizes yield wider confidence intervals and less stable parameter estimates, as reflected in the relatively large standard errors for this category in the ordinal regression results (Table 11). This limitation is acknowledged in the interpretation of findings involving the Pondok Pesantren group.

Variables and Categories

Consistent with the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the variables in this study were organized across two interrelated phases. The first phase adopted a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between participants' secondary school background and their Qur'anic reading competence on their Qur'anic reading competence. The second phase was designed to provide qualitative explanations for the quantitative findings by exploring students' prior Qur'anic learning experiences, school-based Islamic literacy practices, and the factors perceived to have shaped their reading competence.

In the quantitative phase, the independent variable was secondary school background, defined as the type of secondary education completed by students prior to entering university. This variable was operationalized across four categories: SMA, SMK, MA, and Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren). The dependent variable was Qur'anic reading competence, which refers to students' ability to recite the Qur'an in accordance with the fundamental principles of tahsin and tajwid. Table 1 presents the operational criteria and corresponding score ranges used to classify students into the five Qur'anic reading competence levels. Because dividing the 16 possible score points (5–20) into five equal categories does not produce a whole number ($16 \div 5 = 3.2$), the middle category (Moderate) was assigned one additional point to preserve symmetry between the lower and upper ends of the scale, yielding the bands: Very Low (5–7), Low (8–10), Moderate (11–14), High (15–17), and Very High (18–20).

Tabel 1. Level, Category and Operational Criteria.

Level	Category	Score Range	Operational Criteria
1	Very Low	5–7	Able to pronounce hijaiyah letters with basic vowel diacritics (fathah, kasrah, dhammah), in isolated form or basic letter combinations
2	Low	8–10	Able to read foundational <i>mad asli</i> patterns and <i>izhar halqiyah</i> consistently, in addition to Level 1 skills
3	Moderate	11–14	Able to recite basic tajwid rules <i>mad asli</i> , <i>izhar halqi</i> , <i>ghunnah</i> , <i>qalqalah</i> , <i>mad 'aridh li al-sukun</i> , <i>mad 'iwadh</i> , <i>mad wajib</i> , <i>mad ja'iz</i> but without consistent mastery of more advanced rules
4	High	15–17	Able to apply <i>idgham bighunnah</i> , <i>idgham bilighunnah</i> , <i>iqlab</i> , <i>ikhfa'</i> , <i>mad lazim mutsaqqal kalimi</i> , and <i>mad lain</i> , in addition to all preceding criteria
5	Very High	18–20	Demonstrates full, consistent competence in reciting <i>gharib</i> passages and <i>fawatih al-suwar</i> , in addition to all preceding criteria

Source: adapted from the evaluative framework of Jaeni, Ali Akbar, et al. (2019).

In the qualitative phase, several explanatory categories were developed to deepen the interpretation of the statistical findings. These included students' prior Qur'anic learning experiences; the presence or absence of structured Qur'anic learning programs at their respective schools; participation in non-formal Qur'anic education such as TPQ/TPA, madrasah diniyah, private tutoring, or pesantren-based instruction; family and community support; the frequency of Qur'anic reading habituation; and perceived challenges in achieving Qur'anic reading proficiency. Through this categorization, the quantitative and qualitative phases were meaningfully connected. The quantitative data provided statistical evidence of the relationship between school background and Qur'anic reading competence, while the qualitative data offered contextual explanations of the learning experiences and educational environments underlying these differences. This integration allowed the study to move beyond the identification of statistical associations toward an understanding of the educational processes that contribute to variation in Qur'anic reading competence among pre-service teachers

Instrument and Data Collection

The primary instrument in this study was a Qur'anic reading proficiency assessment adapted from the evaluative framework developed by Jaeni et al. (2019), as shown in table 1. The prescribed passages and word sets were identical for all participants to ensure comparable assessment conditions, each assessment required approximately (8–15) minutes, including instructions and score recording. Each of the five indicators was rated on a four-point analytic scale. A score of 4 indicated accurate and fluent application of the relevant recitation rule without substantive error; 3 indicated generally correct performance with minor hesitation or no more than one minor error; 2 indicated partial mastery, marked by several errors in the core rule or substantially disrupted fluency; and 1 indicated that the participant had not yet mastered the indicator independently and required intensive guidance. Scores from the five indicators were summed to obtain a total score ranging from 5 to 20, which was then converted into an ordinal competence category as detailed in Table 1, providing the ordered dependent variable used in the ordinal regression analysis.

The assessment was conducted by lecturers from several faculties who are proficient in Qur'anic recitation, as well as selected students from the Faculty Islamic Da'wah Organization (LDF) who had previously passed the reading assessment conducted by the Religious Education course lecturer. To promote scoring consistency, assessors received prior orientation and calibration using the scoring rubric and standardized examples. Prior to data collection, all assessors received a standardized briefing covering the scoring categories, assessment indicators, and procedures for recording scores into a pre-prepared online form. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected students from each school-background category to explore their prior Qur'anic learning experiences and provide contextual elaboration of the quantitative findings.

Analysis Techniques

In the quantitative phase, data were analysed using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, chi-square test of independence, and ordinal regression (McCullagh, 1980). Descriptive statistics were employed to present the frequency and percentage distribution of students' educational backgrounds and Qur'anic reading competence levels, thereby providing an initial overview of participant composition and general competence patterns. Cross-tabulation was subsequently applied to map the distribution of Qur'anic reading competence across the four educational background categories SMA, SMK, MA, and Islamic boarding school enabling the identification of patterns prior to inferential testing.

The chi-square test of independence was used to examine whether a statistically significant association existed between educational background and Qur'anic reading competence, given that both variables are categorical in nature. To ensure comprehensive reporting of the ordinal regression results,

this study presents the model fitting statistics (Table 9), pseudo R-square values (Table 10), full parameter estimates with standard errors, Wald statistics, significance values, and 95% confidence intervals (Table 11), odds ratios derived from each parameter estimate, and the results of the Test of Parallel Lines to verify the proportional odds assumption (Table 11). This technique was deemed appropriate because the dependent variable is ordinal, comprising five ordered categories. The quantitative analysis thus served not only to describe the distribution of competence levels but also to test the relationship and predictive contribution of educational background to Qur'anic reading competence.

In the qualitative phase, interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, in which transcripts were systematically reviewed, coded, and organized into recurring themes. The analysis was guided by the qualitative categories outlined in the variables section and was oriented toward explaining patterns identified in the quantitative results, particularly among students classified in the very low and low competence groups.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Student Secondary School Background

Following the administration of the Qur'anic reading proficiency assessment among participants from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Universitas Samudra, batch 2025, data on students' school backgrounds were obtained as follows:

Tabel 2. Number of FKIP Universitas Samudra Students by School Background

Educational Background	Number of Student	Persentase
Senior High School (SMA)	600	70,2%
Vocational High School (SMK)	94	11,0%
Islamic Senior High School (MA)	116	13,6%
Pesantren-Based Secondary Education	45	5,3%

Source: Research data

As shown in Table 2, the educational background of FKIP 2025 students at Universitas Samudra is dominated by graduates of senior high school (SMA). Of the 855 students involved in this study, 600 (70.2%) are SMA graduates, followed by 116 MA graduates (13.6%), 94 SMK graduates (11.0%), and 45 Islamic boarding school graduates (5.3%). This distribution indicates that the prospective teacher population in this batch is predominantly comprised of students from general secondary education rather than vocational or religiously oriented tracks.

The relatively small proportion of SMK graduates can be understood in relation to the vocational orientation of that educational track. SMK students are typically prepared through specialized fields more closely aligned with technical, vocational, science, technology, and applied professional pathways. As a result, many SMK graduates tend to continue their studies in programs directly aligned with their prior vocational training, such as engineering, technology, applied sciences, health sciences, business, or polytechnic-based programs. The proportion of MA graduates similarly reflects regional educational patterns. According to Statistics Indonesia 2025, combined data for Aceh and North Sumatra indicate that MA students represent a smaller segment relative to SMA students: in both provinces, SMA students account for 51.01% of the total student population across SMA, SMK, and MA, while MA students account for only 15.77% (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2025). This pattern is consistent with the FKIP sample, in which MA graduates represent 13.6% of the batch 2025.

It should also be noted that regional statistical data do not provide a separate category for Islamic boarding school graduates. This is because pesantren that offer formal education are generally recorded under existing formal school categories, specifically Madrasah Aliyah (MA) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs or SMA under the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. Accordingly, the 45

students categorized as Islamic boarding school graduates in this study represent a more specific institutional background identified through self-reported educational histories, rather than a category that can be directly compared with aggregate regional statistics. The dominance of SMA graduates in the FKIP Universitas Samudra sample is thus broadly consistent with the regional educational structure, while this study provides a more refined classification by distinguishing pesantren-based educational backgrounds from the general SMA and MA categories.

Level of Qur'an Reading Ability

In this study, students' Qur'anic reading competence was classified into five levels: Very Low (Level 1), Low (Level 2), Moderate (Level 3), High (Level 4), and Very High (Level 5). These categories were constructed on the basis of a hierarchical proficiency framework, ranging from the most foundational skills, such as recognizing hijaiyah letters and their makhraj (articulation points) to advanced recitation competencies, including the application of tajwid rules governing mad, idgham, ikhfa, gharib recitations, and fawatih al-suwar. The classification was intended not merely to label student performance, but to identify the highest level of Qur'anic reading proficiency that each student could demonstrate consistently during the assessment.

This categorization follows a hierarchical logic. Students classified at Level 1 (Very Low) demonstrate proficiency limited to pronouncing hijaiyah letters with basic vowel diacritics, namely fathah, kasrah, and dhammah, whether in isolated form or in basic letter combinations. Students at Level 2 (Low) are able to read foundational mad asli patterns and izhar halqiyah. Students at Level 3 (Moderate) are capable of reciting basic tajwid patterns, including mad asli, izhar halqi, ghunnah, qalqalah, mad 'aridh li al-sukun, mad 'iwadh, mad wajib, and mad ja'iz, but have not yet demonstrated consistent mastery of more advanced rules. Students at Level 4 (High) are able to apply idgham bighunnah, idgham bilighunnah, iqlab, ikhfa', mad lazim mutsaqqal kalimi, and mad lain. Students at Level 5 (Very High) demonstrate full competence in reciting gharib passages and fawatih al-suwar.

Tabel 3. Frequency Distribution of Students' School Background

		F	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Senior High School (SMA)	600	70.2	70.2	70.2
	Vocational High School (SMK)	94	11.0	11.0	81.2
	Islamic Senior High School (MA)	116	13.6	13.6	94.7
	Pesantren-Based Secondary Education	45	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	855	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS Analysis

Referring to the tabel 3. The results of the descriptive frequency analysis show that all 855 participants had valid data, with no missing responses. In terms of educational background, most students were graduates of senior high schools (SMA), accounting for 600 students or 70.2% of the sample. This was followed by graduates of Madrasah Aliyah (MA), with 116 students or 13.6%, vocational high schools (SMK), with 94 students or 11.0%, and Pesantren-based secondary education, with 45 students or 5.3%. This distribution confirms that the student profile in this study was dominated by graduates from general secondary education.

Tabel 4. Frequency Distribution of Qur'anic Reading Competence

		F	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Low	37	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Low	118	13.8	13.8	18.1
	Moderate	261	30.5	30.5	48.7
	High	280	32.7	32.7	81.4
	Very High	159	18.6	18.6	100.0
	Total	855	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS Analysis

As presented in Table 4, the distribution of Qur'anic reading competence across all participants reveals that the High (Level 4) category was the most prevalent (32.7%; $n = 280$), followed closely by the Moderate (Level 3) category (30.5%; $n = 261$), with a difference of only 2.2 percentage points. Students classified at the Very High (Level 5) level accounted for 18.6% ($n = 159$), while those in the Low (Level 2) category comprised 13.8% ($n = 118$), and those in the Very Low (Level 1) category represented the smallest proportion at 4.3% ($n = 37$). With respect to the competence threshold established in this study, only students classified at Level 5 (Very High) totaling 159 students were considered to have achieved full mastery and were therefore not in need of further remedial intervention. The remaining 696 students require varying degrees of intensive guidance to progress toward the highest competence level, which serves as the indicator of proficient Qur'anic recitation in accordance with tajwid principles.

Distribution of Qur'an Reading Ability by School Background

To examine the distribution of Qur'anic reading competence among FKIP 2025 students across different school backgrounds, a cross-tabulation analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 5:

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of School Background and Qur'anic Reading Competence

Educational Background		Kemampuan Tahsin					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Vocational High School (SMK)	Count	7	10	28	35	14	94
	Expected Count	4.1	13.0	28.7	30.8	17.5	94.0
	% within Pendidikan	7.4%	10.6%	29.8%	37.2%	14.9%	100.0%
	Terakhir						
Senior High School (SMA)	Count	30	93	197	195	85	600
	Expected Count	26.0	82.8	183.2	196.5	111.6	600.0
	% within Pendidikan	5.0%	15.5%	32.8%	32.5%	14.2%	100.0%
	Terakhir						
Islamic Senior High School (MA)	Count	0	12	33	41	30	116
	Expected Count	5.0	16.0	35.4	38.0	21.6	116.0
	% within Pendidikan	0.0%	10.3%	28.4%	35.3%	25.9%	100.0%
	Terakhir						
Pesantren-Based Secondary Education	Count	0	3	3	9	30	45
	Expected Count	1.9	6.2	13.7	14.7	8.4	45.0
	% within Pendidikan	0.0%	6.7%	6.7%	20.0%	66.7%	100.0%
	Terakhir						
Total	Count	37	118	261	280	159	855
	Expected Count	37.0	118.0	261.0	280.0	159.0	855.0
	% within Pendidikan	4.3%	13.8%	30.5%	32.7%	18.6%	100.0%
	Terakhir						

Source: SPSS Analysis

The cross-tabulation analysis provides a more detailed picture of Qur'anic reading competence by educational background, mapping the full distribution of competence levels (Level 1 through Level 5) across all four school background groups. Among SMA graduates the largest group in the sample ($n = 600$) only 14.2% ($n = 85$) attained the very high competence level, while the remaining 85.8% ($n = 515$) were classified as not yet proficient, with concentrations at the Moderate level (32.8%) and High level (32.5%). A broadly similar pattern was observed among SMK graduates ($n = 94$), in which only 14.9% ($n = 14$) achieved very high competence, while 85.1% remained in sub-proficient categories, including high (37.2%), moderate (29.8%), low (10.6%), and very low (7.4%).

A positive shift in the competence distribution begins to emerge among students from Islamic-oriented educational institutions. Among MA graduates ($n = 116$), the proportion attaining Very High competence increased to 25.9% ($n = 30$), and no respondents were classified at the Very Low level (0.0%). Nevertheless, 74.1% of MA graduates ($n = 86$) remained in sub-proficient categories, indicating that an Islamic secondary school background does not automatically guarantee adequate Qur'anic reading proficiency.

The most striking contrast was observed among Islamic boarding school graduates. Of the 45 respondents in this group, 66.7% ($n = 30$) were classified at the Very High competence level—the highest proportion by a considerable margin across all four groups. The remaining 33.3% ($n = 15$) were distributed across the High (20.0%), Moderate (6.7%), and Low (6.7%) categories, with no respondents at the Very Low level. These findings affirm a consistent association between institutional educational context and Qur'anic reading competence. The boarding school environment characterized by residential learning, continuous religious habituation, and systematic Qur'anic instruction is associated with a markedly higher proportion of students reaching proficient reading levels. However, as this study employs a cross-sectional, non-experimental design, this pattern should be interpreted as an observed association rather than evidence that the pesantren environment causally produces more effective Qur'anic readers. At the same time, the high proportion of sub-proficient SMA and SMK graduates, exceeding 85% in both groups—constitutes a compelling policy concern regarding the adequacy and intensity of Qur'anic literacy instruction in general and vocational secondary schools.

Relationship between School Background and Qur'an Reading Ability

The chi-square test was conducted to examine whether a statistically significant association exists between secondary school background and Qur'anic reading competence:

Table 6. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	93.220 ^a	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	82.234	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	38.168	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	855		

Source: SPSS Analysis

The chi-square test yielded a Pearson Chi-Square value of 93.220 with 12 degrees of freedom and a two-sided asymptotic significance value of .000 ($N = 855$). Since this significance value is less than the established significance threshold of $\alpha = .05$, the probability that the observed association occurred by chance is negligible. Based on the hypothesis-testing criterion, that H_0 is rejected when $p < .05$ —the null hypothesis stating that no relationship exists between secondary school background and students' Qur'anic reading competence is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) affirming the existence of such a relationship is supported.

Table 7. Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.330	.000
	Cramer's V	.191	.000
N of Valid Cases		855	

Source: SPSS Analysis

The strength of the association between secondary school background and Qur'anic reading competence was interpreted using the classification guidelines proposed by Rea and Parker (2014), which are specifically designed for interpreting Cramer's V coefficients (Rea & Parker, 2014).

Table 8. Interpretation Tabel

Cramer's V	Interpretation
0,00–0,10	Negligible
0,10–0,20	Weak
0,20–0,40	Moderate
0,40–0,60	Strong
>0,60	Very Strong

Source: (Rea & Parker, 2014)

In accordance with these guidelines, the obtained Cramer's V value of .191 falls within the range of .10 to less than .20, which is classified as a weak association. This finding indicates that, although the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant ($p = .000$), the magnitude of the association is weak. Secondary school background therefore does not emerge as the dominant explanatory factor for variation in Qur'anic reading competence; rather, it represents one among several contributing factors operating simultaneously. Nevertheless, this finding empirically confirms that prior secondary school background is statistically associated with students' Qur'anic reading competence.

The Association of School Background on Qur'an Reading Ability

The Association of secondary school background on Qur'anic reading competence was examined through a series of ordinal regression analyses. The key indicators are presented in the following tables.

Table 9. Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	146.294			
Final	78.627	67.667	3	.000

Source: SPSS Analysis

The ordinal regression results show that the -2 Log Likelihood value decreased from 146.294 in the intercept-only model to 78.627 in the final model following the inclusion of the school background variable. This reduction yields a Chi-Square value of 67.667 with $df = 3$ and a significance value of .000 ($p < .05$), indicating that the model incorporating school background is significantly more effective in explaining variation in Qur'anic reading competence than the baseline model without any predictor. It can therefore be concluded that secondary school background as a whole contributes significantly to the model.

Table 10. Pseudo R-Square

Cox and Snell	.076
Nagelkerke	.081

McFadden	.027
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Source: SPSS Analysis

The Pseudo R-Square values indicate the proportion of variance in Qur'anic reading competence explained by the school background variable: 7.6% according to Cox and Snell, 8.1% according to Nagelkerke, and 2.7% according to McFadden. While the association of school background is statistically significant, the explanatory power of the model is relatively modest, suggesting that the majority of variance in students' Qur'anic reading competence is likely attributable to factors beyond school background, such as the duration of prior Qur'anic learning, habitual practice, and family support. These factors are explored in greater depth in the qualitative phase of this study.

Table 11. Parameter Estimates

		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
								Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Kemampuan = 1]	-5.343	.356	225.594	1	.000	-	-6.040	-4.646
	[Kemampuan = 2]	-3.742	.325	132.648	1	.000	-	-4.379	-3.106
	[Kemampuan = 3]	-2.252	.316	50.717	1	.000	-	-2.872	-1.632
	[Kemampuan = 4]	-.613	.307	3.995	1	.046	-	-1.214	-.012
Location	[Pendidikan=1]	-2.243	.363	38.109	1	.000	0.106	-2.955	-1.531
	[Pendidikan=2]	-2.392	.321	55.356	1	.000	0.091	-3.022	-1.762
	[Pendidikan=3]	-1.711	.352	23.584	1	.000	0.181	-2.402	-1.020
	[Pendidikan=4]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	1	.	.

Source: SPSS Analysis

The parameter estimates reveal that all three school background categories—SMA (estimate = -2.243; Wald = 38.109; $p = .000$), SMK (estimate = -2.392; Wald = 55.356; $p = .000$), and MA (estimate = -1.711; Wald = 23.584; $p = .000$) are significantly different from the reference category of Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren). The negative estimate values across all three categories indicate that students from SMA, SMK, and MA backgrounds have a significantly lower probability of attaining higher Qur'anic reading competence levels compared to students from Islamic boarding school backgrounds.

Compared with Islamic boarding school graduates as the reference category, SMA, SMK, and MA graduates had substantially lower odds of attaining a higher Qur'anic reading competence category, with odds ratios of 0.106, 0.091, and 0.181, respectively. These estimates correspond to 89.4%, 90.9%, and 81.9% lower odds, respectively. The largest reduction in odds was observed among SMK graduates, followed by SMA graduates, while MA graduates showed an intermediate level of odds. The odds for MA graduates were approximately 1.71 times those of SMA graduates and 1.99 times those of SMK graduates, although they remained considerably lower than those of Islamic boarding school graduates.

Among the three non-reference categories, MA graduates exhibit the estimate value closest to zero (-1.711), indicating that the competence gap between MA graduates and Islamic boarding school graduates is comparatively smaller than that observed for SMA and SMK graduates. Conversely, SMK graduates demonstrate the most negative estimate (-2.392), indicating the largest competence gap relative to Islamic boarding school graduates. These findings are consistent with the cross-tabulation results, which showed that students from Islamic boarding school backgrounds dominated the Very

High competence category (66.7%), while students from the remaining three educational tracks were predominantly concentrated at the Moderate to High competence levels.

Table 12. Test of Parallel Lines^a

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi- Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	78.627			
General	64.060	14.568	9	.104

Source: SPSS Analysis

The proportional odds assumption was tested through the Test of Parallel Lines, which yielded a Chi-Square value of 14.568 with $df = 9$ and a significance value of .104 ($p > .05$). Since the significance value exceeds .05, the null hypothesis positing that the slope coefficients are equal across all response categories is retained. This confirms that the assumption of parallel lines is satisfied, and that the ordinal regression model employed in this study is appropriate and suitable for interpretation.

Taken together, the ordinal regression results corroborate the chi-square findings reported in the previous section. Beyond the statistically significant association, secondary school background is also shown to exert a significant predictive association on Qur'anic reading competence, with students from Islamic boarding school backgrounds consistently demonstrating a higher likelihood of attaining elevated competence categories relative to students from the other three school types. Beyond the statistical significance of these results, their theoretical contribution extends past the simple claim that school background affects Qur'anic reading competence. Rather, school type functions as a structural marker of cumulative learning exposure, continuity of instruction, formal evaluative accountability, habituation, and family or community support the underlying mechanisms through which competence actually develops. This reframing is consistent with the exposure-based mechanism proposed earlier in this study (see Introduction) and is further substantiated by the qualitative findings presented below, which identify these specific mechanisms as the explanatory pathways linking school background to reading competence. Nevertheless, given the relatively small Pseudo R-Square values, the association of school background should be understood as one among several contributing factors, rather than as the sole determinant of students' Qur'anic reading competence.

Discussion

Table 13 presents a joint display integrating the quantitative pattern observed for each school background category with the qualitative themes identified among interview participants from that category's low-competence group, illustrating how the statistical associations reported above are substantiated by students' learning experiences. Following the joint display approach for integrating quantitative and qualitative findings in mixed-methods research (Fetters et al., 2013; Guetterman et al., 2015).

Table 13. Joint Display of Quantitative Patterns and Qualitative Themes by School Background

Educational Background	Quantitative Pattern	Dominant Qualitative Theme(s)
SMA (n=600)	85.8% below Very High; OR = 0.106 relative to Pondok Pesantren	Learning limited to elementary school without continuation (Theme 1); absence of formal Qur'anic reading requirement (Theme 2).
SMK (n=94)	85.1% below Very High; largest gap (OR = 0.091)	Same as SMA (Themes 1–2), consistent with the absence of structured Qur'anic learning programs at the secondary level noted in the Discussion.

MA (n=116)	74.1% below Very High; smaller gap than SMA/SMK (OR = 0.181)	Theme 1 attenuated by more intensive religious curriculum, though still without continuity comparable to pesantren; Theme 2 also attenuated.
Pondok Pesantren (n=45)	33.3% below Very High (smallest); reference category	Formal evaluative accountability embedded in institutional regulation (Theme 2, inverted).

Source: Data Analysed

The quantitative findings presented in the preceding sections indicate that secondary school background is significantly associated with (Pearson Chi-Square = 93.220; $p = .000$) and exerts a significant associate on (model fitting Chi-Square = 67.667; $df = 3$; $p = .000$) students' Qur'anic reading competence, despite a weak association magnitude (Cramer's $V = .191$) and a relatively modest model fit (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .081$). This pattern suggests that the type of secondary school institution alone is insufficient to fully account for why a substantial proportion of students particularly those from SMA, SMK, and MA backgrounds, remain in the low to very low competence categories. The qualitative phase was therefore specifically designed to trace the learning experiences of students within these competence groups, with the aim of providing contextual explanations for the statistical patterns identified. Interview data from these students consistently converged on four central themes: the duration of Qur'anic learning being confined to elementary school without structured continuation; the absence of formal academic requirements mandating Qur'anic reading competence except in pesantren-based institutions; adolescent reluctance to revisit foundational Qur'anic learning materials; and insufficient parental engagement with children's Qur'anic development. These four themes are elaborated in sequence in the following paragraphs and situated within the theoretical framework established in the introduction.

Theoretically, these findings are consistent with the view that Qur'anic literacy cannot be reduced to a technical skill of letter pronunciation, but rather constitutes a cumulative process shaped by comprehension, habituation, and continuous learning experience (Rani Maharani et al., 2025). This perspective is further reinforced by Baharuddin et al. (2024), who argue that Qur'anic reading and writing programs in higher education should serve as a medium for value internalization, not merely technical achievement. In this light, secondary school background functions as a proxy, a surface-level indicator for a more complex and gradual learning process that begins in early childhood. This underlying process varies considerably across students, even among those sharing the same school type, which explains why the ordinal regression model accounts for only a small proportion of the total variance in Qur'anic reading competence. This reasoning constitutes the fundamental justification for the necessity of qualitative data in revealing the mechanisms behind the statistical patterns.

The first theme emerging from the interview data is that low Qur'anic reading competence is largely attributable to learning that was limited to the elementary school period and not continued in any structured manner at subsequent educational levels. This finding reinforces the results of Jaeni et al. (2019), who identified the duration of Qur'anic learning as one of the principal determinants of the Qur'anic reading and writing competence index among university students, alongside the place of learning. When Qur'anic learning ceases in childhood without a continuity mechanism at the secondary level, the competencies that were initially developed tend to stagnate rather than progress, and students enter higher education with competence levels that have not advanced since early childhood. This empirically explains why SMA and SMK graduates who generally lack structured Qur'anic learning programs at the secondary level—exhibit more negative parameter estimates in the ordinal regression (SMA = -2.243; SMK = -2.392) relative to MA graduates (-1.711), who benefit from a more intensive religious curriculum, albeit still without continuity comparable to the pesantren environment.

The second theme concerns the absence of formal academic requirements mandating Qur'anic reading proficiency as a graduation prerequisite, with the notable exception of pesantren-based institutions. This finding is consistent with Supriadi et al. (2022), who demonstrated that many senior high school students are unable to read the Qur'an adequately due to the absence of dedicated programs and clear evaluative standards at the school level. In contrast, Subki (2025) asserts that successful Qur'anic learning is determined by systematic management, including consistent evaluative mechanisms as an integral component of the learning process. In pesantren institutions, this principle is explicitly embedded within the regulatory framework, which designates religious competencies including Qur'anic reading as integral components of graduation standards (Republik Indonesia, 2019). In SMA, SMK, and MA settings, Qur'anic reading proficiency is generally not treated as a binding academic evaluation criterion, thus providing students with no structural pressure to achieve a defined competence level prior to graduation. This structural difference in accountability is what consistently explains the dominance of pesantren graduates in the Very High competence category observed in the cross-tabulation results.

The third theme adolescent reluctance to revisit foundational Qur'anic learning materials (such as Iqra' Volumes 1–3) at the senior high school age constitutes a finding that specifically enriches the existing literature on Qur'anic literacy, which has predominantly focused on instructional strategies, method management, and digital literacy (Hakim et al., 2022; Subki, 2025; Supriadi et al., 2022). This finding introduces a psychosocial dimension that further impedes remedial efforts: students who are aware of their learning deficits actively avoid re-engaging with foundational materials because doing so feels inconsistent with their developmental stage. Consequently, rather than addressing the competence gap, these students tend to allow the gap to widen until they enter higher education. This pattern indicates that barriers to Qur'anic literacy are not solely cognitive or institutional in nature, but also involve affective dimensions—namely self-confidence and social acceptance a dynamic that aligns with the motivational dimensions anticipated in the study's qualitative design. This finding broadens the understanding that Qur'anic literacy interventions at the university level must incorporate approaches that are non-stigmatizing and sensitive to students' affective experiences.

The fourth theme insufficient parental engagement with children's Qur'anic reading development reinforces and inversely confirms the findings of Sulianti et al. (2018), who demonstrated that a culture of Qur'anic reading is cultivated through habituation, institutional support, recognition, and learning communities, including family-based support. When such support is absent during childhood, opportunities for consistent Qur'anic reading habituation are severely limited, particularly when not compensated by structured programs at the formal school level, as discussed in the second theme. This finding is also relevant to the normative foundation established in the introduction, which holds that the strengthening of religious values is a collective responsibility that must begin within the family, not solely within formal educational institutions (Peraturan Presiden Nomor 12 Tahun 2025, 2025; Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Tahun 2005 Tentang Guru Dan Dosen, 2005). Accordingly, parental disengagement may be understood as the starting point of a chain of deficits that remains inadequately addressed at the secondary school level, as elaborated in the preceding themes.

When these four themes are considered collectively, the weak association magnitude (Cramer's $V = .191$) and modest model fit (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .081$) observed in the quantitative results are better understood as reflections of the complexity of factors that cannot be fully captured by school type categories alone. The superior competence profile of Islamic boarding school graduates in the ordinal regression can be coherently explained by the convergence of all four mechanisms: sustained learning duration, formal evaluative accountability, a community learning environment that does not stigmatize re-learning as it is conducted collectively, and active family involvement, which is frequently the

primary motivation for enrolling children in pesantren (Ma'mun Hanif et al., 2025). Among SMA, SMK, and MA graduates, these four mechanisms tend to be absent simultaneously and vary considerably at the individual level—which explains why Qur'anic reading competence within these three groups remains highly variable even within the same school type. This explanation affirms that secondary school background serves as an initial structural indicator, but the four mechanisms revealed through qualitative data constitute the more fundamental explanatory pathways underlying variation in Qur'anic reading competence among pre-service teachers.

Implications for Teacher Education

These findings carry direct implications for FKIP as an institution preparing prospective teachers. Because Qur'anic reading competence functions, as discussed earlier, as a component of the religious literacy expected of teachers across subjects and increasingly as an employability requirement in the growing of integrated Islamic schools sector the substantial proportion of incoming students below proficient levels represents a structural gap that FKIP's student development programs cannot afford to leave unaddressed. First, a diagnostic placement assessment at entry is warranted, allowing the faculty to identify students' competence levels before remedial needs compound further into their studies. Second, remedial support should be differentiated by the mechanisms identified in this study rather than delivered uniformly, students from SMA and SMK backgrounds, who more often lack prior structured instruction and formal accountability, may require more intensive foundational support than MA graduates, whose gap is comparatively narrower. Third, given the qualitative finding that adolescents avoid revisiting basic materials due to self-consciousness, remedial programs should be designed to be non-stigmatizing for instance, through peer based small group formats rather than public identification of low competence students. Finally, because insufficient parental engagement emerged as a contributing factor beyond the university's direct control, FKIP's role is necessarily compensatory, institutional support must substitute for, rather than assume, the habituation many students did not receive earlier in life.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that secondary school background is significantly associated with ($\chi^2 = 93.220$; $df = 12$; $p = .000$) and exerts is significantly associated with ($\chi^2 = 67.667$; $df = 3$; $p = .000$) the Qur'anic reading competence of FKIP batch 2025 students at Universitas Samudra, thereby supporting the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H1). Students from Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren) backgrounds consistently demonstrate a higher likelihood of attaining the Very High competence level compared to graduates of SMA, SMK, and MA institutions. Nevertheless, the weak association magnitude (Cramer's $V = .191$) and modest model fit (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .081$) confirm that secondary school background represents only one among several contributing factors to Qur'anic reading competence.

Qualitative findings from interviews with students classified in the low and very low competence groups further illuminate the observed patterns through four central themes: the cessation of Qur'anic learning at the elementary school level without structured continuation at subsequent stages; the absence of formal academic requirements mandating Qur'anic reading proficiency except in pesantren-based institutions; adolescent reluctance to revisit foundational Qur'anic materials; and insufficient parental engagement. Together, these themes substantively explain the superior performance of pesantren graduates through four reinforcing mechanisms: continuity of learning, formal evaluative accountability, a non-stigmatizing communal learning environment, and more intensive family involvement.

These findings underscore the need for differentiated Qur'anic reading remediation programs that are tailored to students' educational backgrounds, initiated through placement testing for incoming students, and designed in an inclusive manner that avoids stigmatizing those with lower baseline competencies. A further limitation concerns the absence of a formal inter-rater reliability assessment between lecturer and student assessors; although both groups met predefined competency criteria and underwent standardized calibration, no agreement coefficient was calculated, so systematic scoring differences between the two groups cannot be fully ruled out. This study is limited to a single faculty and a single batch 2025; future research is therefore encouraged to expand the scope of participants and to explore additional variables such as duration of non-formal Qur'anic learning and community support in order to develop a more comprehensive explanatory model that accounts for a broader range of factors shaping Qur'anic reading competence.

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