

STRENGTHENING READING CULTURE IN MADRASAH THROUGH ISLAMIC LITERACY STRATEGIES: AN INTEGRATION OF QUR'ANIC VALUES

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ABSTRACT

The reading culture in madrasah faces persistent challenges, as students show strong engagement with Qur'anic and religious texts but limited interest in general reading, further weakened by digital distractions. This study addresses the problem by examining how Qur'an-based Islamic literacy strategies can foster a more balanced and sustainable reading culture. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, research was conducted at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Denpasar, Bali, from May to June 2025. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of literacy documents. Triangulation and member checking were employed to ensure validity, while data were analyzed thematically. The findings highlight three main insights. First, reading culture in madrasah remains fragmented, dominated by religious texts with limited exposure to literature, history, or science. Second, Qur'anic values such as Iqra' (divine command to read) and tadabbur (reflective engagement) provide powerful spiritual motivation and cultivate deeper, critical reading practices. Third, an integrative literacy framework emerges, combining Qur'anic recitation with thematic readings of supplementary texts, which strengthens both spiritual and intellectual engagement. This study contributes theoretically by embedding Islamic perspectives into literacy discourse, challenging secular models that neglect spiritual dimensions. Practically, it offers madrasah educators a framework to integrate Qur'anic values with general reading, creating strategies to develop a holistic, meaningful, and enduring reading culture.

INTRODUCTION

Reading culture has long been acknowledged as a fundamental pillar of intellectual growth and educational development. Emphasizes that cultivating reading habits from an early age is directly associated with academic achievement, lifelong learning, and social mobility. Nevertheless, global indicators present a concerning picture. The Programme for International Student Assessment PISA 2018 ranked Indonesia 72nd out of 77 countries in reading literacy, far below the OECD average. More recently, only about 25% of Indonesian students reached Level 2 or higher in reading literacy in (PISA 2022), compared to the OECD average of 74% (OECD, 2023). Indonesia's average reading score also declined from 371 in 2018 to 359 in 2022, reflecting the deepening challenge of literacy in

the digital era (ISSED, 2023). At the national level, data from the National Library of Indonesia show both progress and limitations. The Indeks Pembangunan Literasi Masyarakat (IPLM) improved from 64.68 in 2023 to 73.52 in 2024, while the national Reading Interest Index (TGM) stood at 66.77 (Perpusnas, 2024). Yet, voluntary reading duration averages only 10 hours 19 minutes per week, which remains moderate (Sinarharapan, 2023). These figures indicate that despite some national progress, reading culture in Indonesia continues to face serious challenges, particularly among students.

In this landscape, madrasah play a strategic role. As faith-based educational institutions, madrasah not only provide formal schooling but also preserve Islamic identity and values. They carry a dual mandate: safeguarding Qur'anic traditions while equipping students with modern literacy competencies. In Islamic education, reading is not a mere cognitive skill but also a spiritual act. The very first divine revelation to Prophet Muhammad began with the command "Iqra" (Read) in Surah Al-'Alaq (1-5), underscoring that reading is both a spiritual obligation and an intellectual pursuit. Thus, literacy in the Islamic tradition integrates intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, offering a philosophical foundation that can harmonize students' spiritual motivation with their academic engagement.

Despite its significance, previous studies on literacy in madrasah reveal several limitations. Research on religious literacy often focuses narrowly on tilawah (recitation) and tahfidz (memorization) of the Qur'an, with little attention to broader literacy competencies such as critical or reflective reading. For instance, (Basir et al., 2024) found that Qur'an reading programs improved fluency but did not significantly foster interest in non-religious texts. Conversely, studies on general literacy tend to employ frameworks such as functional literacy, critical literacy, or digital literacy (Ilomäki et al., 2023; Mohammadi, 2024). While insightful, these models largely ignore spiritual dimensions, making them less relevant to the lived realities of students in faith-based schools. Although some scholars (Reid, 2024) call for integrating religious perspectives, systematic efforts to embed Qur'anic principles into broader literacy practices remain scarce.

This leads to a clear research gap. Current literacy models in madrasah either prioritize religious texts at the expense of general literacy or rely on secular frameworks that do not reflect students' cultural and spiritual identities. Neither approach adequately addresses the dual mission of madrasah. What is missing is an integrative model that systematically incorporates Qur'anic values such as Iqra' (command to read), tadabbur (reflective engagement), and talab al-'ilm (seeking knowledge) into literacy strategies that also involve literature, history, and science. Such integration is crucial, as madrasah students are rooted in strong religious identity yet face global challenges of declining reading interest and digital distractions.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring how Qur'an-based Islamic literacy strategies can strengthen the reading culture in madrasah. The objectives are threefold: (1) to identify the challenges students face in developing consistent reading habits; (2) to examine the motivational and reflective roles of Qur'anic values in literacy practices; and (3) to propose an integrative literacy framework that bridges Qur'anic recitation with thematic readings of supplementary texts.

The contributions of this study are equally multidimensional. Theoretically, it enriches literacy discourse by embedding Islamic perspectives into models often dominated by secular paradigms. Practically, it provides strategies for madrasah educators to align literacy education with students' spiritual identity while fostering critical engagement with diverse texts. Philosophically, it reaffirms Iqra' as both a divine command and an educational foundation, positioning literacy as a bridge between intellectual growth and spiritual formation.

By embedding Qur'anic values within literacy practices and extending them toward general reading, this study introduces a novelty, a Qur'an-based integrative literacy framework for madrasah.

This framework not only strengthens reading culture but also demonstrates how faith-based education can innovate in responding to global literacy challenges in the digital era.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to examine how Islamic literacy strategies, grounded in Qur’anic values, strengthen the reading culture in madrasah. The research was conducted at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Denpasar, Bali, from May to June 2025. A qualitative method was chosen to capture in-depth perspectives, experiences, and practices of teachers and staff regarding literacy and Qur’anic-based reading programs.

Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure triangulation, including: observations of reading activities and classroom interactions; semi-structured interviews with key staff members, including the principal, teachers, literacy coordinator, and students; and document analysis of program plans, teaching materials, and student reading records. Data analysis followed (Creswell & Poth’s, 2018) thematic analysis approach with systematic steps: transcription of interview recordings verbatim; open coding, labeling data segments to identify initial patterns; axial coding, grouping codes into categories and identifying relationships among concepts; theme development, deriving core themes from emerging data patterns that reflect how Islamic literacy strategies influence the reading culture; and interpretation, analyzing the themes in the context of Qur’anic-based literacy practices to gain deeper insights. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were applied, including member checking, verifying interpretations with informants; peer debriefing, having colleagues or experts review the coding and theme development process; triangulation, combining data from observations, interviews, and documents; and anonymization, coding informant identities to maintain confidentiality.

Informants were purposively selected based on their roles in implementing literacy programs and their capacity to provide in-depth information. A summary of key informants is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Research Informan

| No. | Position | Code | Reason for Selection |
|-----|----------------------|------|---|
| 1. | Principal | IF1 | Oversees the vision and policies regarding literacy programs in the madrasah |
| 2. | Vice Principal | IF2 | Involved in managing academic and Qur’anic programs |
| 3. | Literacy Coordinator | IF3 | Directly responsible for designing and monitoring literacy activities |
| 4. | Qur’an Teacher | IF4 | Implements Qur’anic values in teaching and reading activities |
| 5. | Subject Teacher | IF5 | Integrates literacy practices within subject teaching and monitors students’ engagement |
| 6. | Students | IF6 | Provide direct perspectives on reading culture and literacy practices in daily learning |

The results show that IF1 emphasized the importance of clear policies and vision for literacy programs, while IF2 highlighted the need to align academic and Qur’anic programs. IF3 stressed the significance of structured and well-monitored literacy activities, and IF4 noted that integrating Iqra’ and tadabbur effectively fosters reading motivation. IF5 observed that literacy can be strengthened through integration into subject learning, whereas IF6 affirmed that reading becomes more meaningful when connected to Qur’anic values and daily life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Cultivating Reading Culture

Interviews, observations, and documentation at MTs Miftahul Ulum revealed that students are enthusiastic about reading the Qur'an and religious texts but show limited interest in general books such as literature, history, or science. One informant noted, "students are enthusiastic about reading the Qur'an and religious texts, but their interest in general books such as literature, history, or science remains very low" (IF1). Classroom and library observations conducted on May 12-14, 2025 confirmed this pattern: Qur'anic reading was carried out with discipline, while visits to the library for general reading were infrequent. Documentation indicated that school literacy programs prioritized Qur'anic study over general reading materials.

Digital distractions also pose significant challenges. One informant explained, "social media consumes much of the students' time, making them less willing to engage in book reading" (IF2), and a student added, "reading books feels more tiring compared to scrolling on TikTok" (IF6). Observations during recess on June 3-5, 2025 showed that many students were focused on their phones rather than reading, highlighting the competition between digital culture and traditional reading practices.

From a program management perspective, the literacy coordinator stated, "we already designed structured literacy activities, but the implementation is still not optimal because students treat it as routine, not as meaningful learning" (IF3). A subject teacher also noted, "it is difficult to integrate literacy into subject lessons when students are not motivated to read beyond religious texts" (IF5). Documentation of lesson plans showed scheduled reading sessions; however, classroom observations on May 20-22, 2025 indicated that students often lacked enthusiasm when materials were unrelated to Qur'anic themes.

Nevertheless, integrating Qur'anic values into literacy practices shows promise. The Qur'an teacher emphasized, "when we connect reading with Qur'anic values like Iqra' and Tadabbur, students become more motivated, even towards other texts" (IF4). Documentation of Qur'an-based literacy modules supported this approach, showing activities that encouraged reflection on broader themes beyond scripture. Collectively, the triangulated data suggest that while challenges remain, embedding Qur'anic values into literacy practices offers a promising strategy to foster a holistic reading culture at MTs Miftahul Ulum.

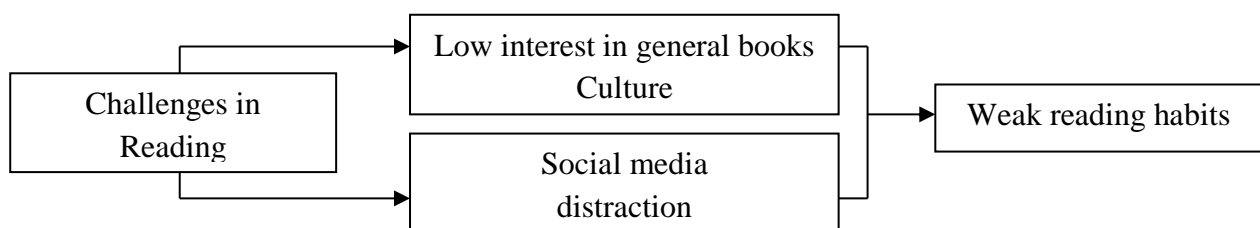


Figure 1. Challenges in Cultivating Reading Culture

At MTs Miftahul Ulum, students show strong enthusiasm for reading the Qur'an and religious texts but limited interest in general books such as literature, history, or science. Observations (May-June 2025) and documentation reveal that literacy programs prioritize Qur'anic study, while digital distractions, especially social media, reduce engagement with traditional reading. Structured literacy activities exist but are often perceived as routine rather than meaningful learning. Integrating Qur'anic values like Iqra' and Tadabbur into reading practices increases motivation and encourages exploration of broader texts. Embedding religious values in literacy offers a promising approach to developing a holistic and sustainable reading culture among students.

Integration of Qur'anic Values in Literacy Practices

The data from interviews, classroom observations, and documentation indicate that embedding Qur'anic values into literacy activities functions as a strong motivational strategy. Students at MTs Miftahul Ulum tend to engage more actively when reading is framed within a spiritual context. The Qur'an teacher explained, "when students are reminded of the command Iqra' as part of their daily literacy practice, they perceive reading as both a spiritual obligation and an intellectual activity" (IF4). Observations during literacy sessions in May and June 2025 confirmed that students showed higher focus and discipline during Qur'an related reading activities compared to general reading sessions.

This religious framing not only motivates students but also encourages deeper engagement with texts. Rather than simply decoding words, students appear to connect reading with reflection on values and meaning. Documentation of lesson plans and literacy modules supported this finding, showing structured activities that linked Qur'anic reading to moral and cognitive reflection. The literacy coordinator emphasized, "we structure literacy sessions so that students can see how the moral lessons in the Qur'an relate to the ideas in the supplementary texts, which encourages reflective thinking" (IF3).

Similarly, tadabbur, or reflective reading, plays a key role in fostering comprehension. "Students are guided not only to read but also to reflect on the meaning of the texts they encounter, which fosters deeper comprehension" (IF1). Observations in the library and literacy corners during May-June 2025 showed that students who practiced tadabbur engaged more thoughtfully with both Qur'anic and supplementary texts, taking notes, discussing interpretations with peers, and relating lessons to everyday life.

Additional insights from the classroom teacher highlighted the connection between Qur'anic literacy and general reading motivation. "After Qur'an recitation, students are often assigned to read stories, historical accounts, or scientific texts that reinforce the ethical lessons from the surah. This approach makes reading more engaging and meaningful" (IF5). Students themselves confirmed this perspective, with one student stating, "I enjoy reading more when the book connects to what we learn in Qur'an class it feels like I am learning both spiritually and intellectually" (IF6).

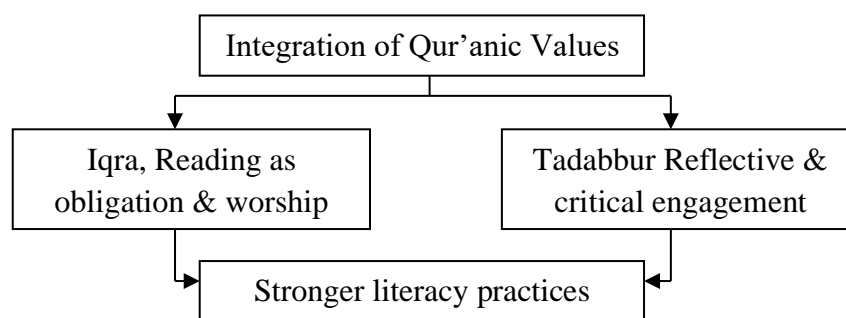


Figure 2. Integration of Qur'anic Values in Literacy Practices

Taken together, interviews, observations, and documentation illustrate that integrating Qur'anic values into literacy practices enhances both motivation and critical engagement. This approach provides a promising pathway for cultivating a holistic reading culture, where students not only fulfill religious obligations but also develop intellectual curiosity and analytical skills. Embedding spiritual principles within literacy sessions bridges the gap between faith based motivation and broader educational objectives, promoting a more meaningful and sustained engagement with reading.

Toward an Integrative Literacy Framework

An integrative literacy framework is emerging at MTs Miftahul Ulum through the convergence of general literacy programs and Qur’anic-based practices. Interviews, classroom observations, and documentation indicate that this integration helps students connect religious knowledge with broader intellectual development. The classroom teacher explained, “after Qur’an recitation, students are assigned to read supplementary books that reinforce the moral lessons from the surah” (IF5). Observations in classrooms and the library during May-June 2025 confirmed that students engaged more actively with general reading materials when these were linked to Qur’anic themes.

This approach encourages students to see literacy as meaningful rather than a routine task. By connecting spiritual content with general knowledge, students are motivated to explore supplementary texts, reflect on moral values, and deepen comprehension. The literacy coordinator added, “we design activities that integrate Qur’anic lessons with literature or historical readings, so students can relate ethical and spiritual values to everyday knowledge” (IF3). Documentation of lesson plans and reading modules demonstrated structured activities that bridged Qur’anic recitation with readings in literature, history, and science, supporting both cognitive and moral development.

The vice principal emphasized the importance of aligning literacy programs with Qur’anic teachings: “when literacy programs are designed in harmony with Qur’anic teachings, students find them more meaningful and relevant” (IF2). Additionally, the Qur’an teacher remarked, “students often ask questions about how the moral lessons in the Qur’an can be applied to the stories or historical texts they read, which shows growing critical thinking and engagement” (IF4). Observations during literacy sessions showed that students demonstrated higher enthusiasm and persistence when activities were perceived as connected to their spiritual and moral learning.

Students themselves confirmed these findings. One student shared, “I enjoy reading more when the books relate to what we learn in Qur’an class because it feels like I can apply the lessons to real life” (IF6). Another added, “sometimes I try to connect the stories in literature or history with the morals we learn in Qur’an recitation; it makes reading more interesting” (IF3). Taken together, interviews, observations, and documentation suggest that aligning general literacy programs with Qur’anic-based practices strengthens engagement, enhances comprehension, and fosters a holistic and meaningful reading culture at MTs Miftahul Ulum.

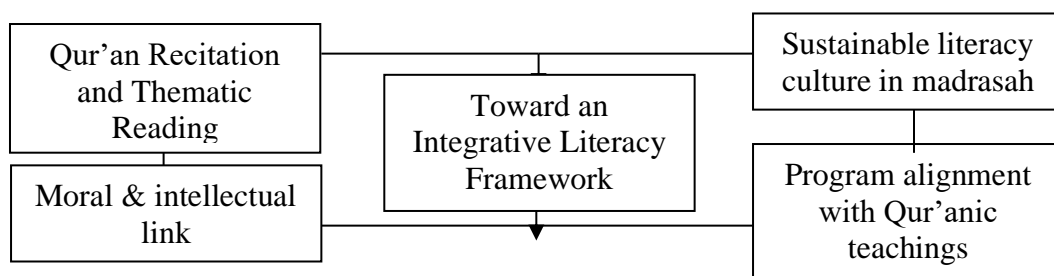


Figure 3. Toward an Integrative Literacy Framework

Taken together, interviews, observations, and documentation suggest that an integrative literacy framework enhances both religious and general literacy. By bridging Qur’anic-based practices with broader reading programs, students are able to develop intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and moral reflection simultaneously. This approach provides a model for cultivating a more meaningful and sustainable reading culture in faith-based educational settings.

DISCUSSION

Challenges in Cultivating Reading Culture

The findings reveal a duality in students' reading practices at MTs Miftahul Ulum, engagement with the Qur'an and other religious texts is high, whereas interest in general books, such as literature, science, and history, remains low. One Qur'an teacher explained, "Students are enthusiastic about reading the Qur'an and other religious texts, but when it comes to literature or scientific readings, they often show minimal engagement or avoid reading altogether" (IF4). Classroom and library observations during May-June 2025 confirmed this pattern, and documentation showed that literacy programs predominantly focused on religious texts.

This phenomenon aligns with the ideological model of literacy (Riviati & Indra, 2024), which emphasizes that literacy is socially and culturally situated. In the madrasah context, religious literacy is prioritized and reinforced through institutional practices, while general literacy remains peripheral. It also resonates with the critical literacy framework (Dera, 2025), which argues that literacy should broaden learners' understanding and enable critical engagement. However, these theories provide limited guidance on effectively integrating general literacy in highly faith-based educational contexts.

Comparison with previous studies:

(Basir, 2024) highlighted the importance of religious literacy for developing student character, but the study paid less attention to general literacy and its connection to Qur'an-based learning. (Alsyabani, 2025) discussed the integration of digital literacy in Islamic schools but did not emphasize moral and spiritual reflection in depth. This study fills the gap by providing empirical evidence on the imbalance between religious and general literacy while offering a Qur'an-based integrative literacy framework that links religious reading, general reading, and reflective practices.

The influence of digital media adds further complexity. The vice principal explained, "Students spend much of their leisure time on TikTok, Instagram, and other social media, which reduces both their motivation and available time for book reading" (IF2). Observations during recess confirmed that students often prioritize smartphones over reading corners, and several students admitted, "Scrolling social media is easier and more fun than reading books" (IF6). These findings align with (Liu et al., 2023) and (Yilmaz, 2025), who emphasize the need to integrate, rather than dismiss, digital engagement in literacy strategies. **Novelty.** Highlights the potential of combining digital tools with literacy programs to sustain reading engagement. **Implication.** Schools should develop hybrid literacy strategies. **Contribution.** Provides practical insights for contemporary education in faith-based schools.

Implementing structured literacy programs also presents challenges. The literacy coordinator explained, "Although structured reading activities are designed, students often treat them as routine tasks rather than meaningful learning" (IF3), and a subject teacher added, "It is difficult to integrate literacy into lessons when students are not motivated to read beyond religious texts" (IF5). Observations on May 20-22, 2025 indicated a drop in engagement when reading materials were unrelated to Qur'anic content. **Novelty.** Emphasizes the need to combine cognitive, ethical, and motivational dimensions in literacy design. **Implication.** Program managers should incorporate value-based and reflective elements. **Contribution:** Provides evidence-based recommendations for optimizing structured literacy programs in religious schools.

Integrative literacy approaches linking Qur'anic readings with general texts show promise. A classroom teacher stated, "After Qur'an recitation, students are encouraged to read supplementary books that reinforce moral lessons, bridging spiritual knowledge with broader intellectual concepts" (IF5). Observations revealed that students were more focused and reflective when general reading materials connected to Qur'anic themes. The vice principal emphasized, "Alignment between literacy programs and Qur'anic teachings makes students perceive reading as meaningful and relevant" (IF2), and the Qur'an teacher added, "Students often ask how moral lessons in the Qur'an apply to stories

or historical texts, indicating deeper critical thinking” (IF4). Novelty. Provides a concrete framework for bridging religious and general literacy. Implication: Schools can implement integrative literacy modules to strengthen both cognitive and moral development. Contribution: Empirical support for combining spiritual values with academic learning in literacy programs.

Finally, reflective practices, such as tadabbur, reinforce comprehension and critical engagement. The literacy coordinator explained, “Students are guided not only to read but also to reflect on the meaning of the texts they encounter” (IF3). Observations in libraries and reading corners showed students taking notes, discussing ideas with peers, and connecting lessons to daily life. Students commented, “I enjoy reading more when the book connects to what we learn in Qur’an class” (IF6) and “It’s more interesting when I can apply moral lessons to stories or historical texts” (IF4). This aligns with critical literacy theory, which posits that meaningful reading involves reflection, interpretation, and application beyond the classroom. Novelty. Introduces a holistic model linking cognitive, moral, and spiritual development through reflective literacy. Implication. Schools should incorporate reflective exercises to deepen understanding and sustain engagement. Contribution. Provides a replicable framework for fostering a balanced, meaningful, and sustainable reading culture in faith-based educational contexts.

Integration of Qur’anic Values in Literacy Practices

The second major finding of this study highlights the significant role of Qur’anic values, particularly Iqra’ (the divine command to read) and tadabbur (reflective engagement), in motivating students and deepening their reading practices. The Qur’an teacher explained, “When students are reminded of Iqra’, reading becomes both an act of worship and a cognitive activity, which increases their focus and willingness to engage with texts” (IF4). Classroom observations during May-June 2025 confirmed that students showed higher concentration and discipline during Qur’an-focused literacy sessions than in general reading sessions.

Documentation of literacy modules revealed structured exercises in which students first recited Qur’anic passages and then engaged in reflective discussion or writing activities based on the meaning of the texts. This supports the arguments of (Sofa, 2022; Altherr Flores, 2021), who emphasize that literacy is not merely decoding words but constructing meaning within cultural and identity frameworks. This study demonstrates the dual role of reading as both a spiritual and intellectual activity in faith-based schools, enhancing engagement and learning outcomes.

Beyond motivation, Qur’anic values also cultivate critical thinking skills. Tadabbur encourages students to become reflective readers rather than passive ones, prompting them to analyze, connect, and internalize meaning. The literacy coordinator emphasized, “Students who practice tadabbur write reflections and discuss moral lessons in their groups, which helps them connect the Qur’an to daily life and other reading materials” (IF3). Observations in literacy corners confirmed that students actively discussed ethical and philosophical implications of Qur’anic texts and related them to stories, history, or scientific phenomena. This approach resonates with (Aulia et al., 2025), notion of ‘reading the word and the world’, positioning literacy as a transformative practice that develops intellectual acuity and moral responsibility. Embedding tadabbur encourages a shift from superficial reading to deeper comprehension, which is critical for developing advanced literacy skills (Qasserras, 2023). Reflective reading practices in this context strengthen both ethical reasoning and cognitive development, preparing students for more complex intellectual challenges.

The integration of Qur’anic values also transforms literacy from a routine academic exercise into a reflective, value-driven practice. The classroom teacher noted, “Students are more willing to read supplementary materials when these are linked to moral lessons from the Qur’an. They feel the reading is meaningful and relevant to their daily lives” (IF5). Observations during library sessions in May-June 2025 showed that students were more engaged with general reading materials, including

literature and history, when teachers connected these readings with Qur'anic themes. Documentation confirmed the use of integrated modules aligning moral, spiritual, and intellectual content, illustrating how students can bridge religious knowledge with broader academic understanding. (Hughes, 2022) supports this approach, arguing that framing learning within students' belief systems strengthens both motivation and comprehension. Linking spiritual values with general literacy promotes student engagement and enhances the relevance of reading activities.

Finally, integrating Qur'anic values into literacy practices fosters holistic development, combining cognitive, moral, and spiritual growth. Students expressed, "When we reflect on Qur'anic verses and then read related stories, we understand better and feel more connected to the text" (IF6). The vice principal added, "Literacy activities are more meaningful when they align with our students' spiritual framework. It strengthens both comprehension and ethical reasoning" (IF2). These findings demonstrate that embedding spiritual values into literacy activities can sustain engagement, deepen understanding, and support moral development simultaneously. Previous Islamic education studies (Isaac, 2025; Bunthawee, 2025; Arif, 2018) similarly indicate that Qur'anic literacy approaches outperform secular methods in motivating students in faith-based contexts. Framing reading as both an act of worship and a cognitive exercise nurtures moral and academic excellence, creating a holistic educational environment aligned with cultural, religious, and intellectual goals.

In conclusion, integrating Qur'anic values such as *Iqra'* and *tadabbur* significantly enhances the quality, motivation, and depth of students' literacy practices. By embedding reflective, value-driven reading into daily literacy activities, teachers enable students to develop both intellectually and ethically, bridging religious understanding with broader academic knowledge. This approach demonstrates a literacy model that is spiritual, reflective, and cognitively enriching, providing new insights for Islamic literacy theory and practice that distinguish Qur'an-based literacy from secular literacy models

Toward an Integrative Literacy Framework

The third major finding of this study demonstrates the emergence of an integrative literacy framework, in which Qur'anic recitation is systematically combined with thematic reading of supplementary texts. The classroom teacher explained, "After Qur'an recitation, students are asked to read related stories, historical accounts, or scientific texts that connect with moral lessons, helping them see reading as meaningful and reflective" (IF5). Similarly, one student shared, "When I read a story that relates to a verse we studied in Qur'an class, I understand it better and feel motivated to finish the book" (IF6). Observations in classrooms and library sessions during May-June 2025 confirmed that students were more attentive and engaged when general reading materials were linked to Qur'anic themes. Documentation of lesson plans and reading modules showed structured activities in which students recited Qur'anic passages, engaged in guided reflection, and then explored supplementary texts aligned with the spiritual message.

This hybrid model aligns with (Eun's, 2023) sociocultural learning theory, which posits that cultural tools mediate students' cognitive development. In this context, Qur'anic recitation serves as a cultural anchor, while supplementary texts expand students' intellectual engagement (Shin & Bolkan, 2021). Aligning literacy practices with students' religious identity increases relevance and sustains participation (Ma & Wang, 2022).

Moreover, the integrative literacy framework addresses critiques of standardized literacy models that often neglect local identities. The vice principal noted, "When literacy programs reflect students' spiritual and cultural realities, they are more motivated to read and reflect, and less likely to treat reading as a routine task" (IF2). Another teacher added, "Connecting general texts to Qur'anic lessons helps students see the relevance of school reading to their lives, so they participate actively instead of just going through the motions" (IF5). Observations revealed that students actively discussed

ethical and philosophical lessons derived from Qur'anic texts and applied these to supplementary readings, including historical narratives, fables, and scientific phenomena. Documentation confirmed that integrated modules combined reflection, moral discussion, and factual knowledge.

This approach reflects (Muhammad et al., 2021) critique that literacy programs often fail to account for local and cultural identities. By embedding Qur'anic literacy into general reading, madrasah education acknowledges students' spiritual realities while expanding their cognitive horizons (Ahmed & Chowdhury, 2025). The framework demonstrates that Qur'anic literacy can serve as a foundation for broader intellectual engagement, making reading both contextually grounded and sustainable in Islamic educational settings (Kamridah et al., 2025, Dora & Arif., 2024). This positions the study as contributing new insights to Islamic literacy theory and practice, distinguishing Qur'an-based literacy integration from secular models that often prioritize cognitive skills alone.

The integrative framework also fosters deeper critical thinking and reflective skills. The literacy coordinator explained, "Students who practice tadabbur not only read but also write reflections and engage in discussions about moral lessons. They relate what they read to their daily experiences and other texts" (IF3). Observations during library sessions confirmed that students engaged in note-taking, peer discussion, and comparative analysis of Qur'anic and supplementary texts. For example, a group of students compared ethical lessons from Qur'anic stories with historical examples from their history book, discussing cause-effect relationships and moral implications. A student remarked, "When I reflect on Qur'an lessons and then read a story from history class, I see the connection between values and real events, which makes learning more interesting" (IF4). This approach resonates with (Aulia et al., 2025) concept of "reading the word and the world," positioning literacy as a transformative process that cultivates both intellectual sharpness and moral responsibility. Embedding tadabbur shifts students from superficial reading to deeper comprehension, enabling advanced literacy skills (Qasserras, 2023).

The integrative framework also enhances student engagement by connecting religious, moral, and academic learning. The classroom teacher noted, "Students are more willing to read supplementary materials when these are linked to moral lessons from the Qur'an. They feel the reading is meaningful and relevant to their daily lives" (IF5). Observations during literacy corners confirmed that students were more attentive and persistent in reading when activities were value-driven. Students often initiated group discussions on moral dilemmas presented in stories or related them to Qur'anic guidance. Documentation further revealed that lesson modules were intentionally designed to connect Qur'anic recitation with literature, history, and science, offering multiple points of cognitive and moral reflection. (Hughes, 2022) emphasizes that literacy framed within students' belief systems strengthens both motivation and comprehension, which is clearly reflected in the integrative approach observed in this study.

Finally, the integrative literacy framework demonstrates that holistic student development is achievable when Qur'anic values are intentionally embedded into reading practices. Students reported, "Reading becomes more meaningful when I can connect Qur'anic lessons with stories and scientific facts. I think more deeply and understand better" (IF6). The vice principal emphasized, "When reading activities align with students' spiritual framework, comprehension and ethical reasoning improve simultaneously" (IF2). Teachers observed that students demonstrated improved reflective skills, moral reasoning, and the ability to connect knowledge across domains. Previous Islamic education studies (Isaac, 2025; Bunthawee, 2025) similarly indicate that Qur'anic literacy approaches outperform secular methods in motivating students in faith-based settings. The integrative framework provides a practical model for literacy education that is simultaneously spiritually, cognitively, and ethically enriching, bridging the gap between religious knowledge and broader intellectual development.

In conclusion, this study presents a replicable integrative literacy framework that combines Qur'anic recitation, reflective practices such as tadabbur, and thematic supplementary reading. By connecting spiritual, moral, and academic dimensions, this framework not only enhances student motivation and comprehension but also supports holistic development. The model demonstrates how madrasah education can cultivate a sustainable reading culture that produces students who are intellectually capable, morally responsible, and spiritually grounded, providing a pathway for faith-based schools to contribute to broader literacy education discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that strengthening the reading culture in madrasahs requires an integrative literacy approach that combines Qur'anic values with general literacy practices. Three key insights emerged: first, there is an imbalance in reading culture, as students show high engagement with religious texts but low interest in general reading materials, a situation further compounded by digital distractions. Second, Qur'anic values such as Iqra' and tadabbur serve as powerful motivational and reflective tools, transforming reading into both an intellectual and spiritual practice. Third, the emergence of an integrative literacy framework bridging Qur'an-based and general literacy provides a sustainable model supporting students' cognitive, moral, and spiritual development. This study contributes theoretically by embedding Islamic perspectives within existing literacy frameworks, and practically by offering madrasah educators strategies to align literacy programs with students' cultural and spiritual identities. Despite limitations in scope and duration, the study highlights the potential of madrasahs to innovate in literacy development. Future research should explore broader contexts and adopt longitudinal approaches to evaluate the long-term impact of Qur'an-based literacy strategies in fostering a sustainable reading culture.

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