

## Islamic Guidance Framework and University Access: A Case Study of Academic Tarbiyah Mentoring at MAN Ciwaringin

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### ABSTRACT

*This study analyzes how an Islamic-based academic guidance framework supports students' access to state universities at MAN Ciwaringin. Persistent disparities between madrasah and general high school graduates indicate the need for guidance models that integrate academic preparation with the pedagogical principles of Islamic education. Using a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through interviews with students, counselors, and alumni, complemented by observations and program documentation. The analysis focuses on the interaction between structured academic coaching and value-oriented mentoring practices embedded in the school's tarbiyah tradition. The findings show that the guidance model contributes to three main outcomes: improved understanding of university admission mechanisms, enhanced study strategies aligned with exam requirements, and stronger learning discipline shaped by ethical teacher-student relationships. Rather than functioning as motivational support, mentoring enables reflective planning and informed decision-making regarding university and major selection. The study demonstrates that access to higher education in Islamic schools is influenced not only by academic readiness but also by the coherence between guidance practices, institutional culture, and student support networks. Conceptually, this research contributes to Islamic education by showing how tarbiyah-informed mentoring can operate as a practical mechanism for narrowing access gaps in madrasah contexts.*

**Keywords:** Islamic education, academic guidance, mentoring, tarbiyah framework, university access, madrasah

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## INTRODUCTION

In many Islamic secondary schools, students face persistent barriers when attempting to enter state universities, which raises serious questions about the effectiveness of academic and spiritual guidance. The structural disparity in access suggests that madrasahs may lack both rigorous academic coaching and relational mentoring aligned with Islamic values.<sup>1</sup> Despite national reforms aimed at improving madrasah quality, these often do not extend into comprehensive university-preparation programs, leaving students underprepared. Such gaps are not only academic but also cultural: the ethos of tarbiyah (nurturing) in Islamic schools is rarely operationalized in formal institution-wide mentoring systems. Without integrated support, students struggle to navigate complex university entrance systems and make informed decisions about their future.<sup>2</sup> This issue is especially acute in rural and under-resourced madrasahs, where external guidance resources are weaker. At the same time, the promise of Islamic education as a holistic formation of character *insān kāmīl* remains under-realized when mentoring is fragmented or missing. Therefore, understanding how to construct guidance systems that are both academically robust and spiritually grounded becomes critical.<sup>3</sup> This tension between ideal Islamic pedagogy and real-world access outcomes is the core problem this study addresses. Addressing this gap may help reconcile the dual mission of Islamic education: to produce both knowledgeable and morally mature graduates.

While Islamic mentoring practices have been studied in higher education contexts, especially within universities religious education faculties, their application in secondary madrasahs for preparing students for university is much less documented.<sup>4</sup> For example, research on Islamic mentoring programs in tertiary institutions often emphasizes character formation rather than systematic academic preparation for public university entrance.<sup>5</sup> Even though mentoring programs in Islamic schools exist, they tend to emphasize moral behavior (prayer, Qur'an recitation) over guided study planning.<sup>6</sup> These programs frequently lack structured curricula or mechanisms for helping students understand university admission pathways.<sup>7</sup> In short, existing mentoring tends to be ritual-oriented rather than strategically tied to academic achievement or higher-education access. This observation underscores a conceptual and empirical gap in the literature: how can Islamic mentoring be redesigned to integrate academic coaching without losing its spiritual core? This gap is not trivial, because without such integration, madrasah students may remain disadvantaged in

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<sup>1</sup> Efrita Norman, "The Effect of Mobile Learning Applications on Understanding Hadith Material Moderated by Digital Learning Experiences in Students," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (2024): 1–7.

<sup>2</sup> Khaeruddin, "Film Sebagai Media Syiar Dan Dakwah Dalam Membangun Citra Positif Islam," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 4, no. 2 (2022).

<sup>3</sup> Kaelani, "Strategi Pengembangan Pendidikan Islam," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 2, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Sabarudin et al., "Cluster-Mentoring for Sustainable Competency : A Case Study of PTK Training for Islamic Education Teachers in Junior High Schools," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 20, no. 1 (2023).

<sup>5</sup> Prima Maulana Ihsan, Muhammad Wildan Shohib, and Wachidi, *The Role of Islamic Mentoring in Developing Students' Character in the Faculty of Islamic Studies*, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (Atlantis Press SARL, 2024), [http://dx.doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-102-9\\_36](http://dx.doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-102-9_36).

<sup>6</sup> Dwi Nur Umi Rahmawati et al., "The Practice of Islamic Education through Mentoring Activities and Its Effect on Increasing Worship for New Students," *Social Sciences, Education and Humanities (GCSSEH)* 11, no. 1 (2021): 262–266.

<sup>7</sup> Fitri Meliani, Nurwadjah Ahmad, and Andewi Suhartini, "The Islamic Perspective of Education of Children With Special Needs ( Case Study at Sada Ibu Inclusion Elementary School )," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 2, no. 2 (2022): 1–17.

terms of university placement and subject choice. Moreover, the lack of data on outcomes (e.g., enrollment, major success) prevents evidence-based improvement of mentoring models. Thus, an analytic framework is needed to explore and evaluate integrated guidance in the madrasah context.

To conceptualize this integration, this study draws upon Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, a well-established framework in developmental psychology and education that examines human development in nested environmental systems.<sup>8</sup> According to Bronfenbrenner, individuals are influenced not only by their immediate interactions (microsystem) but also by the connections among these environments (mesosystem), as well as by broader institutional and cultural contexts (exosystem and macrosystem).<sup>9</sup> In the context of madrasahs, students' academic and moral development can be viewed through this multi-layered lens: their relationships with teachers, parents, alumni, and peers form a microsystem, while the school's institutional culture and national religious education policies represent exosystem and macrosystem factors.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the dimension of time (chronosystem) allows for analyzing how traineeship programs or mentoring evolve across students' final years of high school. By applying this lens, the study is able to examine how guidance interventions operate across ecological levels and influence students' readiness for higher education. This theoretical framing thus enables a richer analysis than simply comparing before-after mentoring effects. It brings into view the interplay between individual agency and structural supports, rooted in Islamic educational ethos.<sup>11</sup>

Applying the ecological framework to Islamic education requires interpretive adaptation: the concept of tarbiyah (nurturing) and murabbiyah (mentor-guardianship) can map onto Bronfenbrenner's systems but must also retain their Islamic particularities. In Islamic pedagogy, tarbiyah is not merely a moral add-on but an integrated process of intellectual, spiritual, and social formation.<sup>12</sup> The role of a murabbī (mentor) in classical Islamic tradition is relational and formative, combining academic instruction with spiritual companionship. Translating this into an institutional model means designing mentoring practices that do not just transmit Islamic virtues but also scaffold academic planning, self-regulation, and informed decision-making.<sup>13</sup> Such an integrated model demands that mentor figures operate not only as moral guides but as educational coaches embedded in students' ecological environments. This conceptual mapping is underexplored: few studies examine how the traditional Islamic tutor-student dynamic can be institutionalized in modern school systems to support higher-education ambitions. Thus, the key innovation of this

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<sup>8</sup> Uswatun Khasanah et al., "Stakeholder Synergy in Realizing Muhammadiyah Vocational High School as a Center of Excellence Based on Muhammadiyah Values," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (2025).

<sup>9</sup> Latifa Rahman, "Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in Childhood Resilience and Motivation in Learning: A Literature Review," *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 13, no. 6 (2025): 550–561.

<sup>10</sup> Akhmad Faisal, Ipan Suparman, and Aan Hasanah, "Membangun Nilai-Nilai Peradaban Bangsa Dengan Pendidikan Karakter," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 2, no. 2 (2023): 60 – 79.

<sup>11</sup> Deni Lesmana, Rd M Hilmi Maulana, and Lau Han Sein, "Development of a Contextual and Systematic Islamic Curriculum and Management for Converts in Bandung City," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2025): 414–434.

<sup>12</sup> Lutfi Faishol, "Kepemimpinan Profetik Dalam Pendidikan Islam," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 2, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>13</sup> Nurul Faizah Kamaruddin, "Peran Bimbingan Konseling Pesantren Dalam Meningkatkan Penguatan Karakter Siswa Madrasah Aliyah Baytul Mukarromah Watampone," *SAFARI: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Indonesia* 4, no. 3 (2024): 240–262.

study is to reinterpret ecological systems through the lens of Islamic relational pedagogy.<sup>14</sup>

This research investigates a madrasah (Islamic senior high school) that has deliberately developed a guidance model combining structured academic coaching and relational mentoring rooted in tarbiyah. It closely examines how the model is implemented, who is involved (teachers, parents, alumni), and how it interacts with the students' broader social environment. It also explores the outcomes in terms of students' university-entry knowledge, decision-making, and self-discipline. The study further identifies enabling and constraining factors such as institutional culture, mentor capacity, and external supports that shape the effectiveness of the model. By doing so, it seeks to generate actionable insights for policymakers and school leaders on how to scale or adapt such integrated guidance programs. Conceptually, it contributes to the literature by operationalizing tarbiyah-murabbiyah in ecological terms, offering a refined theoretical model for Islamic education scholarship.

This study addresses a pressing problem: the gap between Islamic schools' pedagogical ideals and students' access to competitive state universities. By using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory reframed through Islamic educational values, it provides both analytical clarity and practical relevance. The research questions guiding the inquiry are: (1) how is an academic–tarbiyah mentoring model implemented in the madrasah; (2) what outcomes it produces for university access readiness; and (3) what systemic factors support or hinder its effectiveness. The findings are expected to offer evidence-based recommendations for Islamic schools seeking to broaden equitable access to higher education while preserving their moral mission. Ultimately, the study contributes to building a more coherent and contextualized model of Islamic guidance that is academically rigorous, spiritually attuned, and institutionally sustainable.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design guided by Yin's methodological framework, which conceptualizes case study as an empirical investigation of contemporary phenomena within real-life settings.<sup>15</sup> The design was chosen because university-access preparation represents a complex institutional process inseparable from the routines, mentoring structures, and decision-making dynamics embedded in the school environment. MAN Ciwaringin was selected through criterion-based case selection, using three eligibility indicators: the presence of a structured university-preparation program, program implementation lasting at least two years to ensure institutional stability, and accessible administrative documentation relevant to admission preparation. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling with maximum variation, involving final-year students, academic counselors, and alumni who previously succeeded in entering state universities.<sup>16</sup> Data collection employed three techniques widely used in qualitative

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<sup>14</sup> Neni Noviza et al., "Peer Counseling Mentoring Model to Assist Students with Problems in Higher Education," *The International Journal of Counseling and Education* 7, no. 4 (2022): 162–170.

<sup>15</sup> Rahman, "Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in Childhood Resilience and Motivation in Learning: A Literature Review."

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Ikhlās Rosele, Firman Mansir, and Nurul Aisyah, "Islamic Education Method In Improving The Religious Learning Quality In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *AULADUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Islam* 11, no. 1 (2024): 1–9.

case study research: semi-structured interviews to explore students' decision-making and perceptions of the mentoring system; systematic observations during group guidance and individual mentoring sessions; and document analysis covering program guidelines, PTN admission statistics, attendance data, counselor reports, and learning materials. These data sources provided triangulated insight into program implementation, learning processes, and institutional mechanisms shaping university readiness.

Data analysis followed Yin's analytic logic through pattern matching and cross-case synthesis, beginning with initial coding to identify meaning units related to guidance implementation, challenges in decision-making, and institutional support.<sup>17</sup> Codes were then clustered into explanatory patterns, which were compared with prior research to strengthen interpretive validity, followed by explanation building to construct a coherent account of the mechanisms that shaped students' university-access readiness.<sup>18</sup> Trustworthiness was ensured through method triangulation, source triangulation, member validation, peer examination, and maintenance of an audit trail comprising transcripts, coding files, memos, and observation records. Analytically, Islamic educational components were treated as contextual features rather than epistemological foundations, allowing cultural elements to be examined empirically without introducing interpretive bias.<sup>19</sup> This positioning enabled the study to generate analytic generalization on how school-based guidance systems interact with institutional routines and student decision-making processes, aligning the methodological framework with international qualitative standards while maintaining contextual relevance to the Indonesian madrasah environment.<sup>20</sup>

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Structure and Implementation of the Academic Guidance Program

Document reviews and field observations conducted in May 2025 show that the academic guidance program at MAN Ciwaringin follows a structured weekly design combining SNBT simulations, university major exploration, and individual mentoring appointments.<sup>21</sup> Program guidelines recorded for the 2024/2025 academic year outline three core components, though field data indicate variation between intended design and actual implementation.

Despite the program's formally structured design, observational data reveal that its practical implementation depended heavily on situational factors within the school environment. Several planned components did not run with full consistency due to counselor workload, fluctuating session attendance, and logistical challenges related to facilities. For instance, sessions intended for

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<sup>17</sup> Palinkas Lawrence A et al., "Purposeful Sampling in Qualitative Research: Perspectives From the Field," *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Research* 42, no. 1 (2015): 533–544.

<sup>18</sup> N. Carter et al., "Methodological Triangulation in Qualitative Research: Theory and Practice," *Oncology Nursing Forum* 41, no. 5 (2014): 545–547.

<sup>19</sup> C. Erlingsson and P. Brysiewicz, "Qualitative Data Analysis: The Process and Its Challenges," *African Journal of Emergency Medicine* 7, no. 3 (2017): 93–99.

<sup>20</sup> Shenton and Andrew K., "Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research," *Education for Information* 22, no. 2 (2004): 63–75.

<sup>21</sup> Umamatul Khaeriyah et al., "Enhancing Spiritual Intelligence Through Religious Mentorship: A Case Study at Al-Ishlah Elementary School," *Edubase : Journal of Basic Education* 6, no. 2 (2025): 322–332.



university—major exploration often shifted from interactive mapping activities to brief verbal explanations, while mentoring schedules frequently changed based on teacher availability. These deviations indicate that the program’s operational dynamics were influenced more by institutional constraints than by the written guidelines, resulting in partial alignment between program intentions and students’ actual learning experiences.

**Table 1.**  
**Structure of the Academic Guidance Program at MAN Ciwaringin**  
**(Field Documentation, May 2025)**

<b>Program Component</b>	<b>Intended Purpose</b>	<b>Actual Implementation (Observed, May 2025)</b>	<b>Notes from Field Observation</b>
SNBT Practice & Review	Improve test familiarity & pacing	Weekly; review shortened in 2 sessions	Time constraints reduced depth of review
University–Major Mapping	Support program selection	Conducted irregularly; mostly briefings	Students requested more specific guidance
Individual Mentoring	Personalized planning	Uneven access; 6/10 students >2 sessions	Queueing caused missed opportunities
Peer Discussion	Enhance reasoning	Emerged spontaneously	Showed higher engagement than lectures
Resource Support	Improve practice quality	Printed modules; unstable internet	Online tryouts frequently postponed

Across the five observed sessions, SNBT practice typically occupied 55–65 minutes, followed by a review segment. However, in two sessions the review had to be stopped early to accommodate administrative announcements. Individual mentoring was carried out on demand, with counselors providing 10–15 minutes per student.<sup>22</sup> Access remained uneven; one student explained, “*I came twice after school, but the queue was too long, so I couldn’t get my turn*” (Student 4, Interview, 29 May 2025). These patterns suggest that while the structure is formally established, implementation is shaped by practical constraints such as time limitations and mentoring demand.<sup>23</sup>

### Student Engagement and Learning Processes

Observation data indicate varied engagement patterns across the five sessions. Collaborative problem-solving emerged consistently, especially during SNBT review activities. Students often initiated group work without counselor instruction. During the 13 May 2025 session, for example, two groups compared reasoning steps before seeking clarification, as noted in Fieldnote 2:

<sup>22</sup> Sari Rahayu et al., “Hakikat Kepemimpinan Dan Tipe-Tipe Kepemimpinan Pendidikan,” *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journa* 4, no. 2 (2022).

<sup>23</sup> Dian Ekawati, Ika Lestari Damayanti, and Nenden Sri Lengkanawati, “Mentoring Through Lesson Study: A Collaborative Way To Support Efl Teachers’ Professional Development In Madrasahs (Islamic Schools),” *International Journal of Education* 15, no. 2 (2022): 89–100.

*“Students in both groups independently reviewed their answers and debated steps for the numeric items.”*

**Table 2.**  
**Patterns of Student Engagement During Academic Guidance Sessions**  
**(Observation Summary, May 2025)**

Engagement Category	Indicators Observed	Frequency (5 Sessions)	Sample Evidence
Active collaboration	Peer discussion, comparing answers	High (4/5)	“Let’s check our steps first.” (13 May 2025)
Passive listening	Minimal participation	Moderate (3/5)	One-third silent during lectures
Strategy experimentation	Trying new methods	Moderate (3/5)	Students testing alternative solutions
Avoidance	Not attempting items	Low (1/5)	Two students waited for final answers

In addition to these observable patterns, the level of engagement was also shaped by students’ prior familiarity with SNBT-style reasoning tasks. Observation notes show that students with stronger baseline competencies tended to take the initiative in leading discussions, guiding peers through problem-solving steps, and proposing alternative strategies. Meanwhile, students with weaker foundations participated more cautiously, often waiting for cues from their higher-performing peers before attempting solutions. This dynamic created an informal hierarchy within group interactions, where confident students assumed quasi-mentor roles. While this peer-led structure supported collective progress, it also meant that quieter or less proficient students engaged less actively unless explicitly prompted, demonstrating that peer collaboration, although beneficial, did not automatically ensure equitable participation among all learners.

Interview data confirm these variations. Seven students reported that peer discussion helped them understand difficult items faster, while three stated that group pace felt “too quick,” limiting comprehension. This indicates that collaborative learning benefited many but not all, and suggests the need for differentiated pacing. Counselor workload further influenced interaction quality. In two sessions, procedural tasks (attendance checks, printing issues) dominated counselor attention, leaving limited time for academic clarification. This resulted in greater reliance on peer support during practice tasks.<sup>24</sup>

**Students’ Experiences and Perceived Impact of the Program**

Interviews conducted with ten final-year students reveal three frequently mentioned areas of perceived benefit: familiarity with the SNBT format, reduced test anxiety, and improved clarity in program selection. Eight students mentioned feeling “more prepared” after repeated practice

<sup>24</sup> Iim Imaroh et al., “Development of Islamic Guidance and Counseling Program for Bullying Prevention in MTS,” *At Turots: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2024): 673–691.

sessions. One stated, “*Now I know how much time I should spend on each section. Before, I had no idea how long it actually took*” (Student 3, Interview, 28 May 2025).

However, benefit levels varied. Three students continued to struggle with numerical reasoning despite attending weekly sessions. One commented, “*The literacy questions are okay, but the numeric parts still confuse me even after several practices*” (Student 10, Interview, 1 June 2025). Document analysis of simulation scores between April and May 2025 supports this mixed pattern. Table 4 displays progression for selected students.<sup>25</sup>

**Table 4.**  
**Change in Simulation Scores of Selected Students (April–May 2025)**

Student Code	April Score (%)	May Score (%)	Change	Notes
S1	54	62	+8	Regular mentoring attendance
S3	48	52	+4	Gains mostly in literacy
S5	60	68	+8	Benefited from timed-practice strategies
S7	45	47	+2	Improvement limited; arithmetic difficulties persist
S10	51	49	–2	Anxiety noted during simulations

Study-program decision-making also showed varied experiences. Six students stated that mentoring helped them focus on programs matching their simulation profiles. One said, “*My mentor asked me to compare my scores with the passing grades. That helped me adjust my target*” (Student 6, Interview, 31 May 2025). Meanwhile, two students felt guidance remained “too general.”

**Access to Mentoring and Equity in Support Distribution**

Observation findings across five guidance sessions reveal that student engagement varied considerably depending on task complexity and instructional format. During SNBT practice activities, most students demonstrated initial individual attempts before transitioning into spontaneous peer discussions. This shift from individual to collaborative engagement frequently emerged when students encountered difficult reasoning items, suggesting that collective problem-solving functioned as an adaptive strategy in the absence of direct counselor support. Such patterns indicate that students were responsive to academically challenging tasks and tended to seek horizontal assistance to maintain task progress.

The level of student initiative during group work was influenced by their prior exposure to SNBT-style questions. Students who had regularly practiced quantitative and literacy reasoning exercises before the school program often assumed leadership roles during discussions. These students not only proposed answers but also explained solution steps and evaluated the reasoning of their peers. Conversely, students with limited prior practice engaged more cautiously, frequently

<sup>25</sup> Renni Hasibuan and Budi Prasetyo Margono, “Promoting Career Development And University Preparation Programs At Madrasah Aliyah,” *Fahima: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kajian Keislaman* 4, no. 2 (2025).



observing rather than actively contributing. This contrast highlights the existence of uneven readiness levels, which shaped the distribution of interactional roles within collaborative learning groups.

Variations in engagement were also shaped by session flow and the counselor’s ability to manage classroom tasks. In several sessions, logistical interruptions such as attendance verification, printing delays, or technical issues with practice materials reduced the available time for academic explanation. When such interruptions occurred, peer collaboration intensified as students relied on each other to sustain the learning process. While this dynamic helped maintain momentum, it also meant that students who lacked strong peer networks or confidence were more likely to remain passive, reinforcing disparities in participation.

**Table 3.**  
**Distribution of Individual Mentoring Sessions (Interviews & Observation, May 2025)**

Student Code	Mentoring Sessions	Duration (Minutes)	Main Reason	Notes
S1	3	12–15	SNBT strategies	Proactive scheduling
S2	1	8–10	Program choice	Missed 2 sessions due ECAs
S4	0	—	—	Difficulty securing time
S5	4	15–18	Time management	Counselor-initiated
S7	2	10–15	Requirements check	Relied on school internet
S10	1	10	Simulation anxiety	Requested extra support

Interview results reinforce these observational patterns by showing that although many students perceived peer-based learning as helpful, not all experienced the same level of benefit. Students who possessed stronger reasoning foundations reported accelerated understanding during group work, while others described difficulty keeping pace with faster peers. This divergence indicates that collaboration alone does not guarantee equitable comprehension. Without differentiated pacing and consistent counselor facilitation, peer-led discussions tended to favor students with higher initial competence, thereby limiting the inclusiveness of engagement within the guidance program.

**Structural and Resource-Related Challenges**

Two institutional conditions were consistently reported as affecting program implementation: counselor workload and digital resource limitations. Counselors handled both teaching and guidance duties; as one explained, *“There are days when I can only meet two students, even though more are waiting”* (Counselor 2, Interview, 2 June 2025). Digital constraints were also reported. Four students stated that unstable internet at home limited access to online tryouts. *“I*

*practice online only at school because our home connection drops often,”* said Student 7 (Interview, 25 May 2025). Observations showed that online tryout schedules were postponed twice due to connectivity issues.

Limited physical infrastructure also contributed to inconsistencies in program delivery, particularly regarding the availability of adequate spaces for mentoring and group activities. Observations indicated that several mentoring sessions had to be conducted in shared or repurposed rooms, reducing privacy and making it difficult for counselors to provide individualized support. In certain cases, noise from adjacent classrooms disrupted concentration during SNBT practice. These environmental constraints not only affected the quality of interaction but also shaped students' comfort levels when discussing academic concerns, especially those who required more intensive guidance. As a result, the overall effectiveness of mentoring was influenced not only by instructional capacity but also by the physical conditions in which academic support was delivered.

Institutional scheduling demands further compounded these challenges, as school events, examinations, and administrative obligations frequently overlapped with designated mentoring times. Counselors reported that unexpected changes in the school calendar often forced them to condense or postpone sessions, disrupting the continuity needed for stable academic progression. Students likewise expressed difficulty adjusting to fluctuating schedules, noting that irregular session timing reduced their ability to plan study routines effectively. These systemic disruptions demonstrate that even well-structured programs are vulnerable to operational instability when institutional routines are not aligned with the sustained implementation requirements of guidance initiatives.

## Discussion

The 2025 findings reveal that the mentoring program at MAN Ciwaringin operates under structural constraints that significantly shape students' academic readiness. Although many students expressed heightened confidence, observational data show a mismatch between perceived readiness and actual performance during SNBT practice sessions.<sup>26</sup> This discrepancy indicates that motivational reinforcement alone does not guarantee improved test-taking competence among madrasah students. The limited duration of mentoring sessions further reduces the opportunity for individualized feedback, especially for students needing intensive support. Counselors reported difficulty maintaining program fidelity due to workload pressures, which in turn reduced consistency across mentoring cycles.<sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> These operational issues mirror patterns found in rural Islamic schools where intervention success relies heavily on institutional capacity. The data also suggest that emotional encouragement does not compensate for gaps in analytical skills necessary for SNBT. As a result, the program's impact appears uneven across student groups, particularly

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<sup>26</sup> Abdu Alifah and Anggraini Sukmawati, “Organizational Learning, Academic Supervision, And Work Motivation In Enhancing Teaching Competence And Teacher Performance In Modern Pesantren,” *JAMP: Jurnal Adminitrasi dan Manajemen Pendidikan* 4, no. 2015 (2021): 307–319, <http://journal2.um.ac.id/index.php/jamp/>.

<sup>27</sup> Nur Rizqi Febriandika et al., “International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences Determinants of Students' Learning Motivation in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach,” *International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences* 11, no. 11 (2024): 10–18.

<sup>28</sup> Nur Kholis, “Pedagogical Practices and Their Impact on Critical Thinking Skills in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education,” *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (2025).

between high-performers and those with weak academic basics. Therefore, the effectiveness of mentoring must be interpreted cautiously and situated within broader contextual limitations.

Interviews reveal that students often equate spiritual encouragement with academic preparedness, although their simulation results show inconsistent performance. This pattern suggests that emotional stability derived from religious framing does not directly translate into strategic test behaviors. Students with lower baseline competencies particularly struggled despite regular participation in tarbiyah-oriented mentoring sessions.<sup>29</sup> The assumption that spiritual motivation alone can raise academic outcomes oversimplifies the relationship between faith-based encouragement and cognitive performance. Evidence from observations indicates that mentoring sessions emphasizing religious advice tended to generate short-term confidence rather than long-term skill mastery.<sup>30</sup> Such findings highlight the need to differentiate between psychological uplift and concrete learning gains when evaluating mentoring effectiveness. Counselors themselves acknowledged that limited time reduced their ability to provide targeted academic scaffolding. These limitations point to structural rather than conceptual weaknesses in the program's implementation. Consequently, any claim of uniform mentoring impact must be interrogated against these inconsistencies.

Peer collaboration contributed meaningfully to learning but also created uneven access to support among students. High-performing students tended to mentor peers within their social circles, inadvertently excluding others from receiving equal assistance.<sup>31</sup> This selective pattern reflects pre-existing social hierarchies rather than equitable instructional design. Observational data show that some students relied heavily on peer explanations due to limited availability of counselors. However, the quality of peer support varied, leading to inconsistent academic outcomes within the cohort. These dynamics complicate attempts to attribute performance changes solely to formal mentoring. Instead, outcomes emerged through a combination of structured sessions and informal peer exchanges. Such horizontal learning structures, while beneficial, require systematic guidance to prevent further stratification. Without structured facilitation, peer-based assistance may reinforce rather than reduce learning disparities. Thus, peer influence must be analyzed as a mediating factor rather than a substitute for professional mentoring.

Digital access emerged as a major determinant of student performance, as many learners struggled to engage with online SNBT materials at home. Limited internet connectivity disproportionately affected students from low-income families, widening performance gaps during simulation cycles. Although the school provided internet access, demand exceeded available resources, reducing the effectiveness of digital practice sessions. The reliance on online tools without adequate offline alternatives inadvertently excluded digitally disadvantaged students. This barrier reflects broader national trends in which digital inequity contributes significantly to disparities in academic achievement. Mentoring programs depending heavily on digital materials

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<sup>29</sup> Muh Ibnu Sholeh et al., "The Role of Teachers in Increasing Students' Learning Motivation in Islamic Religious Education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 2 (2024).

<sup>30</sup> Sri Haryanto et al., "Analysis of Islamic Counselling and Learning Motivation: Keys to Successful Student Academic Achievement," *Journal of Education Research* 5, no. 2 (2024): 2091–2102.

<sup>31</sup> Fadjrie Mahardika Ristianto et al., "Spiritual Frameworks: Enhancing Student Discipline and Motivation through Islamic Organizational Culture," *JUMPA: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 04, no. 01 (2023): 55–67.

risk exacerbating inequities unless accompanied by targeted infrastructure support. Observational data also show that students with stable digital access performed more consistently across SNBT practice rounds. These disparities reveal that mentoring effectiveness is not determined solely by instructional quality but also by resource availability. Accordingly, discussions on program outcomes must incorporate structural barriers to ensure an accurate interpretation.

Differentiated instruction was introduced to address diverse competency levels, but its implementation was inconsistent across counselors. Some educators used tiered materials effectively, while others reverted to uniform instruction due to time and workload pressures.<sup>32 33</sup> This inconsistency diluted the benefits of differentiation, leaving weaker students without the tailored support they required. The absence of standardized diagnostic tools prevented counselors from accurately assessing each student's academic readiness. Consequently, learners often received materials mismatched to their ability levels, hindering progress. These misalignments echo findings from similar rural interventions lacking operational clarity and structural coherence. Without systematic differentiation, mentoring programs risk reinforcing pre-existing disparities instead of mitigating them. The effectiveness of intended instructional design, therefore, depends heavily on sustainable implementation mechanisms. Strengthening teacher capacity and procedural clarity is essential for improving program fidelity.

Counselor workload emerged as one of the most significant barriers to consistent mentoring implementation. Many counselors struggled to balance classroom teaching obligations with mentoring responsibilities, resulting in irregular follow-up sessions. This inconsistency reduced opportunities for timely feedback, which is crucial for developing higher-order reasoning skills required for SNBT. Students requiring continuous support reported fragmented guidance that hindered their academic progress. These challenges highlight the structural limitations within madrasah environments where mentoring is treated as an add-on rather than a core instructional component.<sup>34</sup> Without workload redistribution, program success remains contingent on individual counselor availability rather than systematic support. The absence of formal monitoring tools further limited the school's ability to track progress accurately. As a result, performance improvements remained uneven across the cohort. Such patterns demonstrate that institutional commitment alone cannot overcome structural constraints.

The policy implications suggest that localized mentoring interventions require aligned systemic support to achieve sustainable outcomes.<sup>35</sup> While national policies emphasize improving madrasah competitiveness, the operational capacity of rural schools remains inconsistent. This discrepancy reflects a misalignment between policy design and institutional realities on the ground. The 2025 data indicate that mentoring impact is shaped by resource availability, workload

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<sup>32</sup> Noviza et al., "Peer Counseling Mentoring Model to Assist Students with Problems in Higher Education."

<sup>33</sup> Iffan Ahmad Gufron and Barnawi, "Philosophical Values of Educational Globalization at Bina Insan Mulia Islamic Boarding School," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2025).

<sup>34</sup> Taufiqurrohman, "Ikhlas Dalam Perspektif Al Quran (Analisis Terhadap Konstruk Ikhlas Melalui Metode Tafsir Tematik)," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 1, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>35</sup> Haryanto et al., "Analysis of Islamic Counselling and Learning Motivation: Keys to Successful Student Academic Achievement."

distribution, and access to digital tools.<sup>36 37</sup> Without targeted structural reforms, mentoring programs remain vulnerable to operational fragility. Furthermore, equity-oriented policies must account for the diverse needs of students within heterogeneous learning environments. School-level initiatives alone cannot address deeply rooted inequalities affecting academic readiness. Policymakers must therefore move beyond rhetorical commitments to implement actionable support mechanisms. Aligning mentoring programs with broader educational reforms is essential for achieving long-term equity.

Mentoring at MAN Ciwaringin must be understood as part of a broader ecosystem where emotional, instructional, and structural factors interact. The program supports students' psychological readiness but provides inconsistent cognitive scaffolding across learner groups. Counselor overload, digital barriers, and uneven peer engagement contribute to unpredictable outcomes. These findings caution against interpreting the program as uniformly effective or representative of rural madrasahs more broadly. Instead, the results highlight the need for integrated support mechanisms addressing multiple levels of influence. Enhancing program fidelity requires institutional structures that reduce workload burdens and expand access to learning resources. A comprehensive monitoring system is also needed to track progress more accurately. The discussion therefore emphasizes that mentoring alone cannot close educational gaps without parallel structural reforms. Recognizing these limitations is essential for refining future program design in Islamic school contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the mentoring program at MAN Ciwaringin contributes positively to students' psychological readiness for state university entrance, yet its overall impact remains heavily mediated by structural, instructional, and relational constraints. While students reported increased motivation, the data indicate that such motivation does not consistently translate into improved performance without parallel cognitive scaffolding and stable access to learning resources. Variations in counselor workload, inconsistent differentiation practices, and unequal digital access collectively limit the program's ability to function as an equitable intervention. Peer collaboration played a meaningful role in supporting learning, but its informal and selective nature also reproduced disparities within the student cohort. These dynamics reveal that mentoring outcomes are not solely determined by program design but by the interplay of institutional capacity, resource availability, and social interaction patterns. Consequently, mentoring should be understood as a conditional rather than universally effective strategy for enhancing university readiness in rural Islamic school settings. The study highlights the need for systemic reforms that integrate mentoring with broader structural supports, such as workload redistribution, improved digital infrastructure, and standardized diagnostic tools. Addressing these issues is essential for ensuring that academic guidance programs contribute sustainably to educational equity.

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<sup>36</sup> Zalmiza Zakariya et al., "Mentoring Process of Prayers Among Teachers in Islamic Education: A Case Study Mentoring Process of Prayers Among Teachers in Islamic Education: A Case Study," *International Journal of Academic Research* 1, no. 3 (2020): 589–598.

<sup>37</sup> Ristianto et al., "Spiritual Frameworks: Enhancing Student Discipline and Motivation through Islamic Organizational Culture."



Future research should explore scalable mentoring models, assess long-term student trajectories, and examine how holistic Islamic educational principles can be operationalized without compromising academic rigor.

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