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Holistic Treatment Patterns for Underachiever Students at Madrasah Aliyah (MAN) 2 Pontianak, West Kalimantan

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ABSTRACT

Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak has been working hard to resolve the case of Underachiever students, from 2023 - 2025. The school implements holistic handling, which involves many parties: Class Teachers, Subject Teachers, Guidance and Counseling Teachers, Parents and Psychologists and the handling starts from the root of the problem. This kind of handling of underachiever students has not been widely carried out in other madrasas in Pontianak City. This kind of handling pattern is felt to be successful in resolving the problem of underachiever students at the school. This study aims to reveal the holistic handling pattern of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak. This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-inductive approach. The data collection technique was carried out through in-depth interviews with 9 informants, namely: 3 Guidance and Counseling Teachers, 1 Principal, 2 Underachiever Students, 2 Parents of Students, and 1 Psychologist. Through the results of the in-depth interviews conducted, this study concludes as follows: 1) that the handling of Underachiever students is carried out using a holistic approach, which is centered on the Guidance and Counseling teacher; Coordination with Class Teachers and Subject Teachers, Discussion with parents of students, and Consultation with Psychologists; 2) the process of handling underachiever students is carried out by identifying, counseling, motivating, and providing other activities related to the problems of underachiever students; 3) the toughest challenge in handling underachiever students lies in the teachers who teach, where subject teachers are often unaware of the existence of underachiever students.

Kata Kunci:

Siswa yang Kurang Berprestasi,
Madrasah Aliyah,
Studi Kasus Holistik,
Deskriptif-Kualitatif

ABSTRAK

Sejak 2023 hingga 2025, Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak telah berusaha keras dalam menyelesaikan kasus siswa Underachiever. Pihak madrasah memberlakukan penanganan holistic, yakni melibatkan banyak pihak: Guru Kelas, Guru Mapel, Guru BK, Orang Tua dan Psikolog dan penanganannya dimulai dari akar masalah. Penanganan siswa underachiever semacam ini belum banyak dilakukan di madrasah-madrasah lainnya di Kota Pontianak. Pola penanganan semacam ini dirasakan berhasil menyelesaikan persoalan siswa underachiever di sekolah tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap tentang pola penanganan holistic Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif-induktif. Teknik pengumpulan datanya dilakukan dengan wawancara mendalam dengan 9 orang informan, yaitu: 3 orang Guru BK, 1 Kepala Sekolah, 2 orang Siswa Underachiever, 2 Orang Tua Siswa, dan 1 Psikolog. Melalui hasil wawancara mendalam yang dilakukan, penelitian ini menyimpulkan sebagai berikut: 1) bahwa penanganan siswa Underachiever dilakukan dengan menggunakan pendekatan holistic, yang terpusat pada guru BK; Koordinasi dengan Guru Kelas dan Guru Mapel, Musyawarah dengan orang tua siswa, dan Konsultasi dengan Psikolog; 2) proses penanganan siswa Underachiever dilakukan dengan cara mengidentifikasi, konseling, motivasi, dan memberikan aktifitas lain yang berhubungan dengan masalah siswa underachiever; 3) tantangan terbesar dalam menangani siswa Underachiever justru terletak pada guru yang mengajar, di mana guru mata pelajaran seringkali tidak menyadari tentang keberadaan siswa underachiever.

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INTRODUCTION

The holistic intervention pattern implemented at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak over the past three years has been reported as effective in addressing cases of underachieving students. This effectiveness is evidenced by the renewed academic achievements of students previously identified as underachievers at the institution. Such success is largely attributed to an intensive intervention model that involves multiple stakeholders, including subject teachers, homeroom teachers, school counselors, the school principal, parents or guardians, and professional psychologists. In addition to broad stakeholder involvement, MAN 2 Pontianak adopts a comprehensive approach in addressing students formally identified as underachievers.

Underachievers are defined as students who possess relatively high potential but demonstrate low academic achievement, or achievement that falls below what would be expected based on their potential, particularly within a more equitable assessment system. Underachievement arises from a discrepancy between potential and actual performance. West and Pennell conceptualize underachievement by emphasizing the gap between “potential” and “achievement,” wherein academic performance scores fall significantly below an individual’s demonstrated abilities (Pennell & West, 2003). Similarly, Dowdall and Colangelo identify three fundamental components underlying the definition of underachievement: (1) a discrepancy between potential and actual academic performance; (2) a discrepancy between predicted achievement and actual achievement; and (3) failure to develop or utilize one’s potential (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). The student is referred to as an *underachiever*, while the resulting condition or outcome is termed *underachievement* (Dewi & Trisnawati, 2017).

When cases of underachieving students are identified, serious and multifaceted interventions become necessary. Appropriate intervention strategies are essential given the complex and multifactorial causes underlying underachievement. The involvement of multiple stakeholders facilitates accurate identification and enables the implementation of targeted interventions (Sulaeman & Choiriah, 2020). Proper identification serves as the foundation for effective intervention. In practice, the characteristics of underachieving students are relatively straightforward: students who typically demonstrate high academic competence across subjects may suddenly exhibit performance that deviates significantly from their usual standards in particular courses (Nurfaizal, 2016).

Research on underachievement within the context of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) remains limited. Most existing studies have been conducted in general public schools, such as case studies in SDN 1 Cakra Negara (Rahayu et al., 2024), SMP Negeri 1 Kotabumi (Rahayu et al., 2024), SMP Negeri 12 Bekasi (Rosidah & Pertiwi, 2024), among others. Moreover, studies conducted in faith-based (Islamic) educational institutions tend to focus primarily on educational quality, curriculum development, or broader aspects of Islamic education rather than specific psychological or academic issues such as underachievement (Zahra, 2025). The researchers did not identify any prior studies specifically addressing the intervention of underachieving students in madrasahs in Pontianak or the broader West Kalimantan region. Consequently, comprehensive understanding of how religious-based educational institutions influence intervention strategies for underachieving students remains underexplored. Therefore, research examining the handling of underachieving students in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri settings is both timely and significant in addressing this research gap.

Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak is a centrally located public Islamic senior secondary school in Pontianak, serving approximately 824 students across 22 learning groups. Various student psychological issues are frequently identified within this institution, including several cases of underachievement. In 2023, two cases of underachieving students were recorded. This number increased to three cases in 2024 and remained at three cases in 2025 (Interview with HR, School Counselor, Pontianak, September 22, 2025).

The presence of underachieving students at MAN 2 Pontianak prompted the school to implement intensive intervention measures. Reports from homeroom teachers regarding declining academic performance among previously high-achieving students during end-of-semester examinations indicated that such cases occurred across multiple learning groups. In response, homeroom teachers initially coordinated with school counselors. Counseling teachers provided individual and group counseling interventions. When these measures were deemed insufficient, the school principal convened meetings with subject teachers. Reports from subject teachers were subsequently communicated to parents or guardians. If the issues persisted, the school consulted professional psychologists to determine the most appropriate intervention strategies. This sequential and integrative process constitutes what is referred to as a *holistic intervention pattern* (Interview with MH, School Counselor, Pontianak, September 2, 2025).

At minimum, three students are reported by teaching staff and referred to school counselors for intervention each academic year. One school counselor explained:

“These issues do exist, but the number is not large in this school. So far, we address them using our standard counseling procedures. We examine students’ academic performance data and provide individual counseling services when learning barriers are identified. We work together to help students find solutions. However, when more serious problems arise, we attempt to identify the root causes. We also make referrals to psychologists after communicating with parents—usually, parents independently take their children to psychologists or psychiatrists.” (*Interview with Mrs. M, School Counselor at MAN 2 Pontianak, May 12, 2025*).

Based on these considerations, the intervention efforts undertaken to address underachieving students at MAN 2 Pontianak present a compelling subject for investigation. The central research questions guiding this study are: How does MAN 2 Pontianak structure its intervention strategies to address underachieving students? What processes are involved in the handling of underachieving students at MAN 2 Pontianak? What challenges are encountered in implementing these intervention strategies?

METHODS

This study aims to examine the intervention patterns applied to underachieving students in madrasahs, using a case study conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak. To explore these intervention patterns, the researchers employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive–inductive approach. The descriptive–inductive approach was intended to present empirical findings derived from field data, primarily based on in-depth interviews with various relevant stakeholders.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews involving three school counselors, three subject teachers, one school principal, one psychologist, two parents or guardians, and three students who had previously experienced underachievement at the madrasah. School counselors were selected as key informants based on the assumption that psychological and counseling-related issues in madrasahs are generally managed by counseling teachers. In addition to school counselors, subject teachers were interviewed to identify early indicators of underachievement observed in classroom settings. Interviews with the school principal were conducted to examine institutional policies related to the handling of underachieving students. Interviews with parents or guardians were intended to explore parental involvement and intervention efforts. A professional psychologist was interviewed to confirm and validate information provided by the school. Furthermore, interviews with students who had successfully overcome underachievement were conducted to corroborate the effectiveness of the intervention strategies implemented by the school.

Data analysis was conducted by systematically connecting responses across informants and evaluating them through logical interpretation. Data reduction and data display procedures were applied to assess the relevance and urgency of the collected data, enabling the selection and organization of data for analytical purposes. The data analysis process followed the qualitative analysis framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The analytical steps included: (1) data reduction, in which data were coded, selected, and focused to ensure organization in accordance with the research themes; (2) data display, in which data were presented in a structured manner to facilitate the emergence of patterns and interpretations; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, in which data were interpreted, validated, and confirmed to ensure the credibility of the findings. Finally, the results were described sequentially to illustrate the intervention patterns applied in handling underachieving students at MAN 2 Pontianak.

RESULT

Underachieving Students at MAN 2 Pontianak

In 2025, Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak had a total of 824 students distributed across 22 learning groups (*rombongan belajar*), with each group consisting of approximately 38 students. Each learning group presents complex academic and psychological challenges that must be addressed by the school in order to provide optimal educational services for students.

Since 2023, MAN 2 Pontianak has frequently handled cases involving underachieving students. In 2023, three cases of underachievement were identified. In 2024, two students exhibited similar symptoms. By the end of November 2025, five students were identified as experiencing underachievement. These cases were revealed during a teachers' council meeting held prior to the end-of-semester examinations. To date, MAN 2 Pontianak has consistently implemented a comprehensive approach in addressing such cases, recognizing that the underlying causes of underachievement are often multifaceted. This comprehensive approach is referred to as a holistic intervention model.

Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak routinely conducts teachers' council meetings at the end of each semester and prior to the commencement of the subsequent semester. These coordination meetings are intended to assess student readiness, teacher preparedness for end-of-semester examinations, and to evaluate the learning process of the completed semester. Based on

reports submitted by homeroom teachers to school counselors, during the odd semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, five distinctive student cases were identified.

Table 1. Findings of Subject Teachers Regarding Student Conditions

No.	Student Initials	Class	Subject Teacher's Concerns
1	YMS	XI A	Since mid-first semester (Gasal), the student has often fallen asleep in class; however, when asked questions, the answers are correct. The problem is that the student's daily quiz scores have been poor through the end of the semester. Previously, this student was very diligent and focused in learning and achieved very high scores—ranked 4th in the class. (Low achievement scores; daily work incomplete or poor; understands and remembers concepts well when interested; a gap between the qualitative level of oral and written work (oral is better).)
2	BDY	XI C	Since the first semester in Grade 10, this student has been a key contributor in solving mathematics problems. However, at the beginning of the first semester of Grade 11, the student became quiet, appearing to merely attend lessons. When asked to solve physics problems at the front of the class, the answers are correct. Yet, on daily quizzes, the scores are very low. (A gap between the qualitative level of oral and written work; very broad factual knowledge; strong imagination.)
3	JOK	XI D	This student tends to interrupt frequently, but what is said sounds belittling and not serious—yet is correct. However, the student's daily quiz scores are very low because the answers are often illogical and sometimes outside the learning context. (Understands and remembers concepts well when interested; a gap between the qualitative level of oral and written work (oral is better).)
4	KAR	XII B	This student is generally quiet, but the answers are usually accurate. However, the student's daily quiz answers are not as accurate as usual. When asked, the student tends to be closed off, and it is difficult to understand what is happening. (Low self-esteem; always dissatisfied with completed work; perfectionistic and self-critical.)
5	FOR	XII E	Since Grade 10, this student has been known as cheerful, and assignments were completed well. The student's scores were very high in almost every subject. There has been no notable change in attitude, yet the student's daily scores have declined toward the end of the semester. (Dislikes practical tasks and rote memorization; unable to concentrate on tasks.)

Based on the data presented, these students were suspected of experiencing underachievement. This suspicion was grounded in established characteristics of underachieving students, particularly as reflected in learning difficulties, including: (a) low academic achievement; (b) incomplete or poor-quality daily assignments; (c) strong comprehension and memory of concepts when interest is present; (d) discrepancies between the quality of oral and written work; (e) extensive factual knowledge; (f) strong imaginative capacity; (g) persistent dissatisfaction with completed work; (h) perfectionistic tendencies and self-criticism; (i) demonstration of alternative initiatives; (j) broad interests and specific talents; (k) low self-esteem; (l) ineffective functioning within group settings; (m) heightened perceptual sensitivity toward oneself and others; (n) unrealistic goal-setting; (o) aversion to practical tasks and rote memorization; (p) difficulty maintaining concentration on tasks; (q) indifferent or negative attitudes toward school; (r)

resistance to teachers' motivational or disciplinary efforts in the classroom; and (s) difficulties in peer relationships (Yusuf, 2022).

Consequently, the school implemented a holistic intervention strategy, beginning with the identification of root causes and involving multiple stakeholders in the intervention process. The school principal instructed all school personnel to work collaboratively and intensively to address students' problems. This integrated and comprehensive approach characterizes the holistic handling of underachieving students at MAN 2 Pontianak (Interview with the Principal and School Counselor, Pontianak, August 30, 2025).

Intervention Strategies for Underachieving Students at MAN 2 Pontianak

Based on interviews with the principal and school counselors at MAN 2 Pontianak, the intervention process for underachieving students follows several structured stages.

First, during teachers' council coordination meetings held at the beginning and end of each semester, the principal instructs all subject teachers to identify students who meet the criteria associated with underachievement, particularly those related to learning difficulty characteristics. When such students are identified, subject teachers are required to report the cases to the homeroom teachers, who then forward the information to the school counselors for further action. School counselors conduct individual or group counseling sessions as an initial intervention. Subsequently, the principal summons parents or guardians for coordination meetings. If deemed necessary, school counselors and the principal consult with professional psychologists to identify the root causes of the students' difficulties and determine appropriate follow-up actions.

Second, once the underlying problems are identified, school counselors initiate recovery-oriented interventions with support from subject teachers and homeroom teachers. When necessary, the principal and school counselors consult psychologists, or alternatively, parents are advised to independently seek psychological consultation for their children. The school then implements intervention measures in accordance with professional recommendations provided by the psychologist.

Third, as an Islamic-based educational institution, MAN 2 Pontianak incorporates Islamic counseling elements into its intervention model. Prior to counseling sessions, students are invited to perform a two-rak'ah *ṣalāt al-hājah* (prayer of need), followed by recitation of selected verses from the Qur'an. The *ṣalāt al-hājah* is intended to help students establish clarity of life goals, while Qur'anic recitation serves as a means of seeking divine guidance and engaging in remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah. Following these spiritual practices, students are guided to reflect on their life goals, articulate their problems, and engage in dialogue aimed at jointly resolving their difficulties.

Since 2023, cases of underachievement at MAN 2 Pontianak have primarily been addressed through individual counseling sessions that integrate standard Islamic counseling materials (As can be seen in Table 2). Throughout the counseling process, school counselors are supported by homeroom teachers and subject teachers. However, in-depth intervention efforts are predominantly led by school counselors. When challenges arise during the counseling process, school counselors consult professional psychologists to ensure appropriate and effective handling of underachieving students.

Table 2. Measures Taken By The Schoolar Counselor Together With Homeroom Teachers And Subject Teachers

No.	Case Indicators	Treatments
1	Low academic achievement	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to reflect on life goals and learning purpose.
2	Incomplete or poor daily assignments	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are encouraged to develop responsibility for academic tasks.
3	Understands and remembers concepts well when interested	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to strengthen intrinsic learning motivation.
4	A discrepancy between the qualitative level of oral and written work	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are directed to improve written academic performance.
5	Very broad factual knowledge	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are encouraged to channel knowledge constructively.
6	Strong imaginative capacity	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to use imagination positively.
7	Constant dissatisfaction with completed work	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to develop self-acceptance.
8	Perfectionistic tendencies and self-criticism	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to manage perfectionism constructively.
9	Demonstrates alternative initiatives	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to express initiative appropriately.
10	Broad interests and specific talents	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to focus talents toward learning goals.
11	Low self-esteem	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are assisted in strengthening self-esteem.
12	Does not function constructively within group settings	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to improve group interaction skills.
13	High perceptual sensitivity toward oneself and others	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are assisted in emotional awareness and regulation.
14	Sets unrealistic goals	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to set realistic academic goals.
15	Dislikes practical tasks and rote memorization	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are provided with alternative learning strategies.
16	Unable to concentrate on tasks	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to improve concentration skills.
17	Shows indifferent and negative attitudes toward school	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to develop positive attitudes toward school.
18	Rejects teachers' attempts to motivate or discipline classroom behavior	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are guided to respond constructively to authority.
19	Experiences difficulties in peer relationships	Ṣalāt al-Ḥājah and Qur'anic recitation. Students are assisted in improving peer relationships.

DISCUSSION

Recognizing and Understanding Underachieving Students

Underachiever refers to an individual whose academic performance falls below his or her ability level. This condition commonly occurs among students with relatively high intelligence; however, their school achievement remains below their expected performance. Notably, this phenomenon is not necessarily caused by inability, but rather by disinterest in certain subjects, which ultimately leads to avoidance and reluctance to learn them (Dewi & Trisnawati, 2017).

The *Dictionary of Psychology* defines an underachiever as “a person who consistently achieves below his or her demonstrated capacity” (VandenBos, 2012). It further notes that underachievement may be specific to a particular area of study or work, or it may be general; it is more prevalent among boys than girls and is relatively common among bright and even gifted children (VandenBos, 2012).

Based on these definitions, such cases may potentially be found in each learning group (class) at MAN 2 Pontianak in 2025. Further tracing was conducted by school counselors to examine observable characteristics more closely. The counselors' identification results were then used as the basis for follow-up interventions. In this process, specific indicators were applied to support identification.

To recognize underachieving students, several behavioral signs may be observed in everyday school life. One of the most salient indicators is low self-esteem. Students may feel they are not good enough to appear in front of others, both in family and peer contexts. Among peers, they tend to withdraw, feel unworthy, and even perceive themselves as less important than others. This is closely associated with an unrealistic self-concept. Underachieving students often view themselves as failures—untalented or useless—although such assumptions may not reflect reality. This negative self-view limits their willingness to grow and develop (Yunita & Sarajar, 2024).

Several key characteristics of underachieving students include: (1) a clear discrepancy between ability and achievement; (2) poor and inconsistent study habits; (3) low self-confidence (self-esteem); (4) negative attitudes toward school and low motivation (Yusuf, 2022); and (5) difficulties in concentration and self-regulation (Husaini & Lestari, 2019).

In recognizing and understanding underachieving students, MAN 2 Pontianak implements a specific strategy through direct monitoring by subject teachers. Subject teachers are provided with cues based on underachiever characteristics (the 19-point indicators described earlier). When subject teachers encounter a case meeting these indicators, they are required to report it to the homeroom teacher. The homeroom teacher then compiles the indications and submits them to the school counselor. Subsequently, the school counselor conducts further identification to determine appropriate intervention.

Once a case is identified, MAN 2 Pontianak applies a holistic handling system that involves multiple stakeholders: subject teachers, homeroom teachers, school counselors, the principal, parents/guardians, and a psychologist. This approach is intended to determine whether the student is experiencing underachievement or other related symptoms. In this context, the role of school counseling is critical in providing motivation and direction for underachieving students (Lelono, 2011).

The phenomenon of underachieving students is not uncommon in educational settings. Children who appear intellectually capable do not always display academic performance that

matches their potential. They may demonstrate sharp thinking, broad insight, and logical reasoning, yet still achieve low academic outcomes. An interview with an educator at MAN 2 Pontianak illustrates this condition:

“There was one case that has stayed with me. I had a student who was cognitively very intelligent. When discussing matters outside the lesson context, he could offer brilliant ideas, logical arguments, and deep understanding. However, during exams or routine assignments, his results were consistently far below his potential. This made me and other teachers wonder: why does a student this smart not demonstrate his ability optimally at school?”
(Interview with AT, Teacher at MAN 2 Pontianak, June 15, 2025).

This narrative suggests that underachievement is not simply a matter of low intellectual ability. Rather, it is more complex and involves factors such as motivation, self-concept, learning environment, and emotional support. Students like this require differentiated approaches—not merely academic pressure, but attention to the psychological and social factors that underlie the mismatch between their potential and achievement.

Within underachievement theory, multiple factors may contribute to a student’s underachievement. As in the case above, a student may be intellectually capable, able to generate brilliant ideas and deep logical arguments, yet still obtain daily task and examination scores far below expected levels. Contributing factors are commonly categorized into internal and external factors.

First, internal factors originate within the individual and substantially influence motivation and learning capacity. Merrell et al. identify three internal factors that affect students’ motivation and learning ability: low intrinsic motivation, low confidence and self-efficacy, and emotional or psychological disturbances (Merrell et al., 2011).

Second, external factors derive from the student’s surrounding environment and shape learning processes as well as academic development (Peacock et al., 2012). These external factors may include the family environment, the education system, and peer support. Within the family context, limited support may cause students to feel unappreciated or less motivated (Wardiansyah Ilyas, 2024). An inflexible educational system, monotonous teaching methods, and perceived unfair evaluation practices may reduce students’ interest in learning and lead to performance below their actual capability (Ira & Asari, 2023). Peer support also matters; positive peer support can strengthen motivation and improve academic achievement (Sukaesih, 2023).

Underachieving students frequently experience difficulties in peer relationships. They may feel rejected, lack confidence in social interaction, or encounter social conflict. Some become quiet and withdrawn, whereas others exhibit aggressive or defiant behavior (Husaini & Lestari, 2019).

In AT’s case, the student was described as cognitively strong—highly intelligent, able to understand issues beyond lesson contexts, with brilliant ideas, logical arguments, and deep comprehension. However, confirmation from another teacher (NV) indicated problematic attitudes: the student tended to underestimate the subject, belittle teachers, protest school policies, and primarily spoke outside the lesson context (Interview with NV, Islamic Education subject teacher, Pontianak, August 20, 2025).

Theoretically, students experiencing underachievement often appear lazy, poorly motivated, inattentive in class, lacking organizational skills and time-management, holding negative attitudes toward school, and showing limited interest in school activities. Conversely, they may show strong

interest and high performance in specific areas (Pramudiani, 2019). At times, such students display oppositional behaviors, including aggression or challenging teacher authority. They may respond to instructions with refusal, sarcasm, or intentional rule violations (Nurfaizal, 2016).

The key issue, therefore, is how to resolve the problem so that the student can return to performing in line with his or her true potential.

At MAN 2 Pontianak, individual counseling was conducted to obtain relevant data. Based on the counseling results, three primary causes of the student's underachievement were identified: (1) teaching methods perceived as monotonous; (2) an evaluation system perceived as unfair; and (3) peer support perceived as insufficient.

To address these issues, in addition to providing motivation and reasonable explanations regarding diverse teacher characteristics, the school evaluated subject-teacher instructional practices and provided training on updated teaching approaches. For learning content involving memorization, the student was guided through specific strategies aimed at increasing engagement—for example, understanding the meaning first before memorizing the verses. This approach proved effective because meaning-based comprehension enabled the student to follow the narrative sequence and logic within the Qur'an and Hadith. As a result, the student returned to his baseline potential and achieved scores aligned with his actual ability.

Handling Underachieving Students at MAN 2 Pontianak

The underachiever phenomenon in education demonstrates that high academic potential does not always correspond to optimal academic achievement. Underachieving students are individuals with adequate or high intellectual capacity, yet their performance remains below their potential. This condition is influenced by both internal factors—such as low motivation, negative self-concept, and emotional disturbances—and external factors—such as family environment, educational system, and social relationships.

Underachieving students often display characteristics such as low self-esteem, poor study habits, negative attitudes toward school, and difficulties in concentration and social interaction. In classroom learning activities, they may appear passive or even demonstrate challenging behaviors. Therefore, approaches to underachieving students require special attention and comprehensive strategies.

Similar cases were found at MAN 2 Pontianak, as described in AT's account. The student was categorized as intellectually capable but did not achieve high grades consistent with his ability. This was attributed to behaviors perceived as negative by subject teachers. In written assignments and examinations, the student frequently failed to complete tasks seriously, responded carelessly, or did not submit assignments at all. This aligns with Nurfaizal's findings that underachieving students may avoid responsibility by blaming external factors, such as peers, teachers, or school situations (Nurfaizal, 2016).

Some students demonstrate different patterns. In class, they tend to be passive, unenthusiastic, and minimally engaged in discussions or group tasks. They may appear distracted, reluctant to ask questions even when they do not understand the material, and prefer silence rather than risking mistakes. Even when invited to express opinions, they may refuse or provide brief answers without attempting to develop ideas. Underachieving students also frequently show boredom or disinterest, as if the presented material is irrelevant to them (Pratama et al., 2018).

Such students need to be addressed immediately so they can return to their baseline potential. If not handled through appropriate approaches, these attitudes and behaviors may further worsen academic outcomes and reinforce recurring failure patterns (Pramudiani, 2019). However, intervention requires a sustained process with sequential stages.

The Intervention Process for Underachieving Students

MAN 2 Pontianak serves a relatively large student population (824 students) with 50 teachers. The required number of school counselors depends on several factors, particularly the student–counselor ratio. Based on standards often referenced by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), the ideal counselor ratio is approximately 1 counselor per 150–200 students, although this ratio may vary depending on school needs and contextual conditions. Under this assumption, a school with 824 students would require approximately 5–6 school counselors to provide effective services.

At MAN 2 Pontianak, however, only three counselors are available—approximately half of the suggested standard. Nonetheless, school counselors attempt to address this limitation through collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including subject teachers, peer students, parents/guardians, and psychologists.

According to FT, handling underachieving students at MAN 2 Pontianak typically involves parents: “If there is a problem with a child’s grades, we usually conduct counseling and call the parents to understand the child’s learning methods and activities” (Interview with FT, School Counselor, July 20, 2025). This indicates that from the initial stage, the school cooperates with parents. A similar point was expressed by MH: “When problems like this occur, we counsel the student, seek additional information from the homeroom teacher, and call the parents. The expectation is that after counseling and communication with parents, there will be changes in learning behavior and improved achievement” (Interview with MH, School Counselor, July 21, 2025).

The handling of underachieving students at MAN 2 Pontianak is implemented through an interconnected pattern that is highly determinative. This pattern is based on each stakeholder’s roles and functions, enabling coordination and holistic intervention.

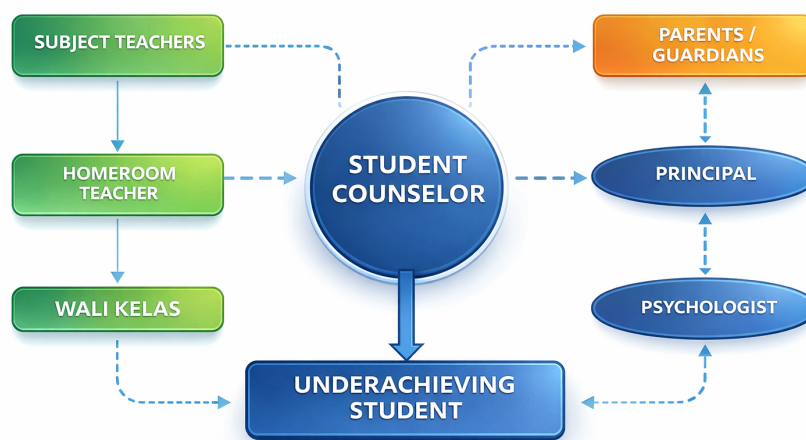


Figure 1. Treatment Pattern for Underachieving Students at MAN 2 Pontianak
(Based on findings from interviews with guidance counselors at MAN 2 Pontianak)

In identifying possible underachievement symptoms, school counselors coordinate with subject teachers. Counselors provide subject teachers with observable underachiever characteristics to be monitored in each classroom. Subject teachers report suspected cases along with observable symptoms. The counselor then summons the student for further observation and identification, accompanied by individual counseling. If the counselor encounters difficulties, coordination with the principal occurs. Where symptoms are ambiguous or involve new concerns, the principal coordinates with parents/guardians and/or a psychologist to obtain direction regarding appropriate treatment strategies.

Table 3. Stakeholders and Their Roles in Handling Underachieving Students

No.	Stakeholders	Roles and Functions
1	Principal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring that intervention is implemented effectively. 2. Establishing intervention policies. 3. Coordinating all involved stakeholders. 4. Ensuring that interventions align with institutional and moral values.
2	School Counselor (BK Teacher)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing criteria for identifying underachieving students. 2. Identifying cases based on reports from homeroom teachers. 3. Determining root causes and appropriate intervention strategies. 4. Implementing interventions in accordance with the principal's policies.
3	Homeroom Teacher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Receiving reports from subject teachers regarding suspected underachieving students. 2. Compiling subject teachers' reports and submitting them to the school counselor. 3. Assisting in the intervention process for underachieving students. 4. Providing classroom-based motivation as a preventive effort.
4	Subject Teacher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying potential cases of underachieving students in the classroom. 2. Reporting suspected cases to the homeroom teacher. 3. Assisting in the intervention process for underachieving students.
5	Parents / Guardians	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing detailed and honest information regarding students' conditions at home. 2. Assisting in intervention efforts in accordance with guidance from the school counselor. 3. Reporting any changes observed in students' behavior or learning patterns.
6	Psychologist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing professional guidance to school counselors regarding appropriate intervention strategies. 2. Assisting in therapeutic treatment for students when required.

Each stakeholder carries distinct responsibilities and functions. Overall, handling underachievement at MAN 2 Pontianak prioritizes identifying root causes to facilitate problem resolution. If the root cause relates to teaching methods, teacher training is implemented. If the problem originates from the student's individual background or past experiences, appropriate personal interventions are pursued. All stakeholders are expected to improve their roles to help align student potential with achievement outcomes.

Challenges in Handling Underachieving Students at MAN 2 Pontianak

Addressing underachieving students requires sustained efforts from both school counselors and subject teachers. Teacher efforts and student empowerment refer to actions taken to strengthen students' motivation and capacity to overcome learning difficulties so that they can improve academic achievement. Empowerment involves guidance and direction tailored to the factors that contribute to a student becoming an underachiever.

Handling underachievers requires strategic efforts and comprehensive support from the school. Schools should not function merely as sites of knowledge transfer, but as environments that foster students' emotional, social, and psychological development. A crucial form of support is an individualized approach—deeply recognizing each underachieving student's characteristics and needs. Teachers and homeroom teachers can conduct initial mapping to identify unrealized potential and inhibiting factors, including motivation issues, family environment, self-concept, and psychological conditions.

Schools can also organize proactive counseling programs. School counselors play an important role in helping students recognize their potential, overcome psychological barriers, and build healthier self-confidence. Consistent positive feedback and reinforcement of effort—not only final results—can strengthen students' intrinsic motivation. Teachers also need to implement more varied and engaging learning approaches, such as group discussions, creative projects, or interest-based learning, so that students become more actively involved.

School support should also include effective communication with parents. Collaboration between teachers and parents is essential to ensure consistency of approaches at home and at school. In addition, schools may provide training or workshops for teachers to enhance understanding of strategies for handling underachieving students. Through integrated and sustained efforts, schools play a vital role in helping underachieving students develop in line with their potential and in creating more meaningful learning experiences (Ira & Asari, 2023).

Based on interviews with school counselors and subject teachers at MAN 2 Pontianak, the most significant challenges in restoring underachieving students' performance include the following:

1. Teachers may not recognize changes in students' learning interests early. Subject teachers tend to focus on delivering material effectively and employ various strategies to ensure student understanding. Underachievement is often detected only during evaluation, meaning that when treatment is initiated, it may already be relatively late.
2. Limited coordination between subject teachers and school counselors. Some subject teachers hesitate to report suspected underachieving students to counselors because the student may be summoned to counseling services, which could create stigma. There is also concern that the issue may be limited to the student's dislike of a particular subject teacher, while no problems appear with other teachers. Consequently, teachers fear that reporting may generate negative stigma toward the reporting teacher. As a result, some subject teachers choose not to report suspected underachieving students.

In general, underachieving students display distinctive behaviors during classroom learning. They tend to be passive, unenthusiastic, and minimally involved in discussion or group tasks. They often appear distracted, reluctant to ask questions even when confused, and prefer silence over taking the risk of making mistakes. When encouraged to express opinions, they may refuse or provide short responses without developing ideas.

This is consistent with Pratama et al.'s findings that underachieving students frequently appear bored or disinterested, as if the material delivered is not relevant to them (Pratama et al., 2018). Low intrinsic motivation, low self-confidence, and the gap between academic potential and actual performance make it difficult for underachieving students to achieve optimal learning outcomes. In interactions with teachers, they may also maintain distance, avoid open communication, and resist feedback. If not addressed appropriately, these behaviors may further undermine academic achievement and reinforce repeated failure patterns (Pramudiani, 2019).

To address these challenges, MAN 2 Pontianak implements a holistic handling model by involving multiple stakeholders and focusing on root causes, with interventions tailored to those causes. To date, MAN 2 Pontianak has reportedly managed such cases effectively, as reflected in students' final achievement outcomes that align with their baseline potential and improved performance after intervention.

CONCLUSION

Based on interviews with school counselors, subject teachers, and former underachieving students, it can be concluded that the handling of underachieving students at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Pontianak is conducted comprehensively—from identifying root causes to implementing resolution strategies—and involves multiple stakeholders, including parents or guardians, subject teachers, and professional psychologists. The intervention process for underachieving students primarily employs a persuasive approach through individual counseling conducted by school counselors in collaboration with subject teachers. In addition, the intervention model integrates Islamic elements, such as *ṣalāt al-ḥājah* (prayer of need) and Qur'anic recitation, as part of the counseling process.

The handling of underachieving students follows several sequential stages, including identification, counseling, motivation enhancement, and the provision of alternative learning activities related to subjects disliked by students or other factors contributing to their reluctance to learn in accordance with their actual abilities. These strategies are designed to help students realign their academic performance with their inherent potential.

One of the most significant challenges in addressing underachievement lies at the instructional level. Many subject teachers have not yet fully recognized the presence of underachieving students in their classrooms. In some cases, when students experience underachievement in particular subjects, leniency is granted through grade adjustments rather than appropriate intervention. This practice is partly driven by concerns over negative stigma associated with referrals to counseling services, as well as fears that such referrals may be perceived as indicators of ineffective teaching.

The findings of this study are expected to serve as an alternative model or prototype for other Madrasah Aliyah institutions in addressing underachieving students in madrasahs or schools. Furthermore, the results may function as an evaluative reference for MAN 2 Pontianak in improving its strategies for handling underachieving students. For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct studies focusing on the early detection of students with potential underachievement in Madrasah Aliyah settings.

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