



Reconceptualizing community-based education (Islamic Boarding Schools) in Neoliberal context: An analysis of parental choice, social class, and market forces

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Abstract

This research is focused on analyzing the dynamics of market for Islamic boarding schools and the shifting parental choice within the Muslim community, which is prompting these educational institutions to reform, focusing on enhancing the quality of facilities and also diversifying programs. Consequently, the cost of education in these institutions has tended to rise, leading to a situation where access has become more exclusive and limited to specific groups. Henry Giroux stated that the phenomena of corporatization and commercialization in the education sector reflect neoliberal practices. Empirically, Islamic boarding schools seem to be tied to the logic of capital through the commercialization of education and the products offered. This research uses a qualitative method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, with thematic analysis employed to interpret the findings. The results indicate that the high demand for IBS generates strong market pressures, compelling institutions to implement pricing strategies, strategic location selection, and accessibility improvements while fostering conducive learning environments. Promotional efforts, including scholarships, open houses, and digital marketing, further reinforce the marketization of IBS. The findings suggest that community-based education within IBS has shifted towards a market-driven system, reflecting the internalization of neoliberal values in Islamic education.

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Introduction

Community-based education serves as a foundation of educational system in Indonesia, aiming to address the specific needs of Muslim community (Harjanto et al., 2018; Saleh & Satriawan, 2020). Community-based education used to be integrated with what was called a *pesantren*. Nowadays, *pesantren* has integrated with a concept of contemporary *madrasah*, also known as Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) (Faizin, 2024; Pasi et al., 2020). Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) have emerged as a prominent educational option for the quality education for Indonesian Muslim community, including in West Sumatra and Java. The development aligns with the belief that education should not only impart cognitive skills but also cultivate Islamic character (Riskiyah, 2020). In addition, Islamic education is expected to help the Muslim community internalize Islamic values and knowledge through instruction and learning (Arifin & Pramuja, 2024). Therefore, IBS has emerged as an alternative educational institution for the Muslim community, including in West Sumatra. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), approximately 97.42 percent of the population in West Sumatra adheres to Islam, thus reflecting the factors, values, and norms within the community that are grounded in Islamic principles (BPS, 2021). Another contributing factor is the tendency among the community to view education not solely as a means of enhancing intellectual intelligence, but also as a method for character development.

However, the current changing times have led to social dynamics, including within family life. This situation is influenced by the high pressures from external social interactions and school environments, compounded by parents who are busy with work and careers. As a result, parents tend to prefer enrolling their children in boarding schools to ensure academic oversight and character education. Given the Islamic environment that these institutions provide, interest in IBS has significantly increased in Indonesia.

The growing interest in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is influenced not only by changes in parental choices but also by political factors and prominent figures (Saleh & Satriawan, 2020). This has led to a shift in community segments that are changing preferences for Islamic education (Giyarsi, 2023). As a result, *pesantren* must adapt their management to meet the demands of these communities. To understand the rapid increase in *pesantren*, a comparison is made with several Islamic boarding schools in Java, which has the highest interest in

Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia (Hidayah, 2021).

The high market demand for inclusive education has made Islamic boarding schools (IBS) more pragmatic in their approach. These institutions engage in competition by offering enhanced facilities and a diverse array of extracurricular activities, frequently establishing relatively high tuition fees to cover these services. Furthermore, the autonomy conferred by government policies has facilitated the transformation of IBS into private entities. This shift in policy empowers IBS to operate in alignment with market needs, trends, and demands, thereby positioning education as a commercial commodity. Within the context of Indonesian education, the manifestations of neoliberalism are observable through the expanding role of private educational institutions, the commercialization of educational services, and the escalation of schools tuition (Salim et al., 2023). The concept of neoliberalism views education as a commodity that can be bought and sold, encouraging educational institutions to operate like competing businesses in an economically valued market (Marginson, 2016) leading towards high participation systems (HPS thus subordinating education to capital through its commercialization. Consequently, various changes have emerged in the educational landscape concerning quality, equity, and access to education (Premalatha et al., 2024). The impact of this trend has been limited accessibility to Islamic boarding schools, resulting in their becoming accessible primarily to certain social groups and consequently fostering social class segregation.

Previous research on neoliberalism in education has highlighted its various impacts on educational institutions across different contexts. Karki (2024) argues that neoliberalism drives deregulation, privatization, and market-based approaches in education, leading to its commodification and economically driven policy shifts. Similarly, Nyundu and Hosseini (2024) describe how neoliberalism introduces authoritarian corporate values in higher education, sparking social resistance movements like Fees Must Fall, which demand more democratic and inclusive education. Furthermore, Neoliberalism and the Violation of Students' Rights: The Case of English Language Education (2024) highlights how neoliberalism not only commodifies education but also shifts educational responsibility from the government to households, enforces standardized testing, and positions English as an economic asset aligned with labor market demands. Meanwhile, Esmati et al. (2024) assert that neoliberalism pushes educational institutions to align with economic interests and market-driven workforce training,

resulting in commercialization and widening social inequality. In contrast, Islamic education traditionally emphasizes normative and pedagogical approaches, focusing on moral and character development. However, as neoliberal influences grow, it is crucial to examine how these dynamics reshape Islamic educational institutions (Murdianto et al., 2020).

While previous studies have explored neoliberalism's influence on education, research on Islamic education remains largely normative and pedagogical, overlooking structural and economic transformations. As neoliberal influences grow, it is crucial to examine how these dynamics reshape Islamic boarding schools (IBS), not only in terms of policy shifts toward privatization and commercialization but also in how they redefine institutional values, accessibility, and management. This study provides empirical insights into how IBS respond to market pressures whether through adaptation, resistance, or structural transformation bridging the gap between neoliberal economic theory and the sociology of Islamic education. By moving beyond theoretical discourse, this research also offers practical implications for policymakers and IBS administrators in designing sustainable and inclusive educational models.

This study provides a novel contribution by offering empirical insights into how neoliberalism influences Islamic educational institutions an area still underexplored in existing research. By bridging the gap between neoliberal economic theory and the sociology of Islamic education, this study provides empirical evidence on how IBS respond to market pressures through adaptation strategies, resistance, or structural transformation. Ultimately, it contributes to both theoretical discussions on neoliberalism in education and practical considerations for policymakers and IBS administrators in designing sustainable and inclusive educational models.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach to provide an in-depth understanding of neoliberal influences on Islamic boarding schools (IBS). Qualitative methods are particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena as they allow for detailed narratives and contextual analysis beyond numerical data (Fadli, 2021; Jacob, 2023).

The study utilizes observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to examine how IBS stakeholders, administrators, teachers, parents, and students perceive

and respond to market-driven educational reforms. Semi-structured interviews provide a flexible yet focused approach to gathering rich qualitative data while maintaining consistency in key themes (Patton, 2022).

To ensure systematic analysis, the study employs computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) using NVivo, facilitating efficient coding and thematic categorization (Endah et al., 2020). This approach helps mitigate researcher bias, a common limitation in qualitative studies, by ensuring a structured and replicable analytical process (Endah et al., 2020). Document analysis further strengthens the research by providing historical and policy-related insights into the transformation of IBS under neoliberal pressures.

The study applies purposive sampling, selecting participants based on their relevance to the research focus. Administrators, policymakers, and educators are included to provide institutional perspectives, while students and parents contribute insights into the lived experiences of neoliberal shifts in IBS. By integrating these qualitative techniques, the research aims to offer a comprehensive, empirically grounded understanding of how IBS navigate neoliberal transformations while balancing their religious and educational missions.

To ensure a comprehensive and systematic data collection process, this study integrates semi-structured interviews and document analysis alongside observations. Semi-structured interviews follow a guided yet flexible approach, allowing the researcher to explore key themes while accommodating open-ended discussions on relevant topics (Arbale & Mutisya, 2024; Assadpour et al., 2023; Saunders, 2004). Document analysis further enriches the study by examining official records, including national policies, regional regulations, and school curriculum documents, providing contextual depth to the findings.

The research process unfolds in four main stages: (a) initial investigation, (b) design, (c) construction, and (d) evaluation and revision. The initial investigation phase involves field observations, surveys, and team discussions to refine research focus. The design stage consists of developing interview formats, compiling key questions, and preparing structured interview guides. During construction, data are collected and classified based on research objectives for in-depth analysis. Lastly, the evaluation and revision stage ensures the validity and reliability of findings through triangulation, followed by a review and refinement of results to align with the study's objectives.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Neoliberal Context in Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS)

As an indigenous Islamic educational institution in Indonesia (Murdiato et al., 2020), *pesantren* have served as a foundational root for the emergence of education based on Islamic principles (Giyarsi, 2023, Sadali, 2020). The current development of Islamic education demands that *pesantren* continuously innovate to be better accepted by society. Integrated with modern *madrasahs*, Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) adapt to market needs, meeting parental expectations and competing in the educational market beyond ideological concepts. Historically, Kusnadi describes IBS an education model focused solely on religious values, often seen as “old-fashioned.” And resistant to modern developments. However, over time, IBS has evolved to respond to changes and advancements in learning activities and broader societal developments (Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023). The development of IBS is significantly influenced by government policies on school autonomy. Privatization lets IBS adapt to market needs, integrating neoliberal principles into education while competing to attract parental interest.

According to Harvey, neoliberalism is a political-economic theory that asserts societal well-being can be achieved by enhancing human welfare through the provision of entrepreneurial space and skills for individuals within an institutional framework characterized by autonomy over development rights and free markets. In this context, Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) serve as an example (Salim et al., 2023). The introduction of neoliberal concepts into the educational sphere leads to the privatization of education, a shift in government authority, and the emergence of a generation shaped by neoliberal values. Furthermore, within the educational context, various aspects become subjects of neoliberal analysis, each influenced by geographical location and cultural roles. In simple terms, neoliberalism is a cultural ideology emphasizing individualism and free markets, which has significantly impacted the development of educational systems in the era of globalization (Hidayah, 2021).

According to Mani Karki, the concept of neoliberalism can be described as plastic due to its highly flexible, multidimensional, and dynamic characteristics (Karki, 2024). Thus, the concept can be applied across various aspects, including education. However, key terms that facilitate understanding of neoliberalism are ‘freedom’

and ‘market’ (Ngametua, 2022). These two components are essential for grasping the neoliberal concept, although this perspective may be overly simplistic and reductionist in conceptualizing neoliberalism. Furthermore, within the educational context, numerous aspects warrant examination, each significantly influenced by the geographical location and cultural roles, along with the political priorities and policies guiding their implementation (Hall & Pulsford, 2019). However, in this special research edition, the focus will be on reconstructing the discourse surrounding neoliberalism within the framework of: the ideas of marketization and autonomy; parents’ rights to choose the ‘best school for their children’; and the market dynamics among the majority Muslim community (Sandra et al., 2023).

This research explores Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) in West Sumatra and Java, highlighting their shared market focus on the middle-class Muslim community. The findings reveal that each IBS targets a similar market segment: the middle-class Muslim community. This is based on the assumption that the upper-middle class has a crisis of confidence in conventional schools to provide value-oriented education. Supporting this, Sandra’s research indicates that Muslim parents have a strong desire to send their children to private schools with Islamic values because they think IBS are key institutions for educating the younger generation (Sandra et al., 2024). Additionally, IBS is focused on providing quality education that meets the needs and demands of today’s parents. The shift in market interest from conventional schools to IBS is also influenced by the busy lifestyles of middle-class parents, leading them to rely on Islamic Boarding Schools for value-based education and character development. Survey data indicate that nearly 80 percent of parents believe the curriculum offered by IBS aligns with their expectations.

This hypothesis allows Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) greater flexibility to explore market opportunities to design educational models that align with parental expectations (Najah, 2021). School privatization grants IBS autonomy to create diverse offerings, including inclusive curricula, superior facilities, extracurricular activities, and international collaborations, attracting middle-class families willing to pay for these services. This adaptability extends to operational aspects, such as management structures, funding strategies, and institutional policies. In the context of education, Neoliberal influences have transformed education, shifting its organization, funding, and delivery towards corporatization. Schools now engage in partnerships with private institutions, foreign schools, and government

agencies, fostering exchange programs and international curriculum adoption. For Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS), corporatization is particularly feasible because these institutions operate autonomously as private schools, meaning they are not bound by specific government regulations (Rohmah, 2022). This autonomy allows them to adapt more readily to market demands and engage in various educational collaborations

Community-Based Education Analysis

In simple terms, community-based education is centered on the role of the community, with the state's involvement being minimal in its implementation. Naturally, the community holds significant authority and responsibility in executing and evaluating this type of education to ensure it aligns with its foundational principles (Fauziddin et al., 2022). Indonesia, in fact, has an indigenous educational model that embodies community-based education, exemplified by the long-established *pesantren* (Setiawan et al., 2022). This model of educational institutions is born from, by, and for the community. This illustrates that community-based education has existed long before Indonesia's independence; with institutions established and run by the community. Furthermore, *pesantren*, as key educational institutions, help communities adapt to social engineering (Saleh & Satriawan, 2020). In practice, three dimensions characterize this form of community-based education: cultural, educational, and social dimensions. Collectively, these dimensions position *pesantren* as a distinctive model of community-based education, possessing unique strengths and characteristics (Riskiyah, 2020).

The conceptual model of community-based education at that time was primarily recognized as *pesantren* (Murdiato et al., 2020). Moreover, *pesantren* is currently regulated under the Indonesian Law No. 20 of 2003 as a form of community-based education that accommodates the various demands and needs of society (Murdiato et al., 2020). Furthermore, Zulkarnain and Zubaedi explain that community-based education fosters the democratization of education. This creates a space for community freedom, positioning it as the center for community-based education in the development of the *pesantren* model (Zulkarnain & Zubaedi, 2021).

However, the rapid advancement of education today necessitates that *pesantren* innovate and adapt to maintain their existence within the educational landscape (Setiawan et al., 2022). This development is also influenced by the orientation of Industry 5.0, which emphasizes the integration of both soft skills

and hard skills into educational curricula (Rohmah, 2022). This partnership enables IBS administrators to better meet market demands, though it leads to increased decentralization and autonomy for IBS, thereby diminishing the community's traditional central role. IBS has emerged as a resilient model capable of navigating modernization and neoliberalism, with curricula that not only emphasize character and religious education but also address competencies required by Industry 5.0 (Joni Indra Wandu et al., 2022).

Sharif Jallow further explains that the presence of Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) in Indonesia's Muslim community plays a crucial role in the country's historical development and continues to provide education oriented toward religious and cultural values (Jallow, 2023). Students study Islam, Arabic, interpretation of the Qur'an, hadith, jurisprudence, morals, and various other sciences. In this study, researchers used literature research methods. A literature research method is an approach used to collect and analyze information from published related sources, such as journals, books, reports, and other documents. The aim is to obtain an overview of the topic under study and obtain the required information. In this research, we will discuss further: Islamic values in character building, the role of Islamic boarding school education in character building, and the role of Islamic boarding school education in character building (Islamic psychology perspective). This was also directly confirmed by the administrators of several IBS (Islamic Boarding Schools) during the interview session, as it stated: "... Most parents who send their children to IBS (Islamic Boarding School) are parents from religious families who want to maintain their religious values amidst the rapidly advancing technology and information. Additionally, they are also parents who are busy with work..." (the administrators of several IBS, Interviewed on August, 2024).

As previously mentioned, Islamic boarding schools are closely associated with character education through the concept of morality. Community-based education emphasizes empowerment and autonomy, but IBS now prioritizes market demands, thereby granting the community full autonomy and responsibility in managing education according to its values and needs, making the community's role passive. Visits to six IBS reveal innovations targeting the upper middle class, including improved facilities, integrated boarding programs, academic and non-academic offerings, institutional partnerships, and international curricula, distancing IBS from traditional community-driven education. Also, various innovations implemented at Islamic Boarding

Schools (IBS) reflect the aspirations of the students' guardians, which have been systematically integrated by the IBS management. As stated during the interview: "... The facilities provided at IBS are designed to differ from those of conventional Islamic boarding school models. Specifically, the rooms are structured to limit the number of students per room, ensuring optimal comfort for the students. This consideration is particularly important as some students prefer less crowded living environments. Furthermore, each room is equipped with spacious wardrobes for individual students, allowing a single room to comfortably accommodate up to 10 students without compromising their comfort." (The Administrators of IBS, Interviewed on August, 2024).

This flexibility arises from the privatization of schools, granting IBS full authority over their structural management. Consequently, IBS can independently formulate policies regarding curriculum design, facilities, and evaluations, allowing them to respond effectively to market needs and create rational development opportunities.

The emergence of Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) as a modern form of community-based education is tied to meeting global industry needs (Abdullah, 2020) while preserving societal values and cultural norms, which drive parents to choose IBS for their children. This aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, which posits that individuals possess three primary forms of capital: social capital, economic capital, and cultural capital (Jaeger, 2022). In analyzing this phenomenon, cultural capital emerges as the most relevant lens for understanding the transformation of community-based education. Simply put, the cultural capital introduced by Bourdieu refers to non-material assets held and distributed among individuals, which also serve as symbolic indicators of one's social status (Xu & Jiang, 2020). However, traditional community-based education struggles to meet global industry demands, prompting the rise of IBS as a more adaptive model. While IBS addresses these aspirations and facilitates the distribution of cultural capital, it has also shifted traditional education away from its original purpose, diminishing its essence and existence

Analysis of Parental Choice in Influencing IBS demands

According to Burns et.al, parental choice refers to the right of parents to select the school for their children based on their values, goals, and preferences (Burns et al., 2022). This choice is important for ensuring that children benefit from high-quality education (Burns et al., 2022). Also, Perwita and Widuri highlight that parents'

decisions are often influenced by their interactions with colleagues, friends, and social networks when choosing their children's education (Perwita & Widuri, 2023). Besides, Shiferaw and Kenea also note that the concept of school choice gives parents more freedom to select the best school for their children (Shiferaw & Kenea, 2024). Additionally, it is essential to recognize that not all schools serve the same demographic, and different teaching methods or school designs can cater to various types of children. Parents consider various factors when choosing an Islamic Boarding School (IBS), as expressed by some parents during the interview: '...We chose IBS for our child's education because the curriculum offered is an international curriculum that is relevant to current developments and can prepare students to enter top universities. This is evident from the distribution of alumni in prestigious universities, as highlighted in the school's brochures and website. Additionally, the teachers (ustadz and ustadzah) at IBS possess capabilities not only in religious studies but also in academic and non-academic fields. This is supported by the fact that the teaching staff are graduates of reputable universities, both domestically and internationally.' (The Parents of IBS students, Interviewed on August, 2024)

Observations to some IBS reveal that IBS integrates the *Merdeka Curriculum* with the *Cambridge Curriculum* as a strategic response to the growing demand for holistic education that is globally competitive (Lundeto et al., 2021). This dual-curriculum approach not only equips students with the skills necessary to excel in a rapidly evolving global landscape but also ensures broad access for alumni to pursue higher education at prestigious universities. At the same time, IBS maintains a strong emphasis on religious values, which serves as a key distinguishing factor and a major draw for prospective families (Lundeto et al., 2021). Additionally, the availability of high-quality facilities emerged as another significant factor influencing parents' decisions to choose IBS. These insights were corroborated through interviews with multiple stakeholders: "The environment of Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) is highly conducive to students' learning, as it offers a serene atmosphere, being situated away from urban noise, and is complemented by a green and natural setting. This creates an optimal learning environment that supports both academic and non-academic development. Furthermore, IBS provides comprehensive facilities, ensuring that students have access to all necessary resources within the school premises. As parents, we feel reassured and secure, knowing that our children do not need to leave the boarding school environment, allowing them to

focus more effectively on their education.” (Multiple stakeholders, Interviewed on August, 2024).

In addition to a conducive learning environment, parents’ school preferences are also influenced by the structured routines within the boarding school and the sense of security regarding their children’s social interactions: “Beyond providing a safe environment, IBS fosters discipline through structured daily routines, which students internalize even outside the boarding school. At home, they independently maintain good habits, such as praying on time and encouraging family worship. As parents, we are pleased with the strong character, politeness, diligence, and responsibility our children develop, despite the higher costs compared to regular schools. For working parents, IBS offers peace of mind by ensuring a supervised and morally guided environment, with separate dormitories for boys and girls to prevent negative social influences. Additionally, a monitoring app allows parents to track their children’s activities and receive real-time updates on rule compliance.” (The Administrators of IBS, Interviewed on August, 2024).

Through direct observation, the author was able to experience the various facilities available at IBS, including a health clinic, minimarket, dormitories, laboratories, classrooms, sports fields, an auditorium, a library, a bookstore, a cafeteria, and other amenities. These parental statements align with those expressed by Saleh and Satriawan (2020) identifying several key factors that influence parents’ decisions to enroll their children in schools, including the image of harmony, quality service, expectations, and egalitarian pride (Rahtikawati, 2021). Parents often seek high-quality schools that they believe will benefit their children. Giyarsi (2023) adds that, beyond a school’s reputation and image, parents desire good service for their children (Giyarsi, 2023). Aliyah et al., (2023) define quality service as meeting or exceeding the eight national education standards: curriculum, processes, graduate competencies, educators and staff, facilities, management, funding, and assessment.

Additionally, numerous studies highlight the critical role parents play in school selection (Sandra et al., 2024). Many parents choose boarding schools to instill good values in their children, particularly when they feel unable to manage their children’s education at home (Sadali, 2020). Busy work schedules often limit parents’ ability to fulfill their educational roles (Rahtikawati, 2021). Research by Susilo and Wulansari indicates that boarding school management effectively achieves national educational goals while aligning with religious values (Susilo & Wulansari, 2020). Data analysis using NVivo reveals various factors influencing parental

choice, as illustrated in the accompanying spider chart (Figure 1).

The concept of parental choice, often correlated with the market’s principles such as freedom in education that gives opportunities for the development of education to continually respond to demand in its management (Burns et al., 2022). Consequently, schools like IBS become such as commodities that can be offered to consumers, namely parents. Findings indicate that parents choose Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) based on their inclusive curriculum, facilities, and safe learning environment (Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023). Qualitative data from in-depth interviews reveal that parents select IBS not only for their religious focus but also for their ability to offer a holistic education encompassing intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. Furthermore, IBS also adopts international curricula, such as the Cambridge Curriculum, to ensure that students achieve proficient English language skills, enabling them to compete globally with their international peers. Surveys indicate 62 percent of parents view IBS as essential for modern needs, while 80 percent believe the curriculum meets expectations. This reflects the assumption that providing high-quality education is a fundamental desire of every parent to ensure a secure future for their children.

Parental decision-making in choosing an IBS is a deliberate process influenced by Bourdieu’s three forms of capital, as outlined in the NVivo chart. Cultural capital plays a significant role, as parents’ educational backgrounds, reading habits, and family educational culture shape their school preferences (Hadiwinata & Hudriani, 2022). Highly educated parents prioritize institutions that balance religious and academic values. IBS supports holistic development through academics and extracurricular activities, including sports, arts, and language acquisition. Social capital further reinforces these preferences through discussions with relatives, religious communities, and alumni networks. Recommendations from successful IBS graduates, who have gained admission to prestigious universities both domestically and internationally, strengthen the school’s reputation and appeal to prospective parents. Additionally, economic capital plays a crucial role, as IBS is an exclusive institution that requires substantial financial resources. This financial barrier limits access to families who can afford the associated costs, reinforcing IBS’s status as a selective educational institution (Kurniawan et al., 2023).

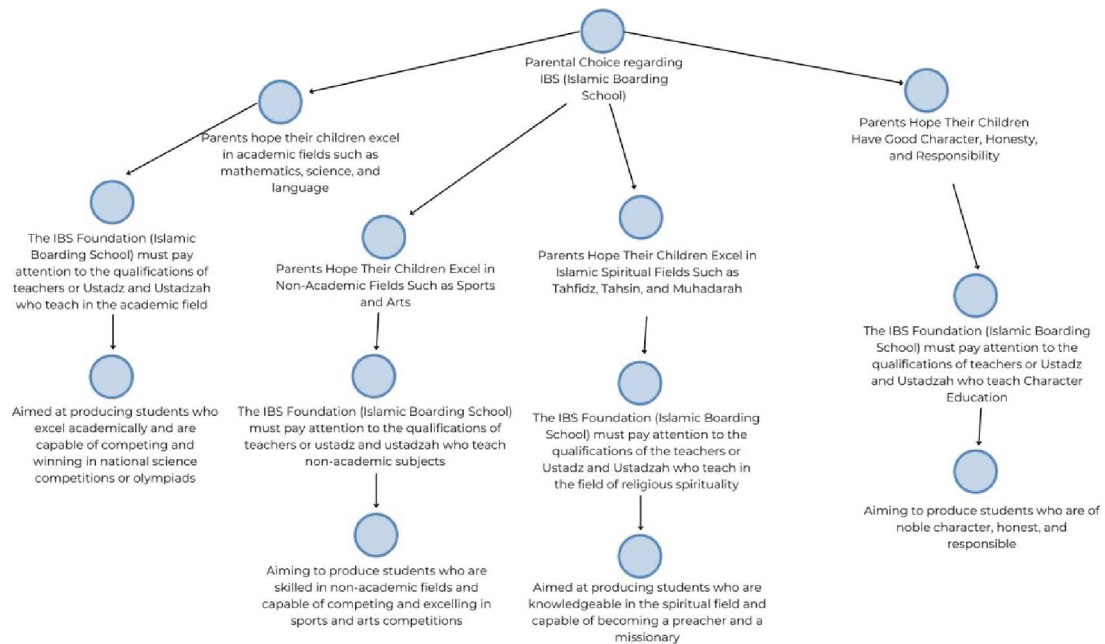


Figure 1 Parental Choice Analysis at Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) Using NVivo Spider Chart
Adapted from by Author 2024

Analysis of Social Class as IBS Segmentation in Society

Although boarding schools are often seen as more expensive than general educational institutions due to their higher quantity and quality of education compared to conventional systems (Rahtikawati, 2021), public interest has increased, driven by Indonesia's predominantly Muslim society and its preference for faith-based education (Hidayah, 2021). As educational institutions that integrate community-based learning with academic and character development, a strong reputation is essential for gaining public trust and ensuring the sustainability of these schools. However, the growing influence of neoliberalism challenges their growth, especially in education, requiring them to reconceptualize curricula and other key aspects to remain relevant. To expand their market, Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) implement clear segmentation strategies and offer integrated curricula. They combine religious education, such as *tahfidz* and *tahsin*, with science, technology, and practical skills. Findings from several boarding schools in Java show that some IBS combine religious education with subjects that promote technology, science, and practical skills. This holistic approach, aligned with global standards, ensures graduates can compete in the modern world while maintaining strong religious values.

One of the key concepts in Bourdieu's theory is

habitus, which refers to the internalized dispositions, values, and practices shaped by one's cultural and social environment (Xu & Jiang, 2020). Within IBS, institutional routines and the shared values of parents and students reflect a strong commitment to education that upholds moral and religious principles despite higher costs (Benjamins, 2025). Parents see IBS not just as a school but as a community that aligns with their lifestyle and values. Interviews with parents highlight these considerations: "We chose a modern Islamic boarding school because of its comprehensive facilities, international curriculum, and opportunities for overseas education. The environment also aligns with our lifestyle." (The Parents of IBS students, Interviewed on August, 2024).

Another parent emphasized: "We want a balance between religious and general education. Our goal is for our child to have strong religious knowledge while also developing skills for the workforce, which is why we chose a school that integrates modern approaches without compromising Islamic values." (The Parents of IBS students, Interviewed on August, 2024).

IBS employs a multifaceted market segmentation strategy, considering demographic such as regional differences in Java and West Sumatra. Psychographics address parental priorities like academic excellence and moral development. Psychological factors also play a role, as parents value structured, faith-based education

for their children's well-being. Ultimately, the interaction between Bourdieu's capital theory and neoliberal market dynamics illustrates how IBS navigates an economically competitive yet culturally rooted educational landscape (Nugraha, 2025). While schools must adopt market-oriented strategies like segmentation and curriculum diversification, Bourdieu's framework reveals the underlying social processes that enable IBS to do so. By providing better access to educational resources, IBS maintains its relevance in an increasingly globalized world while simultaneously reinforcing existing social hierarchies.

To segment the market, boarding schools consider several factors, including demographics, psychographics, and psychological aspects, as outlined by Camilleri (Haleem et al., 2022). Market orientation in Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) considers three key factors. (1) Demographics focus on geographical positioning, with differences in student preferences between West Sumatra and Java shaped by culture and socio-economics. (2) Psychographics highlight shared values, where parents seek both academic excellence and strong Islamic upbringing, even at high costs. (3) Psychological factors emphasize the belief that a structured religious environment benefits children's mental and emotional development. Aware of teenage challenges, parents increasingly prioritize disciplined education to ensure moral and social stability. These factors collectively influence parental decisions in choosing IBS for their children's education (Figure 2).

Market Forces of Islamic Boarding Schools

In examining contemporary educational concepts, which are characterized by the rapid influence of globalization, there is a need for traditional pedagogical approaches (Haleem et al., 2022). Interestingly, the education sector has evolved into a dynamic market force, moving away from isolated concepts. This evolution compels schools to adaptively formulate policies to reassess strategies and consider market-oriented approaches (Nisak et al., 2024). Consequently, Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) must adapt to competitive demands to ensure high-quality education (Khambali et al., 2022). This approach is a manifestation of market-driven strategies, with the primary goal of fostering customer loyalty to encourage repeat enrolment (Siti Julaeah, 2024). From Bourdieu's perspective, globalization and market shifts have reshaped the structure of cultural capital in education. Traditionally rooted in cultural capital, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) now face pressure to adopt new forms of capital aligned with the global economy (Xu & Jiang, 2020). pesantren have institutionalized formal standards, transforming cultural capital into economic capital. However, according to Hidayah, this strategy presents challenges for IBS, as it necessitates continuous innovation and the ability to adapt to changing market conditions and parental preferences as consumers (Hidayah, 2021). Findings highlight how market forces shape Islamic boarding schools. A pesantren leader in Java stated: "We recognize

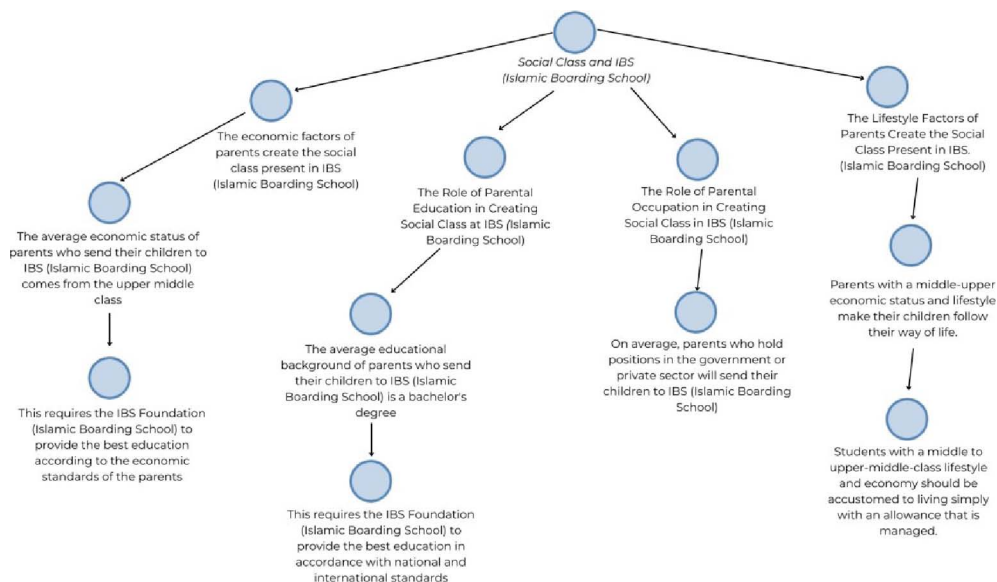


Figure 2 Social Class Analysis of IBS Using NVivo Spider Chart
Adapted from Author 2024

the need to adapt. While *pesantren* once focused solely on religious education, we now integrate academic programs aligned with job market demands.” Another leader emphasized: “Parents and students are more selective. If our curriculum isn’t market-relevant, students may lack the necessary skills for employment.” (A Leaders of IBS, Interviewed on August, 2024).

This shift reflects the commodification of education, where *pesantren* must balance religious identity with market-driven expectations. In a neoliberal framework, education transitions from character formation to economic utility, fostering customer loyalty through valued cultural capital—such as academic skills and alumni networks—convertible into social and economic gains. However, this transformation also reinforces inequality, as access to quality education remains limited to those with sufficient financial capital. Parental perspectives further confirm this shift: “We want our children to receive religious education while also being prepared for the job market. That’s why we chose a *pesantren* that offers strong academics, career opportunities, and university connections.” (The Parents of IBS students, Interviewed on August, 2024).

Findings reveal several factors that elucidate the market forces in Islamic boarding schools, which are illustrated through the spider web analysis below (Figure 3):

Based on the research findings, achieving the

objectives requires specific strategies to meet market demands across five key aspects. (1) Product: IBS offers tailored programs that align with parental expectations, integrating flagship curricula with high-quality facilities such as dormitories, laboratories, libraries, and sports amenities. (2) Price: IBS tuition fees are higher than public schools, reflecting the quality of education provided. Although 39 percent of parents acknowledge the high cost, demand remains strong, with tuition varying based on institutional offerings. (3) Location: IBS campuses in West Sumatra and Java are strategically placed for accessibility. For example, Darul Hikam in Bandung is situated in an educational district with easy public transport access, while Ar-Risalah Institution is near the city center, ensuring convenience. (4) Promotion: IBS employs digital marketing, word-of-mouth, and open house events to engage parents and students. Additionally, scholarships are offered to attract high-achieving students. (5) Person: IBS educators come from reputable domestic and international universities. Local graduates excel in Islamic studies, while international graduates contribute modern perspectives, fostering a balanced, innovative education system. These strategies position IBS as a competitive educational institution, meeting market demands while maintaining its core.

Education at IBS serves not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as a site for the accumulation and reproduction of cultural capital within

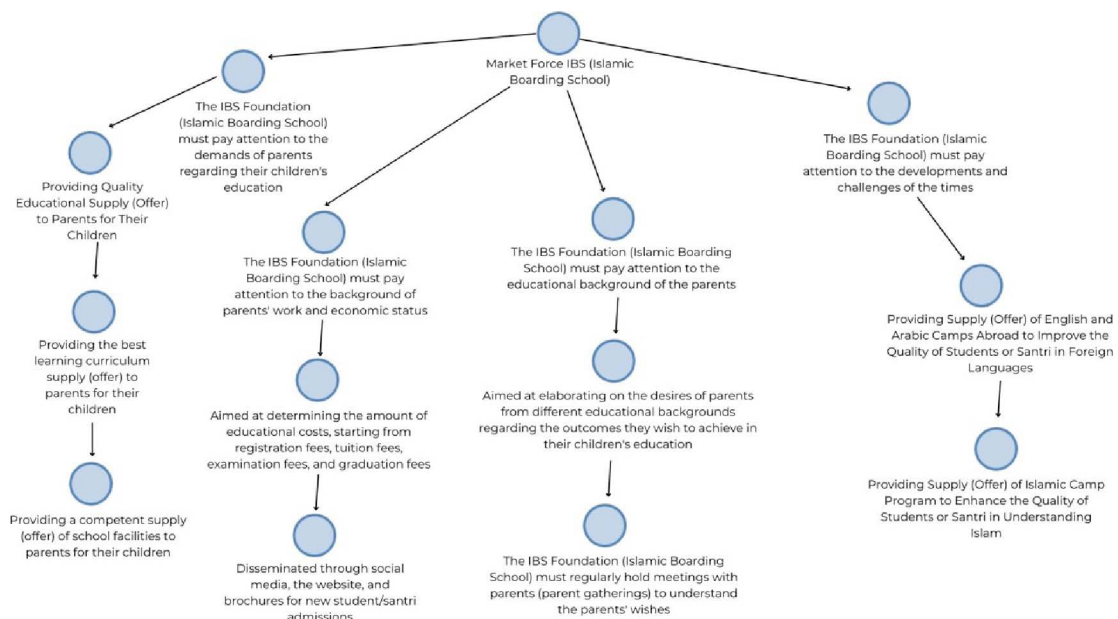


Figure 3 Market Force Analysis of IBS Using NVivo Chart Spider
Adapted from Author 2024

a neoliberal framework (Lahmar, 2020) so too have the questions on their purpose and impact in pluralistic Western societies. Amid this increasingly complex environment, questions are raised, both internally and externally, to determine the nature of Islamic educational goals, schools' knowledge and pedagogical practices. Analysis in this paper draws on multiple sources of data: classical and contemporary literature on education in Islam; the Department for Education (DfE). Research findings indicate that IBS's strategies such as enhancing its educational offerings, adjusting fees, strategic location, effective promotion, and recruiting qualified teachers can be analyzed through Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Xu & Jiang, 2020). The institution's elite curriculum and nationally/internationally recognized credentials represent institutionalized cultural capital, legitimizing IBS graduates in academic and professional competition. Facilities like laboratories and dormitories reflect objectified cultural capital, reinforcing social differentiation (Rohmah, 2022). The diverse teaching staff embody cultural capital, blending Islamic values with global perspectives. However, access to these resources depends on economic capital, as high tuition fees limit IBS to financially privileged groups. Thus, education at IBS is not merely a transfer of knowledge but also a battleground for cultural capital, where access to quality education operates as a mechanism of social selection, maintaining the exclusivity of certain groups.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Islamic Boarding Schools (IBS) in Indonesia have increasingly become a preferred educational option for parents, particularly among the upper-middle-class Muslim community, who seek a balanced education for their children. These schools, which span across both Sumatra and Java, represent a shift from traditional educational models by offering an integrated approach that combines religious instruction, moral development, and academic rigor. By aligning their curricula with both national and international standards. This research highlights IBS's role within market forces and social class dynamics. Government-granted autonomy and privatization enable continuous innovation, allowing IBS to respond to market demands. Education has become a market-driven commodity, positioning parents as consumers and reinforcing neoliberal values. Competition compels IBS to adapt by developing curricula, improving teacher qualifications, and expanding facilities. The increasing demand for enrollment in IBS has created

powerful market dynamics that pressure schools to maintain relevance and appeal. This constant innovation not only helps IBS cater to the evolving expectations of parents but also reinforces its position as a leading educational choice. The multifaceted improvements within IBS ranging from the integration of academic and religious curricula to the enhancement of facilities demonstrate how these institutions are navigating the complexities of an education system influenced by both cultural values and neoliberal economic forces. Consequently, the continued diversification of offerings and the responsiveness to market forces are crucial for ensuring IBS remains a preferred educational institution.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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