

Educational Inequity in Pesantren: Examining How Parental Socioeconomic Status Shapes Student Achievement in Bandung

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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic status (SES) of a family in society is determined by several factors, such as income, education, and occupation. This study adopts James Coleman's social capital framework to investigate how parents' socioeconomic status can influence student achievement in one of the pesantren in Bandung, West Java, as well as the disparities it generates within the institution. While this topic has been widely examined, studies that specifically explore this reality in pesantren, which have different systems, cultures, and resources from other institutions, remain very limited. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how parents' socioeconomic status may affect students' achievements in the pesantren. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach. Data collection was carried out through multiple methods; open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and analysis of student achievement records. The informants included nineteen parents of high-achieving students, three homeroom teachers, and two school principals. The findings demonstrate a strong relationship between parental socioeconomic status and student achievement. All high-achieving students at the pesantren came from middle-to-upper economic backgrounds families, well-educated, and actively involved in community organizations. The conclusion of this study highlights the importance of affirmative programs for students from lower-class families to enhance their competencies so that they can compete on an equal footing with others.

Keywords: Educational inequity; pesantren; socioeconomic status; student achievement

Introduction

SES refers to the social and economic status of an individual or family in society, which is usually determined by factors such as income, education, and occupation. One of the main ways SES affects academic achievement is through access to resources (Mukundi, 2024, p. 1). Children from rich families have access

to better resources and opportunities (Madhavan, 2023, p. 2). This access is an advantage for them because it can support higher achievement.

Meanwhile, students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds can face barriers to learning, which impacts their educational outcomes and perpetuates the cycle of socioeconomic inequality. This can contribute to broader social problems, including reduced workforce diversity and impaired social mobility. If these issues are not addressed, they can exacerbate educational inequalities and hinder equal opportunities for academic success. Addressing these challenges is critical to achieving a more equitable education system and fostering more inclusive socioeconomic development (Mukundi, 2024).

The impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on students' academic achievement has been extensively studied, highlighting its significant influence on various aspects of their education. There are several previous studies that explore similar topics, namely 'Socioeconomic Status, Parenting, and Child Development' (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002), 'Socioeconomic Status and Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Review of Research' (Sirin, Selcuk R., 2005), 'Correlation of socioeconomic status (SES) of parents with academic achievement of fifth grade elementary school students' (Saputra et al., 2025), 'The Influence of Social Status, Economic Conditions, and Parental Motivation on the Learning Achievement of Elementary School Students in Kampung Beru, Gantarangkeke District, Bantaeng Regency' (Murni et al., 2020), 'The influence of social status and economic conditions of parents on the social studies learning achievement of elementary school students 25 Madello Soppeng Regency' (Hardiyanti, 2018), etc.

From all the studies that have been reviewed, no research has specifically examined the influence of parents' socioeconomic status on students' academic and non-academic achievement in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). There is a private *pesantren* operating under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Jam'iyyah Persatuan Islam in Bandung, West Java. This institution has its own unique characteristics, offering four levels of education; kindergarten, elementary, junior high, and senior high school, and serving students from various regions and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This study employs a case study approach to understand social reality holistically and realistically, with the potential to generate deeper insights by exploring hidden factors such as students' internal motivation, parenting styles, and teachers' instructional methods, all of which significantly impact student achievement. Moreover, the novelty of this research lies in its geographical focus, as no prior studies have been conducted in Pangalengan district, an agricultural and livestock-based area in Bandung Regency, West Java. The findings of this study can serve as a valuable data source for *pesantren* across Indonesia in addressing achievement gaps related to socioeconomic disparities.

There are two research questions formulated in this study, namely:

1. What is the socioeconomic status of the parents of high-achieving students' in *pesantren* in Bandung?
2. How does the socioeconomic and social status of parents influence student achievement?

The aims of this research are:

1. To describe the socioeconomic status of the parents of high-achieving students' in pesantren in Bandung.
2. To analyze the relationship between the socioeconomic status of parents and student achievement in pesantren in Bandung.

Literature Review

The role of parents in children's education

Parents play a very crucial role in a child's educational success. This is because a child's education is a shared responsibility between parents and the school. Good collaboration between parents and schools plays an important role in supporting children's academic and non-academic development (Winarti et al., 2023, p. 2308). Children have different abilities in participating in learning at school. Some of them may experience difficulties in their academic process, which prevents them from developing in their education (p. 2303). Therefore, parents are expected to be actively involved in supporting their children's education, both academic and non-academic (p. 2304).

In addition, Winarti et al., also mentioned several other important points regarding the role of parents in their children's education, namely as role models whose behavior is imitated by children so that they must always behave well, provide social support that can increase self-confidence and high motivation for children, teach moral and ethical values to shape good character in children, create a supportive learning environment so that children can learn with focus and productivity, provide direction and guidance to prepare them for the future, encourage independence so that children can be more confident, responsible and able to solve life's challenges well, and build positive relationships (pp. 2304-2315). In addition, parents also need to provide appreciation and motivation (Warga School, 2024).

The type of family a child comes from, whether a nuclear family (two parents and children), a single parent, or a stepfamily, can also significantly affect their academic achievement. Nuclear families are often considered ideal for raising children, as they provide stability and support from both parents (Rouse & Barrows, 2006). According to Bysenk and Locksoh (2011), extroverted children tend to come from smaller families, which helps them adjust better to school and participate more in class. Conversely, children from larger families often have lower levels of education and perform less academically. Powell and Stellman (2010) stated that a child's academic success depends on the time and attention given by parents, and in larger families, each child may receive less of these inputs, including financial support, attention, and encouragement.

The relationship between the socioeconomic status of parents and children's achievements.

The socioeconomic status is the combination of a variety of factors out of which monthly family income, literacy levels of parents and their occupation or sources of income are the most important indicators of academic achievements. The family socioeconomic status can facilitate the academic achievements of the

students in three important ways i.e. provision of financial and material support, timely and appropriate guidance from paid sources and safer and elevated social status than that possessed by the rest of the society. Children from low socioeconomic status families struggle hard in achieving their developmental goals. A child from low socioeconomic status, despite their high capabilities, is more likely to secure low grades than a child of the same capabilities but from a higher socioeconomic background. Socioeconomic status is also influential in raising the mental and emotional well-being of children which positively affects their academic performance (Ali et al., 2023, p. 8).

Parents who have higher levels of education tend to have higher expectations for their children's academic success. Research by Okumu, Nakajjo, and Isoke (2008) showed that when parents attain higher levels of academic achievement, their children are less likely to drop out of school. These parents are often more involved in their children's education, offering support, guidance, and resources to help them succeed. This involvement can include helping with homework, fostering curiosity, and encouraging positive attitudes toward learning. Research by Nannyonjo (2007) shows that children whose parents have higher education tend to perform better academically. This finding is consistent with previous research by Hanushek (2005), which showed that maternal education significantly affects students' test scores, although paternal educational attainment tends to have a stronger impact.

The importance of equity in Islamic education

Based on the principles and theories of equity in education, there are five main goals: encouraging all students to achieve the expected learning outcomes, ensuring equal access to education, providing non-discriminatory opportunities for all learners, guaranteeing fair treatment in the learning process, and offering adequate and balanced educational resources (Solis, 2000; Kenayathulla & Radzi, 2017).

According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), three key elements must be prioritized in implementing equity in education: educational inputs and resources, the learning process, and quality educational outcomes. These elements are interconnected and must be well-managed to achieve educational goals (p. 51). UNICEF also emphasizes the importance of zakat management institutions in prioritizing zakat distribution for improving education quality and supporting education policies that promote educational transformation (p. 52).

The principles of equity and inclusivity in Islamic education are reflected in Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 143.

“And likewise We have made you (Muslims) a “middle nation” that you may be witnesses over mankind and that the Messenger (Muhammad) may be a witness over you. We did not make the direction of prayer that you (used to face) to it except that We might know who follows the Messenger and who turns back on his heels. Indeed, it is very difficult, except for those whom Allah has guided. And Allah will not

waste your faith. Indeed, Allah is Most Gracious, Most Merciful to mankind.”

Based on the verse, Islamic education must uphold the principles of justice and inclusivity. As *ummatan wasathan* (a just and balanced nation), it is required to be fair, equitable, and accessible to all, without discrimination based on students’ backgrounds. In Islam, knowledge is a right for all humans without exception, and education must be rooted in compassion and care for others.

Method

The study will employ a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. Case Study is a method that provides an in-depth examination of a single entity (e.g., an organization, program, event, or individual) within its real-world context. This research method allows researchers to explore phenomena more comprehensively, so that the information obtained is richer and more complex which may not be found by other research methods (Creswell, 2014, p. 97).

The data collection process was carried out through Online open-ended questionnaires for parents, In-depth interviews (with teachers, principals, and parents), Direct observation in the school, and document analysis (report cards, certificates, attendance data, etc.). The informants in this study included 19 parents of high-achieving students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, 3 class teachers from different levels, and the 2 principals from different levels in pesantren in Bandung. The data analysis techniques used were data reduction, thematic categorization (economic findings, social status, academic achievement, non-academic achievement), and Conclusion or drawing and interpretation.

Results

In this study, data were collected online through open-ended questionnaires involving 19 parents of high-achieving students from the RA/TK, MI/SD, MTS/SMP, and MA/SMA levels at one pesantren in Bandung, West Java. In addition, interviews were conducted with the principals of the MI and MA levels, two MI teachers, and one RA teacher. Based on the data collection process, the following conclusions were drawn:

Socioeconomic Profile of High-Achieving Students' Parents at PPI 259 Firdaus Pangalengan

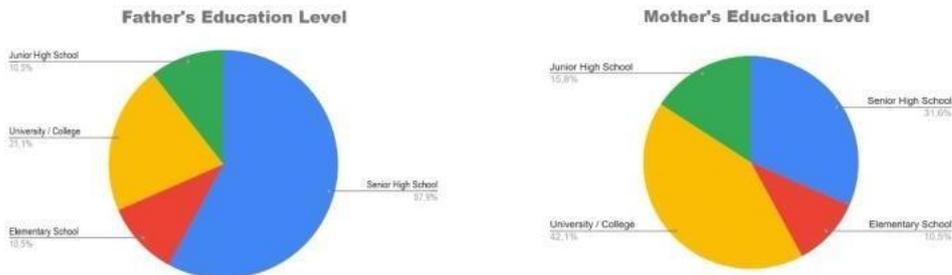
Parents Educational Background

The analysis shows that most parents of high-achieving students—especially mothers, tend to have secondary or higher levels of education.

Figure 1 shows that 57.9% of the fathers of high-achieving students are high school graduates, followed by 23% with a university degree, 15% with junior high school education, and 8% with elementary education. Meanwhile, the majority of

mothers hold a university degree (42.1%), followed by high school graduates (31%), junior high graduates (23%), and elementary graduates (8%).

Figure 1. Parent's education level



In summary, most parents of high-achieving students in Bandung pesantren have a secondary or higher education background, with 44.7% being high school graduates and 31.6% university graduates. This finding indicates that parents' social status, particularly their education level, has a significant influence on students' academic achievement in the pesantren.

This influence is also supported by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) stated that *"...the best hidden and most socially determinant educational investment is undoubtedly the domestic transmission of cultural capital"* (p. 244). In other words, a child's academic success is strongly shaped by the cultural capital inherited from their immediate environment, namely the family. Bourdieu further explained that this capital is often transmitted implicitly through everyday practices such as communication style, reading habits, valuing knowledge, and the encouragement to achieve their goals (p. 245).

In the context of pesantren in Bandung, the cultivation of an intellectual culture within the family is also reflected in the practices of the parents of a high-achieving student in English. They shared their approach to supporting their child's learning at home as follows:

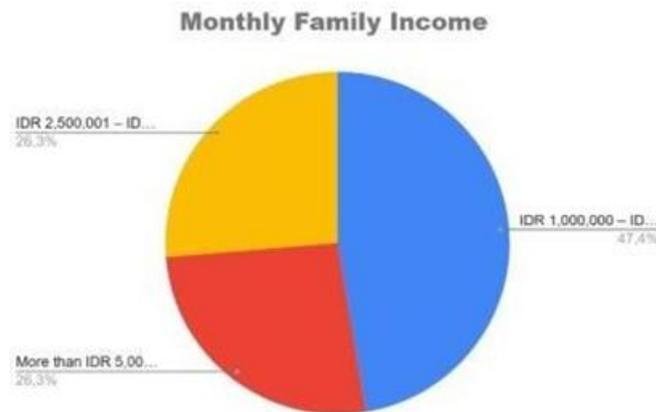
"Aside from learning at school, we also try to provide additional learning at home by enrolling our child in holiday camps during school breaks, providing reading books along with worksheets, and watching foreign-language films together to improve language skills. We also engage in discussions about technological developments, life experiences, and future possibilities to broaden knowledge and enhance our child's critical thinking" (Parent of a student, university graduate, personal communication, June 3, 2025).

In Islam, a person's immediate environment is believed to significantly influence their quality of life. This is emphasized in a hadith narrated by Abu Dawud and at-Tirmidhi: *"From Abu Hurairah RA, the Prophet SAW said, 'A person follows the religion of his close friend, so be mindful of whom you befriend.'"* Based on this hadith, it can be concluded that the family, as the closest environment to a child, plays a crucial role in shaping the child's character.

Family Economic Profile

According to Figure 2, which presents the monthly income distribution of parents of high-achieving students, the majority (47.4%) earn between IDR 1,000,000 and IDR 2,500,000 per month. The remaining parents are evenly divided: 26.3% earn between IDR 2,500,001 and IDR 5,000,000, while another 26.3% earn more than IDR 5,000,000 monthly.

Figure 2. Economic Profile of Students' Parents



Referring to the poverty line of Bandung Regency in 2024—IDR 455,636 per capita per month, all parents of high-achieving students in pesantren in Bandung fall into the middle and upper economic class. This is based on the 2023 population data of Pangalengan District (where the pesantren is located), which recorded 163,863 people and 35,875 households (Badan Pusat Statistik, pp. 24–33). From these figures, the average household size is approximately 4.57 persons per family, a relevant indicator in assessing a family's socioeconomic status by showing the level of financial responsibility.

For example, in the lowest income group (47.4% earning IDR 2,500,000/month), each family member has around IDR 547,500/month, which is slightly above the poverty line. The second group also remains just above the poverty threshold. Meanwhile, the highest income group (earning at least IDR 5,000,000/month) reaches a per capita income of about IDR 1,093,660/month, placing them in the middle to upper economic class. Families in this group likely have more stable financial conditions and better access to services like education and healthcare.

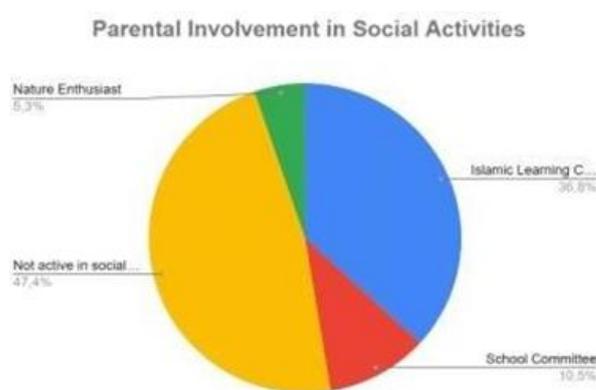
Based on this calculation, it can be concluded that most high-achieving students in pesantren in Bandung come from families with lower-middle to upper-middle socioeconomic backgrounds. This finding indicates a strong correlation between students' academic achievement and their parents' economic status. Financially capable parents are more likely to support their children's education by providing complete learning facilities at home and school, enrolling them in extracurricular activities, actively participating in school meetings and volunteering, monitoring academic progress, and engaging in discussions about their future.

Parental Involvement in Social Activities

The distribution chart of parental participation in community social activities shows a relatively high rate, with 52.6% of parents involved. Specifically, 36.8% are active in religious communities, 10.5% serve on school committees, and 5.3% participate in environmental activities.

Parents who are actively engaged in religious, social, and environmental activities shared that such involvement helps them stay informed about valuable opportunities for personal and child development, such as competitions and enrichment programs. They also noted that these activities enhance their own knowledge, improve soft skills, and serve as a source of inspiration for their children to participate in organizations and develop leadership abilities (Personal communication, June 2–7, 2025).

Figure 3. Parental involvement in social activities



Ibn Khaldun described the connection between education and social groups through the concept of *ashabiyah*, which means *esprit de corps*, familial unity, group cohesion, solidarity, and collective consciousness (Mulasi et al., 2023, p. 210). According to him, *ashabiyah* as a form of social relationship and cultural transmission, can have a positive impact on the success of community education (p. 207). Conversely, he emphasized that weak social bonds among groups may lead to a decline in educational quality. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun argued that education should be designed to foster solidarity and social responsibility, as a cohesive society is more likely to develop knowledge and educational innovation (p. 216). Supporting this view, Coleman (1988) introduced the concept of *intergenerational closure*, emphasizing that parents' social involvement is essential in forming collective norms that positively influence children's academic outcomes (pp. 106–107).

However, the fact that 47.4% of parents are not involved in any community presents a unique finding, despite the lack of external social capital, their children are still able to achieve high performance. This suggests that their strength lies in internal social capital, particularly within the nuclear family unit.

Teachers' and Principal's Perceptions of the Relationship Between Parents' Socioeconomic Status and Students' Academic Achievement

According to the teachers, in the Pangalengan sub-district, Bandung Regency, where most residents work as farm laborers, parents earning IDR

2,500,000 per month are already considered middle class. These parents are generally consistent in paying school fees, provide adequate learning facilities for their children, maintain regular communication with teachers, and actively support school programs (Interview with homeroom teachers, June 4, 2025 via phone).

A *Raudhatul Athfal* (kindergarten) teacher described students from upper-middle-class families as more confident, open, critical, and outspoken. They are more willing to challenge teachers and peers when they disagree. Another teacher added that these students tend to ask more questions and dominate class discussions. While student from low-income families, teachers observed that they are usually shy and quiet. However, they also noted exceptions some students from high-income families lack confidence, social skills, and low academic achievement.

One of the teacher with seven years teaching experience at the pesantren stated:

“Parents’ economic status does have an influence on santri achievement, but it’s not absolute. In terms of academic performance, what matters more is the attention and involvement of parents in supporting their children’s learning” (Personal interview, June 4, 2025)

Lack of communication and attention from parents often results in learning gaps and lower academic performance. The principal of the *Madrasah Aliyah* (Senior High School), stated that students from low-income families often face academic difficulties (Personal communication, May 29, 2025). Even so, some low-income parents do engage actively with teachers and support their children's education. Teachers have also found a few santri from lower economic backgrounds who perform well academically and show strong leadership and social skills, though such cases are rare. Overall, they concluded that most high-achieving students at their pesantren come from middle- and upper-class families.

According to the principal of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (Elementary School), the main key to make student achieve excellent is strong collaboration between parents and the pesantren. He emphasized the need for parental involvement in at-home learning, tracking academic progress, and participating in school activities. For the students who come from underprivileged families, *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* level has initiated support programs such as waiving monthly fees, building fees, and student worksheets. While for the other levels of the pesantren have connect donors with santri in need.

The principal also highlighted that welfare challenges affect not only students but also teachers. He noted the difficulty in improving teachers' welfare through certification or another government programs because his pesantren is a private Islamic school under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Jam'iyyah Persatuan Islam. He stressed that teacher welfare is crucial, as it directly influences performance, commitment, and job satisfaction, which in turn affect classroom learning (Personal communication, June 15, 2025).

Conclusion

Promoting equity in the implementation of pesantren education is crucial to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to achieve and reach their full potential. This study reveals that all high-achieving students at PPI 259 Firdaus Pangalengan come from families with relatively strong economic and social backgrounds. Their access to educational resources and additional support through parental social capital has shown a significant impact on their academic success. This highlights the urgent need for affirmative programs such as scholarships, talent development activities, skill enhancement programs, and inclusive learning curricula to ensure that underprivileged students also have equal access to quality education.

For Jam'iyyah PERSIS, optimizing productive waqf for pesantren could be a practical solution. Successfully addressing achievement gaps rooted in socioeconomic disparities would enhance the role and credibility of PERSIS pesantren, not only as institutions focused on Islamic religious education but also as exemplary models of inclusive and equitable Islamic education.

Recommendations

- a. For the pesantren: Pesantren should foster active communication with parents from all backgrounds and implement programs that educate both students and parents. These programs must be contextual and flexible to ensure wider participation and promote stronger school–parent collaboration to improve student learning outcomes. In addition, pesantren should provide affirmative programs such as educational scholarships and enrichment activities for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, ensuring equal opportunities for all students to achieve academic success regardless of their family's economic condition.
- b. For parents: Parents should remain actively engaged in their children's education despite financial limitations. This includes supporting learning routines at home, instilling school-aligned values, motivating children to succeed, and encouraging positive habits that enhance their skills and confidence.
- c. For *Jam'iyyah PERSIS*: It is necessary to develop and optimize *productive waqf* for pesantren, such as cooperatives, cultivable land, or other sustainable initiatives that can help support the educational needs of students from lower-income families. The allocation of *zakat* funds should also prioritize education development as part of a long-term sustainable development effort. Additionally, there is a need to actively promote the importance of *ber-jam'iyyah* (community affiliation) as a form of social capital that can greatly benefit both the development of education and the *Jam'iyyah* itself.
- d. For future research: This study focused on nineteen parents of high-achieving students. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample, including students with lower academic performance, to produce more robust and generalizable findings. A mixed-method approach is also recommended to better assess the impact of parents' socioeconomic status on student

achievement in pesantren. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the data collected will be deeper and more comprehensive, enabling findings from a holistic perspective.

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