

***Pesantren* Graduates and Social Mobility in the Global Era: Roles and Challenges**

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the integration of *pesantren* graduates into society and the labor market based on key indicators that determine successful integration. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through purposive sampling involving participants who had completed their education at the *Madrasah Aliyah* level (Senior High School) within *pesantren* institutions. Data validity was ensured through the triangulation of theories and sources, while data analysis involved the stages of data collection, reduction, and drawing conclusions. The findings reveal that *pesantren* graduates demonstrate in-depth religious knowledge, strong discipline, collaborative skills, and economic independence comparable to the general population. Importantly, their consistent exposure to structured and disciplined environments not only enables them to compete effectively in the job market but also to adapt to technological advancements, reassuring their potential in the ever-evolving job market.

Keywords: *pesantren* graduates, social mobility, global era, roles and challenges

Introduction

The life experienced by someone who lives in a *pesantren* and at home has quite significant differences. Individuals residing in an Islamic boarding school environment are expected to be independent and straightforward, making the most of their free time while also adhering to applicable rules (Irsyad et al., 2017). This unique environment fosters a character that is distinct from most people. *Pesantren*, as Islamic educational institutions, play a vital role in developing moral character and spiritual values, enabling *santri* (student) not only to apply religious knowledge but also to possess noble character (Sari & Faza, 2024).

Pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, have strong historical roots in the development of Indonesian civilization. From the pre-independence era to the reform era, *pesantren* has played an important role in shaping the moral, spiritual, and intellectual character of Muslims (Shodiq, 2023). The necessity of *pesantren* in the development of a civilized nation in Indonesia is a reality that cannot be overlooked. It is evident that since the kingdom of Islam in Aceh in the first centuries of the Hijria and continued in the era of the *Walisongo* until the beginning of the 20th century, many religious

leaders and scholars emerged as forerunners in new villages. Islamic traditional education institutions have evolved, particularly in Java and Madura, for centuries (Hakim & Aksa, 2021).

This institution not only produces scholars and religious leaders, but also nurtures national movement figures who significantly contribute to the development of national identity. Amidst the dynamics of globalization and rapid social transformation, *pesantren* graduates in the professional realm and modern society face increasingly complex and multidimensional challenges (Dakir & Anwar, 2020). Not only that but *pesantren* is also known as social laboratories of society (Siswanto, 2014) which play a crucial role in promoting development in all aspects of life.

The modernization of society, marked by the rapid development of information technology, the demands of an increasingly competitive job market, and increasing standards of professionalism, underscores the urgent need for graduates of *pesantren* to bridge the gap in technical skills. While they are equipped with strong religious competence, especially in the fields of *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, and *tasawuf*, the lack of mastery in technical skills, digital literacy, global communication, and adaptive abilities in modern professional culture is a pressing issue. This necessity highlights the importance of addressing how graduates of Islamic boarding schools can optimally integrate themselves into the ever-changing social and economic structure.

The dynamic progress of the era brings various hopes as well as new challenges for modern society, including for graduates of *pesantren*. These social and technological changes require *pesantren* educational institutions and their graduates to be able to adapt without losing their identity, a delicate balance they must strike. On the one hand, *pesantren* continue to strive to maintain traditional values and classical scientific practices that have become their foundation. However, at the same time, Islamic boarding schools are also required to be critical of every technological advance and social transformation that occurs at such a rapid pace. In this context, *pesantren* graduates are expected not only to be proficient in religious knowledge but also to possess adaptive, analytical, and solution-oriented abilities, enabling them to respond wisely to the challenges of the times. So that *pesantren* graduates can optimally integrate themselves into social and economic structures (Athoillah & Darmaningrum, 2023).

Several government policies, such as the *pesantren* education revitalization program outlined in Law No. 18 of 2019 concerning *pesantren*, have created opportunities for these institutions to transform into entities that meet the

needs of their communities. This includes the development of an integrative curriculum that combines religious knowledge and general knowledge. However, cultural, structural, and systemic challenges still become obstacles in the transition process of *pesantren* graduates to a more secular and competitive professional world of work. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct an in-depth study on how the integration strategy can be implemented effectively without compromising the Islamic identity and values of *pesantren*, which have become the nation's cultural and spiritual heritage.

This study aims to analyze the process of integration of *pesantren* graduates into the professional world and modern society. It highlights various factors that determine the success of this integration, such as the quality of the curriculum, the role of *pesantren* in developing non-religious skills, state policies, and public perceptions of *pesantren* graduates. This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategic contributions of Islamic boarding school graduates and the challenges that must be overcome to achieve harmonious integration between traditional values and the demands of modernity.

This study is enriched by a qualitative approach, which enables a profound understanding of the experiences and dynamics of graduates from *Madrasah Aliyah* Manahijul Huda Ngagel, Dukuhseti District. These graduates, with a *pesantren* background, have navigated their way in society and secured jobs that align with their expertise.

The technique for selecting informants was carried out with meticulous care through purposive sampling, which involves the deliberate selection of research subjects based on specific criteria, in this case, graduates of *Madrasah Aliyah* who have experience studying in a *pesantren* environment. To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies triangulation techniques, both source triangulation and theory triangulation. Source triangulation involves comparing information from multiple informants, while theory triangulation entails comparing field findings with various relevant theories. Data analysis is done descriptively qualitatively through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. This approach enables researchers to delve into the profound significance of the research subjects' experiences and comprehend the socio-cultural context that shapes their self-development process and job achievement.

Result and Discussion

Based on the comprehensive results of research conducted through in-depth interviews with graduates of *Madrasah Aliyah* Manahijul Huda Ngagel and field observations in the village of Ngagel and its surroundings, a documentation study of several graduates of *pesantren* who are now working in the professional sector or actively involved in society, it was found that their integration process shows varying patterns, depending on the background of the *pesantren*, type of work, and the social environment in which they live.

This study identified five aspects and indicators that are the benchmarks for the success of the integration of *pesantren* graduates into the professional world and modern society, namely:

Aspect	Indicators
Knowledge and	Mastering religious knowledge
	Mastering practical knowledge (vocational/general)
	Able to speak Arabic and English
	Skilled in information technology
Professionalism Islamic Attitude and Work Ethic	Sincere, trustworthy, and responsible
	Disciplined and professional
	Humble but confident (<i>Tawadhu'</i>)
	Independent and independent
Social Soft Skills	Communicative and persuasive
	Able to work together across groups
	Socially concerned
Public Integrity and Ethics	Maintaining manners in interactions
	Anti-corruption and manipulation
	Moderate and non-extremist thinking
Independence and Innovation	Having a Sharia entrepreneurial spirit
	Ready to adapt to the times
	Lifelong learning spirit

Basic Religious Competencies of *Pesantren*

The basic religious competencies of *pesantren* graduates have proven to be strong, especially in terms of worship and understanding basic fiqh. However, to address the challenges of preaching in the digital era, it is necessary to strengthen aspects of media literacy, interdisciplinary communication, and a moderate approach that aligns with the socio-religious context of a pluralistic society. In addition, the *pesantren* curriculum needs to be reorganized to align with the needs of contemporary society without compromising its scientific identity (Sholihah et al., 2022).

Pesantren is generally equipped with an adequate understanding of the basics of religion. They are not required to be proficient in reading *kitab kuning/turats* (yellow books). However, at least they can fulfill socio-religious

roles such as serving as an imam for prayer, leading tahlil, and, at an advanced level, becoming a khatib (Aly, 2015). Basic fiqh such as *tabarah*, prayer, and inheritance law are important provisions that they have. In addition, they understand the values of *hablum minallah* and *hablum minannas* as principles of vertical and horizontal relations in community life.

Some basic books considered important include *Taqrib* and *Ta'limul Muta'allim*, which not only provide a textual understanding of religion but also promote character-building. The emergence of various Islamic schools of thought is not a problem for graduates of *pesantren*, as they possess a strong religious foundation. Their attitudes tend to be inclusive and uphold the principle of "*lakum diinukum waliyadin*," meaning they are not easily provoked or interfered in the affairs of other groups.

Knowledge and Professionalism

The results of interviews and observations revealed a description of *pesantren* as educational institutions that foster religious, independent, and moral character. Graduates of *Pesantren* often demonstrate excellence in terms of discipline, hard work, and responsibility. Discipline is a prominent characteristic of *pesantren* graduates. During their education, *santri* is accustomed to undergoing a busy routine from early morning until night. Activities such as congregational prayer, reciting the Quran, studying the *Kitab Kuning*, and daily community service take place in a structured and disciplined manner.

Discipline is also a distinctive character that is formed during the *pesantren* period. The obligation to participate in structured activities and strict sanctions for violations form a tough mentality and high work ethic. When entering the workforce, graduates of *pesantren* demonstrates punctuality, responsibility, and the ability to communicate effectively. The values of sincerity, consent, and intention because of Allah are the spiritual foundations in carrying out professional duties. Although they do not specifically study a particular profession at *Pesantren*, graduates can adapt and develop themselves. This shows that *pesantren* education provides high resilience.

Graduates of *pesantren* are accustomed to completing tasks independently. They are trained not to rely on luxurious facilities and to have physical and mental resilience in the face of difficulties. In the world of work, this is manifested in the ability to complete work on time, a high willingness to learn, and a fighting spirit in the face of pressure. Islamic values, such as sincerity, trustworthiness, and intention in the service of Allah, form the moral

foundations for practical work. Graduates of *pesantren* tend to have a high level of loyalty and integrity towards the institutions or agencies where they work.

The results of the interview revealed that while *pesantren* does not explicitly teach vocational science or modern professional skills, the strong moral and spiritual educational background equips *pesantren* graduates with a unique adaptability. This adaptability allows them to easily transition into diverse work environments. Their professionalism is reflected in the following:

1. Good work ethics, such as respecting superiors, maintaining communication, and working according to the rules.
2. Interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, peaceful conflict management, and the ability to establish positive communication.
3. Their commitment to work quality is unwavering, as they view work as a form of worship and moral responsibility. This dedication instills confidence in their employers and colleagues.

Based on the research findings from interviews with several *pesantren* graduates, it is clear that these graduates possess a powerful work ethic, with spiritual values serving as the foundation for work integrity and loyalty. Their professionalism is evident in their responsibility, discipline, and high work ethic. However, there is a clear need for them to strengthen their technical skills and adapt to modern work culture, especially in areas related to technology, cross-sectoral communication, and management.

This finding aligns with (Mumtahanah, 2015) opinion, which states that *pesantren* not only produces religious graduates but also independent individuals who possess character and are prepared to face social life. High work ethic, discipline, and responsibility are the main capital that is carried over to the professional world of work. However, to become superior human resources in the context of modern industry, there is an urgent need for synergy between *pesantren* values and the provision of 21st-century skills, such as digital literacy, problem-solving, and other professional soft skills.

Social Soft Skills

One of the challenges in integrating into modern society is the readiness to face technological developments and possessing a responsible character in society and the world of work. Although *santri* is accustomed to a low-tech environment, most graduates of *pesantren* is able to adapt to social media and basic use of technology. The main obstacle is in terms of filtering information and using technology productively.

However, the spiritual and moral literacy skills they gain from *turats* (classical books) provide a framework for filtering information and avoiding harmful content. This moral sensitivity is a natural filter that graduates from other education systems rarely possess.

Based on the results of in-depth interviews conducted with informants, four main points were obtained regarding the digital literacy of Islamic boarding school graduates, namely:

1. Adaptation to Information Technology

Upon their departure from the *pesantren*, a significant number of graduates displayed a remarkable enthusiasm and adaptability towards technology. Many of them took it upon themselves to learn how to use social media, office software, and online communication platforms like Zoom or Google Meet.

2. Use of Social Media

Pesantren graduates often utilize social media as a means of preaching, educating, and promoting small businesses. They demonstrate the ability to convey Islamic values contextually on digital platforms. However, there are still obstacles to managing digital content professionally, such as visual design (creating engaging and visually appealing posts), media algorithms (understanding how social media algorithms work to reach a wider audience), and digital marketing techniques (promoting products or services effectively online).

3. Barriers to Critical Digital Literacy

One of the biggest challenges is the ability to filter information and utilize technology productively. The lack of formal training in the use of technology makes some graduates easily exposed to hoax information or have difficulty sorting educational content from mere entertainment.

4. The Role of Moral Literacy as an Information Filter

Interestingly, moral and spiritual literacy acquired from *pesantren* becomes a natural means of filtering digital information. Values derived from classical books such as *Ta'limul Muta'allim*, *Adabul 'Alim wal Muta'allim*, and *Bidayatul Hidayah* make *pesantren* graduates more sensitive to harmful content such as pornography, hate speech, and online slander. This is a strength that distinguishes them from graduates of other general educational institutions.

Findings Table: Technological Readiness of *pesantren* Graduates

No	Aspects Assessed	General Findings
1	Access to technology during <i>pesantren</i>	Limited; most Islamic boarding schools avoid using gadgets and the internet
2	Adaptation of technology after <i>pesantren</i>	Quite good; self-taught and through the work environment
3	Use of social media	Generally used for preaching and promotion, although not optimal
4	Main obstacles	Lack of digital training and information filtering
5	Moral values as information filters	Very strong; makes technology use more responsible

These findings indicate that religious and traditional backgrounds are not absolute barriers for *pesantren* graduates to enter the digital world. The character and moral integrity formed during the *pesantren* education process become important capital in exploring the digital space with ethics and responsibility. This concept is based on “digital moral literacy,” which refers to the ability of individuals not only to understand technology but also to possess the values necessary to use it ethically. In this case, *pesantren* graduates excel in the value dimension, but there is an urgent need for them to strengthen their technical skills and digital critical thinking.

Islamic Attitude and Work Ethic

Graduates of *pesantren*, as community movers, bring with them core Islamic values such as *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *amanah* (responsibility), and *ihsan* (doing good). These values not only shape their personalities but also encourage active contributions in social life (Soffan, n.d.). The value of *ukhuwah*, fostered by *pesantren*, instills a spirit of solidarity and concern for others, enabling these graduates to build togetherness and foster social harmony.

From the perspective of Talcott Parsons’ structural functionalism theory (Shodiq, 2023), the role of graduates of *pesantren* reflects the latent function of religious and educational institutions as producers of individuals who can carry out social functions through the internalization of values and social integration. Graduates of *pesantren*, strategically, serve as a bridge of communication between groups, bridging social, cultural, and ideological differences in a pluralistic society through a dialogical and value-based approach (Faiq, 2020). Their existence is not only important in the religious realm but also crucial in building social cohesion within modern society.

During their stay in the *pesantren*, *santri* lives in *pesantren* with colleagues from various regions, tribes, and even different schools of thought. This situation directly trains them to tolerate differences in culture and outlook on life. According to the symbolic interactionism theory developed by George Herbert

Mead (Zanki, 2020), intensive social interaction in a diverse environment can form a deeper understanding of the social roles and identities of others.

The ability to socialize and mingle with people from different backgrounds is an advantage of *pesantren* graduates (Maharromiyati & Suyahmo, 2016). They are accustomed to living in a culturally and socially pluralistic environment during their time at the *pesantren*, so they can easily adapt to new communities, including those from different religions or ethnicities. *Pesantren* graduates are generally active in community activities, including religious studies, community service, and other social forums. This participation is not only a social obligation but also part of the religious values that they have understood since early on. Based on the results of interviews with several *santri* who graduated from *pesantren*, *santri* learns to manage differences through constructive communication, form attitudes of mutual respect, and create social solidarity across backgrounds. Additionally, internal diversity in *pesantren* requires *santri* to develop cross-cultural communication skills, understand diverse social contexts, and adapt their behavior to remain relevant and accepted within the environment. Thus, *santri* not only become tolerant individuals but are also able to understand social dynamics in a profound and applicable manner, enlightening us with their knowledge.

Public Integrity and Ethics

Graduates of *pesantren* plays a crucial role in maintaining ethical and moral values in various social environments, including at school, in the workplace, and the general community. They have a strong capacity to respond to social and moral challenges amidst the dynamics of modern society (Basyit, 2017). Challenges such as moral decadence, permissive culture, disintegration of family values, and identity-based social conflicts are faced with an approach that prioritizes moderate and solution-oriented Islamic values. Graduates of *pesantren* demonstrate internalized moral resilience in the form of the ability to restrain oneself (*tabammul*), mediate conflicts wisely, and become role models. Their role in maintaining these values reassures us about the future of our society (Bashori, 2017).

Education in *pesantren* has a distinctive characteristic, namely the foundation of education based on classical books (*turats*), which teach not only religious laws but also shape moral character and social sensitivity. For example, Imam al-Ghazali's *Bidayatul Hidayah* emphasizes the importance of vigilance against moral decay and the need to maintain morals in public life (Khotimah, 2022).

In practice, these values encourage *pesantren* graduates not only to avoid deviant behavior but also to actively become agents of moral change in their environment, either through lectures, counseling, or exemplary attitudes. Theoretically, this finding is relevant to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, especially in the post-conventional stage (Khoirun Nida, 2013). Namely, a person acts based on universal ethical principles such as justice, equality, and human dignity, and internal awareness. *Pesantren* graduates who have undergone an education process based on strong religious values tend to act not only in response to external norms but also because of an intrinsic moral awareness formed through experiencing religious teachings. They can assess social problems from an ethical and spiritual perspective rather than merely a pragmatic or legalistic one.

In addition, within the framework of social resilience theory, *pesantren* graduates appear as a group that can maintain value identity amidst the pressures of modernity while being flexible in interacting with various new challenges (Kusumaningrum et al., 2025). This resilience is reflected in their ability to respond to issues such as radicalism, value liberalism, and moral degradation of young people in a balanced way—not reactive, but also not permissive. Thus, they not only survive the negative influences of the environment but also become active subjects who provide moral direction for their communities.

This study also indicates that the social and moral roles of *pesantren* graduates are not limited to the formal religious realm (such as preachers, *ustaz*, or *madrassa* teachers), but extend to the public sector—encompassing humanitarian activists, social counseling facilitators, and even business actors who base their actions on Islamic ethics. Their ability to combine Islamic values with the needs of contemporary society shows that *pesantren* education contributes directly to the development of national morals.

In facing realities such as extortion, bribery, Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism, graduates of *pesantren* often exhibit a critical and dilemmatic attitude. On the one hand, they uphold the principle of honesty and reject the culture of corruption. However, on the other hand, they also realize that the existing social system sometimes “forces” them to compromise for a greater goal. They try to understand the context, even linking it to religious stories such as the Prophet Ibrahim, who once lied for safety. Thus, the response of Islamic boarding school graduates to social and moral challenges can be seen as a manifestation of the actualization of integrative, value-based education. They not only maintain Islamic values normatively, but also transform them into tangible

contributions amid a pluralistic society, which is a key characteristic of the role of religious education in shaping a modern civilization rooted in ethics and spirituality.

Economic Independence and Innovation

Graduates of *pesantren* have strong potential in the field of economic independence and entrepreneurship, although not all of them come from formal economic or business educational backgrounds (Widiati et al., 2023). *Pesantren* education, which emphasizes the values of honesty (*sidq*), hard work (*ijtihād*), and sincerity (*ikhlās*), has fostered a high work ethic, a valuable asset in the business world (Syukron, 2017). In addition, the simple and disciplined lifestyle that is cultivated during *pesantren* becomes a practical provision in managing a business independently and sustainably. Many graduates of *pesantren* choose the entrepreneurial path, such as opening bookstores, printing shops, *pesantren* cooperatives, organic farming, and even Sharia-based start-ups. They are also involved in the creative economy and digital business with a spirit of preaching that is integrated into business practices.

The values of *pesantren* becomes social capital that strengthens community-based business networks, such as *pesantren* cooperatives or alumni networks. Graduates of *pesantren* utilize relationships of trust, social solidarity (*ukhuwah*), and the spirit of mutual assistance (*ta'awun*) as a basis for business development (Basit & Widiastuti, 2020). Theoretically, this aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's view of social capital as a force that can be converted into economic capital when individuals are part of productive networks (Holilulloh, 2016). Graduates of *pesantren* tends to use alumni networks, relations between *pesantren*, and religious communities to build business partnerships and expand market access.

The ability to live independently economically is also an important indicator of the success of character education in *pesantren* (Nurjanah & Amrullah, 2021). *Pesantren* graduates do not depend on formal employment; instead, they create job opportunities for themselves and others. Within the framework of Gary Becker's human capital theory, the practical skills, values, and experiences acquired by *pesantren* graduates during their stay at the boarding school can be converted into productive economic power (Mohamad Mustari, 2012). The experience of managing *pesantren* canteens, *santri* cooperatives, mosque-based entrepreneurial activities, and skills training such as sewing, farming, or trading are concrete forms of applicable human capital formation.

Based on the results of interviews with *pesantren* graduates, it was stated that building a business is considered a rational choice if life's needs cannot be met

from the main job. *Pesantren* graduates do not make wealth their only goal but rather view business as part of devotion and potential for development. Some of them also consider investment as a sustainable way of life.

Conclusion

Graduates of *pesantren*, with their substantial religious, moral, social, and spiritual capital, are well-equipped to integrate into the professional world and modern society. They face challenges in terms of technology and complex social systems, but their strong work ethics enable them to adapt while maintaining the fundamental values of *pesantren*. This integration process not only showcases the success of *pesantren* in producing strong individuals but also proves the relevance of traditional values in the context of contemporary life.

These graduates are not just knowledgeable in religious and practical knowledge, but also show a remarkable ability to adapt and develop technological capabilities over time. They work collaboratively across groups in a communicative manner without discriminating against others, and possess a strong entrepreneurial spirit and enthusiasm for learning. Their strong work ethics instill confidence in their professional capabilities, ensuring high-quality work and fostering good community relations.

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