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FROM TRANSMISSION OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE TO SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BOARDING SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA AND PAKISTAN IN THE DIALECTIC OF THE HABITUS OF BARAKA AND COMPETENCY RATIONALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dialectic between the habitus of baraka (blessing) and competency rationality in the practice of religious knowledge transmission at Indonesian pesantren and Pakistani madrasah, and their contribution to social transformation. Employing a multi-site comparative qualitative approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis at four institutions: two pesantren in Indonesia (Pasuruan, East Java, and Gontor, East Java) and two madrasahs in Pakistan (Lahore and Karachi), selected on the basis of a traditional-integrative typology. Integrating Pierre Bourdieu's capital-habitus framework and Jürgen Habermas's communicative rationality, the study identifies three principal findings. First, the habitus of baraka functions as a dispositional system that simultaneously reproduces and impels the transformation of cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Second, spaces for communicative action in Indonesian pesantren are comparatively more open than in Pakistani madrasah, which remain dominated by unilateral textual authority. Third, differences in field dynamics between the two contexts generate distinct yet complementary patterns of social transformation. These findings contribute to the development of comparative Islamic educational sociology and extend the Bourdieu-Habermas theoretical dialogue into non-Western religious educational settings.

Keywords: *Habitus of Baraka, Competency Rationality, Pakistani Madrasah, Social Transformation, Comparative Islamic Education.*

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INTRODUCTION

No educational institution is more intimately connected to the social life of local communities, and yet more epistemologically complex, than the pesantren in Indonesia and the madrasah in Pakistan. Both have grown from the same roots: the conviction that the transmission of religious knowledge is a path toward social peace and spiritual well-being (Hefner, 2022). Yet as the wheels of history have turned, both have been confronted by the pressures of modernization, waves of extremism, and the demands of global competency that can no longer be ignored. In this context, the question of how these institutions transformor simply refuse to transformhas become one of the most pressing questions in contemporary Islamic educational sociology (Goshu & Ridwan, 2024).

Research conducted between 2022 and 2025 has consistently demonstrated that Indonesian pesantren have evolved far beyond institutions of rote recitation and transmission of religious texts. Documented how Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor successfully built a transformative educational model that integrates Islamic values with a reflective and managerial pedagogical framework (Jusubaidi et al., 2024). (Iwan Setiawan et al., 2026; Ubaidillah & Fauzinudin Faiz, 2025) affirm that pesantren no longer stand behind their own sacred walls, but actively engage with moderation, tolerance, and inclusive da'wah practices that reach across community boundaries. This is not merely a curricular change; it is a transformation of collective habitus occurring quietly but unmistakably.

On the other side, Pakistani madrasah carry the weight of a different narrative. Global discourse tends to cast Pakistani madrasah in shadow: associated with radicalism, questioned for their relevance, and frequently treated as a policy problem rather than as a heritage of civilization. Yet, as various studies in Islamic educational sociology have shown, Pakistani madrasah also harbor transformative potential that has not been fully explored potential that can be understood more clearly when compared systematically with the Indonesian pesantren experience. (Abas et al., 2025) in their comparative study of Islamic theology teaching in Indonesian and Malaysian pesantren, offered an early indication that cross-contextual comparisons of this kind can yield insights far richer than those produced by mono-contextual studies.

This gap constitutes the point of departure for the present study. Across the entire corpus of Scopus-indexed articles related to pesantren and madrasah between 2022 and 2025, not a single study deliberately and systematically places Indonesian pesantren and Pakistani madrasah within a single, integrated comparative framework. Each make valuable contributions by revealing the internal dynamics of Indonesian pesantren, yet all stop at the boundaries of their national context (Abubakar et al., 2025; Basori et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024; Sumanti et al., 2024; Wasehudin et al., 2023). Meanwhile, approach the institutional capital of pesantren through the study of scholarly networks and waqf systems, without explicitly framing those concepts within Bourdieu's theory of capital (Samindjaya et al., 2024; Suwendi et al., 2024).

Pierre Bourdieu offers conceptual tools that are highly relevant for reading this phenomenon. When we speak of pesantren and madrasah, we are speaking of social

fields populated by various forms of capital: cultural capital in the form of mastery of classical texts and scholarly traditions; social capital in the form of networks of scholars and alumni; and symbolic capital derived from authority and legitimacy. Reminds us that Bourdieu's theory of habitus, capital, and field is not merely a tool for structural analysis, but also opens space for understanding how social agents reproduce and simultaneously transform their social conditions (Darmawan, 2024). In the context of pesantren, the dispositional habitus formed through the internalization of values of obedience, sincerity, and a blessed orientation works far deeper than mere behavioral norms: it is a way of seeing the world, a way of feeling obligation, and a way of orienting oneself within broader social structures.

Yet Bourdieu alone is insufficient. The habitus of baraka, for all its power in integrating communities and transmitting tradition, also harbors internal tensions that need to be examined: how do these institutions respond to the demands of open argumentation, critical reflection, and non-coercive consensus? This is where Jürgen Habermas becomes relevant as a dialogic partner for Bourdieu. Habermas's communicative rationality emphasizes consensus-based communicative action free from domination, providing a sharp lens for reading whether the spaces of discussion, deliberation, and teacher-student interaction in pesantren and madrasah truly open possibilities for genuine dialogue or merely reproduce rhetoric. Have shown that Habermas's approach to education specifically enables the rational reconstruction of pedagogical practicesan approach that has never been explicitly applied in the context of pesantren or madrasah (Englund, 2006; Koomen, 2020).

Existing research, while empirically rich, generally operates within the comfort zone of description and documentation. Religious moderation has been documented (Athoillah et al., 2024; Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Rahman, 2022; Sabarudin et al., 2024) curricular modernization has been noted (Arif et al., 2025; Habibi & Sholikha, 2025; Mutammam et al., 2025). Yet the deeper questionwhy and through what mechanisms can the transmission of religious knowledge serve as a catalyst for social transformation?remains without a satisfactory theoretical answer. Remind us that Bourdieu himself never reduced his theory to structural determinism; the theory always provided space for transformation and social change through agents capable of reading and altering the conditions within which they operate (Fowler, 2020; Yang, 2014).

The novelty of this study operates on several layers simultaneously. First, it offers a cross-national comparison that does not yet exist in the literature: not a single article in the 2022–2025 Scopus corpus directly compares Indonesian pesantren and Pakistani madrasah within an integrated research design. Second, it formulates the concept of the habitus of baraka as an independent analytical category that goes beyond merely labeling blessing or sincerity as a value, placing it instead as a dispositional system that can be analyzed and compared across cultural contexts. Third, it constructs a theoretically productive dialogue between Bourdieu and Habermas: not merely deploying both theories in parallel, but allowing the tension between them to serve as the motor of analysis. Fourth, it positions the transmission of religious knowledgefrom the study of classical texts to jurisprudential dialogue and

commentaryas a mechanism for capital production and a space for communicative action oriented toward concrete social transformation.

The urgency of this research is also inseparable from a rapidly shifting global context. As religious extremism continues to find openings within and beyond Islamic educational institutions, as social polarization erodes trust in religious institutions, and as demands for global competency press traditional institutions to change without losing their integrity, this is where a comparative study such as this finds its greatest relevance. Aptly describe pesantren as an architecture of Islamic moderation in need of reimagination; this study takes up that challenge and extends it to the Pakistani context, while equipping itself with a theoretical framework sufficiently robust to produce knowledge that is not merely descriptive, but genuinely transformative (Ubaidillah & Fauzinudin Faiz, 2025).

METHODS

This research is designed as a comparative qualitative study grounded in a multi-site case study approach (Multi-site comparative case study). This methodological choice is not merely conventional, but arises from a genuine epistemological need: understanding how the habitus of baraka and competency rationality operate within different cultural and structural contexts requires an approach capable of capturing complexity and contextualization, rather than a quantitative approach that reduces phenomena to numbers and distributions. Have demonstrated that the qualitative multi-case approach is the most appropriate and productive methodological choice for Islamic education research that seeks to probe more deeply into practice and meaning (Latif & Hafid, 2021; Muhammad Akmansyah et al., 2025; Wasehudin et al., 2023).

The unit of analysis consists of two representative pesantren in Indonesiaselected on the basis of typological heterogeneity (Traditional/salafi and modern/integrative) as well as geographic locations reflecting the ecological diversity of Islamic educationand two madrasah in Pakistan with similar criteria. This purposive case selection follows the logic of theoretical sampling in qualitative case study traditions: it does not seek statistical representativeness but rather theoretical representativeness that enables richer testing and development of concepts (Habibi & Sholikha, 2025; Harjatanaya, 2025).

Data were collected through three complementary channels. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with kiai, ustadz (Teachers), senior faculty, students, and alumni at each institution, as well as with madrasah principals and key scholarly figures in Pakistan. The interviews were designed to elicit not only explicit narratives about educational practices, but also the latent dispositions involved in perceiving authority, students' understandings of compliance, and the manner in which deliberation unfoldsall indicators of Bourdieu's habitus and Habermas's communicative rationality. Second, participant observation was conducted in learning spaces, daily activities, devotional practices, and informal interactions among kiai, ustadz, and studentssince habitus, as Bourdieu emphasizes, is more readily grasped in spontaneous practice than in planned narratives. Third, document analysis

encompassed curricula, syllabi, institutional handbooks, and national educational policies in both countries.

Data analysis employed the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of three interrelated streams of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This process was conducted cyclically rather than linearly, so that initial findings were continually tested and refined through cross-case comparison. What distinguishes the analysis in this study from most other pesantren studies is that data reduction was not purely empirically thematic, but explicitly oriented toward two principal theoretical frameworks: Bourdieu's habitus-capital-field concepts for reading the dispositional structures and capital configurations within institutions (Fowler, 2020), and Habermas's concepts of communicative action and rational reconstruction for evaluating the quality of dialogue and participation in educational processes (Baianstovu & Ablett, 2020; Koomen, 2020; Tihnike, 2025).

To ensure validity and reliability, this study employs source triangulation (Interviews across multiple levels of institutional hierarchy), technique triangulation (Interviews, observation, and documents), and member checking by reconfirming interpretive findings with key participants at each institution. Demonstrate that layered triangulation of this kind constitutes the recognized validity standard in high-quality qualitative Islamic education research (Habibi & Sholikha, 2025; Muhammad Akmansyah et al., 2025; Wasehudin et al., 2023). Furthermore, researcher reflexivity was maintained through systematic field journaling that documented assumptions, tensions, and critical moments during data collection and analysis.

The cross-national comparative dimension of this study introduces its own methodological complexities, which were addressed through several strategies. First, researchers avoided the equivalence trap of assuming that concepts appearing similar across two contextssuch as 'moderation' or 'knowledge transmission'carry identical meanings. Each concept was operationalized inductively from within each context before cross-case comparisons were made. Second, language differences (Indonesian, Urdu, local languages) were managed through the use of cultural translators who conveyed not only words but also social and religious nuances. Third, the comparative analysis was conducted in two phases: an in-depth within-case analysis at each institution, followed by a systematic cross-case analysis to identify patterns of convergence and divergence between Indonesian pesantren and Pakistani madrasah.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Social Landscape of Two Systems: Indonesian Pesantren and Pakistani Madrasah as Distinct Fields

One thing immediately apparent when researchers entered the Pesantren Ngalah complex in Sengonagung, Pasuruan, was an atmosphere difficult to describe in purely technical vocabulary. There was the aroma of coffee wafting from a small warung in the corner of the dormitory area, the sound of Quranic recitation from the male dormitory mingling with students' informal conversations about social media, and a notice board displaying a public lecture schedule featuring non-Muslim guests. This was not a pesantren isolated from the outside world; it was a living social landscape

in constant negotiation between tradition and the demands of the age. The contrast became sharply felt when researchers visited the Deobandi madrasah in Orangi Town, Karachi, where high walls, strict sectarian separation, and minimal space for cross-interpretation dialogue created a learning ecology that, in Bourdieu's terms, produces fundamentally different dispositions.

Field data collected over at least eight months at four institutionsPesantren Ngalah (Pasuruan), Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (Ponorogo), Jamia Ashrafia (Lahore), and Jamia Uloom al-Islamiyah (Karachi)confirms what (Darmawan, 2024) refers to as fundamental differences in the configuration of habitus, capital, and field. Indonesian pesantren operate in a far more fluid and dynamic social environment: Ministry of Religious Affairs data from 2025 recorded 42,391 pesantren with more than 11 million students, distributed across a highly diverse economic ecosystem, including 9,020 multicultural units and productive enterprises centered on the kiai. Pakistani madrasah, numbering between 20,000 and 40,000 units (Many unregistered), operate in a more ideologically segregated environment, where distinctions among Barelvi, Deobandi, Shi'a, and Ahl-e-Hadith are not merely social differences but theological ones.

This difference in field configuration is not without identifiable historical roots. The dramatic surge in Pakistani madrasah occurred during the Zia-ul-Haq era (1977–1988), when the state deliberately instrumentalized madrasah within the geopolitical context of the Cold War and the Afghan conflict(Andersen et al., 2021). In 1947 there were only 189 madrasah in Pakistan; this number exploded to tens of thousands within a few decades, many of them funded by Wahhabi groups from Saudi Arabia with a very narrow, sectarian curriculum(Pakistan & Sajjad, 2013). Indonesian pesantren, by contrast, developed within the context of Pancasilaa national framework that structurally promotes inclusivity and moderation. Burga & Damopolii, 2022 and (Iwan Setiawan et al., 2026) document how this national context shaped a collective pesantren habitus far more open to cross-identity dialogue, a fact also confirmed by studies of religious tolerance in pesantren (Latif & Hafid, 2021).

From the perspective of Bourdieu's field theory, these structural differences are not merely differences of context; they are differences in the rules of the game that determine which capital is valued, which habitus is produced, and which form of social reproduction is dominant (Fowler, 2020; Yang, 2014). When Indonesian pesantren operate in a field that values moderation, inclusivity, and dual competency (Religious-secular), the capital produced becomes more diverse and adaptive. Conversely, when Pakistani madrasah operate in a field that prioritizes ideological loyalty to a particular school of thought, the capital produced tends to be exclusive and sectarian. Pöllmann, 2016 affirms that intercultural transformation is only possible when field structures are sufficiently fluid to allow habitus negotiation and this is the fundamental difference between the two contexts studied.

The Habitus of Baraka: From Hidden Value to Functioning Symbolic Capital

The most productive concept emerging from this study is the habitus of baraka: a dispositional system formed through the repetition of religious practices, proximity to the kiai or scholarly figure, respect for the scholarly chain of transmission (Sanad),

and the conviction that knowledge is not only cognitively valid but also spiritually efficacious. The habitus of baraka therefore cannot be understood merely as 'good values' or 'personal spirituality.' It functions as a way of seeing the world, a way of evaluating authority, a way of organizing teacher-student relations, and a way of defining the boundaries between obedience, propriety, and intellectual courage.

In Bourdieu's terms, the habitus of baraka is a disposition embodied in the body and daily practices of students: the habitual kissing of the kiai's hand, maintaining decorum when asking questions, accepting pesantren duties without calculating profit and loss, and treating knowledge as a moral trust. Yet this disposition also works at a subtler level: students learn that academic success, career achievement, and social service do not stand independently, but must remain connected to the moral legitimacy of their teacher and community. At this point, baraka transforms from a theological category into an actual symbolic capital, conferring recognition, trust, and social authority on those deemed close to the center of blessing.

The habitus of baraka operates through three layers. The first is the embodiment layerthe formation of attitudes of humility, discipline, patience, and respect through the routines of pesantren or madrasah life. The second is the relational layerthe formation of a moral network among the kiai, students, alumni, parents, and the surrounding community. The third is the institutional layerwhen the value of baraka is institutionalized in the curriculum, governance, leadership structure, and institutional reputation. This third layer explains why pesantren and madrasah produce not only graduates who know religious texts, but also individuals possessing particular lifestyles, political orientations, and religious dispositions.

At Pesantren Gontor and Pesantren Ngalah, the habitus of baraka is present not as a constraint on rationality, but as an ethical framework that disciplines how rationality is deployed. The kiai remains the center of moral authority, yet that authority does not invariably close off intellectual space. In many situations, the kiai in fact serves as the legitimating force enabling students to speak, write, organize, engage in entrepreneurship, and interact with broader society. In other words, baraka is not positioned in opposition to competency; rather, baraka becomes the reason why competency must be developed responsibly."*Here, the kiai's baraka does not mean students cannot think critically. On the contrary, the kiai encourages us to question, to debate, as long as it is done with proper manners*"(Senior Ustadz, Gontor, interview, March 2024, personal communication, n.d.)

This quotation reveals that the category of 'proper manners' (Adab) functions as an important bridge between the habitus of baraka and competency rationality. Proper manners do not always mean silence or unquestioning submission; in the context of a more open pesantren, proper manners mean the ability to express opinions in appropriate language, at an appropriate time, with awareness of the existing social relations. Critical engagement is thus not automatically construed as refutation; it can be accepted when situated within a framework of respect for knowledge and for the teacher. This is a form of symbolic transformation: the kiai's authority does not disappear, but shifts its function from guardian of compliance to guide of a reflective learning process.

At Pesantren Ngalah, the habitus of baraka takes on a more inclusive and dialogic character. Baraka is understood not only as a vertical relationship between students and the kiai, but also as an ethic of living together amid a plural society. Programs of interfaith dialogue, alumni engagement in social advocacy, and openness to guests from diverse backgrounds demonstrate that baraka is translated as the capacity to generate social benefit. In this context, the symbolic capital of the pesantren derives not only from internal integrity, but also from public recognition that the pesantren can serve as a safe space for diverse social encounters.

Conversely, at the Pakistani madrasah particularly Jamia Ashrafia and Jamia Uloom al-Islamiyah the habitus of baraka is more frequently associated with textual compliance and hierarchical deference to scholarly authority. The tradition of sanad and knowledge transmission remains very strong, but the space for testing a teacher's arguments, comparing interpretations, or connecting texts to contemporary social issues is more restricted. In such a configuration, baraka tends to be interpreted as the outcome of loyalty to the established chain of knowledge, rather than as an impetus to expand the horizons of understanding. This does not mean these madrasah are impoverished in knowledge, but it does indicate that the knowledge produced is more concentrated on textual mastery than on dialogic capacity."*The student's task is to absorb, not to question. Later, when he possesses sufficient knowledge, he can think for himself"*(Senior Lecturer, Jamia Ashrafia, interview, May 2024)", personal communication, n.d.).

This statement reveals a pedagogical logic that defers learner agency. Independent thinking is deemed legitimate only after the student has crossed a threshold of maturity determined by the teacher's authority. On one hand, this logic preserves the continuity of tradition and prevents careless readings of texts. On the other hand, it can slow the formation of argumentative competency, particularly when students have never been trained to formulate objections, construct reasons, and test claims in class. A habitus of baraka that is excessively closed risks ultimately becoming a mechanism for reproducing symbolic domination.

These differences have direct implications for capital production. In Indonesian pesantren, the kiai's symbolic capital can be converted into social capital, cultural capital, and even economic capital. Students obtain moral legitimacy from the pesantren and then deploy it to build alumni networks, social institutions, productive enterprises, and moderate da'wah activities. In Pakistani madrasah, the symbolic capital of scholars is very strong within the sectarian community, but more difficult to convert into cross-group social capital because the social field is segmented. The key issue, therefore, is not whether the habitus of baraka exists or does not exist, but rather how it is converted into competencies that can function in a broader social space.

Table 1. Below summarizes the differences in capital configuration produced by the habitus of baraka in the two research contexts

Type of Capital	Pesantren Ngalah & Gontor (Indonesia)	Jamia Ashrafia & Jamia Uloom (Pakistan)	Key Differences
Cultural Capital	Classical texts (kitab kuning), foreign languages, general sciences, student organizations, life skills, and a scholarly orientation that connects classical texts to contemporary needs.	Fiqh, tafsir, hadith, Islamic logic, and memorization of texts are highly developed, but integration of general sciences and public skills remains limited.	Integrative and cross-competency vs. specialist and textual.
Social Capital	Alumni networks, parents, local communities, government, higher education institutions, and interfaith communities are relatively open.	Internal sectarian networks and ulama patronage are strong, but cross-group relations are weaker and often constrained by ideological segregation.	Bridging/linking social capital vs. bonding social capital.
Symbolic Capital	The kiai's authority is reinforced by a reputation for moderation, state recognition, alumni achievement, and the institution's image as a character-formation space.	Scholarly authority is high within internal communities, but external reputation is often burdened by stigmas of radicalism and exclusivism.	Broad public legitimacy vs. strong internal legitimacy.
Economic Capital	Developed through pesantren business units, cooperatives, productive waqf, empowerment programs, and alumni networks.	More dependent on community donations, sectarian philanthropy, and patron support; productive economic units are relatively limited.	Productive self-sufficiency vs. donative dependence.

This table reveals that the difference in the habitus of baraka lies not in the intensity of religiosity, but in the direction of capital conversion. Indonesian pesantren are able to transform the kiai's symbolic capital into social trust, institutional networks, and empowerment opportunities. Pakistani madrasah also possess strong symbolic

capital, but that strength circulates more within the community itself. Consequently, the capital produced is internally dense but less flexible when engaging with a plural social environmen (Pakistan & Sajjad, 2013).

From Bourdieu's standpoint, Indonesian pesantren demonstrate a higher rate of inter-modal capital conversion. Mastery of texts, proximity to the kiai, alumni reputation, and student organizational practices can mutually reinforce each other and flow into the arenas of economics, local politics, public da'wah, and even higher education. Pakistani madrasah, by contrast, show strong accumulation of cultural capital but a more limited conversion rate, owing to their more closed field structure. Thus, the habitus of baraka becomes a transformative capital only when it possesses institutional channels through which it can move beyond its community of origin (Fowler, 2020; Yang, 2014).

Competency, Rationality, and Communicative Action: Is Genuine Dialogue Occurring?

Competency rationality as conceptualized in this study is not defined narrowly as technical skill for winning labor market competition. It refers to students' capacity to translate religious knowledge into responsible argumentation, reflective moral decision-making, productive social skills, and public participation that does not damage the plural social order. In this sense, competency is not the antithesis of religious truth, but a form of truth capable of functioning within modern social spaces.

Habermas helpfully clarifies that competency of this kind only develops when educational processes provide space for communicative action. Communicative action differs from ordinary instructional communication. In instructional communication, the teacher transmits and the student receives; in communicative action, the learner is given space to understand reasons, test claims, raise objections, and reach consensus through the force of argument. The primary measure is not whether all participants occupy fully equal social positions, but whether communication affords genuine opportunities for correction, reflection, and the formation of consensus without coercion (Boyne & Habermas, 1986; Fairtlough, 1991; Koomen, 2020; Tihnike, 2025)

In the context of pesantren and madrasah, communicative action never appears in fully ideal form. The kiai-student or teacher-student relationship remains hierarchical, and that hierarchy is often viewed as part of proper educational etiquette. Yet hierarchy does not automatically produce dialogic communication. What is determinative is whether the teacher's authority is used to silence or to guide the process of argumentation. When authority is used to uphold the ethics of dialogue, competency rationality can develop. When authority is used to silence questions, inherent competency tends to be limited to memorization, compliance, and the reproduction of knowledge.

At Pesantren Gontor, observation of a student musyawarah (Deliberative forum) concerning policy on the use of mobile devices demonstrated a structured exercise in communicative action. The kiai was not present; senior students led the forum; participants expressed opinions; objections were noted; and decisions wede reached through an agreed-upon mechanism. Such forums are not yet fully free of hierarchy

seniority still carries weight but they have shifted a portion of authority from a single figure to communicative procedures. This is where organizational competency, the courage to speak, and argumentative discipline are formed.

This practice reveals that pesantren can function as micro-laboratories of cultural democracy. Students are not only learning books or languages, but also learning how to formulate problems, construct arguments, listen to differing opinions, accept collective decisions, and maintain civility after disagreements arise. Such competencies are often not inscribed in the formal curriculum, yet they are highly determinative of alumni's ability to enter the public arena. When pesantren alumni are active in community organizing, moderate da'wah, social entrepreneurship, or legal advocacy, they are carrying with them the communicative experience formed in the pesantren.

At Pesantren Ngalah, communicative action manifests through patterns of cross-identity dialogue. The learning space is not confined to internal kiai-student relations, but extended into encounters with external communities. Openness to non-Muslim guests, social forums, and community activities demonstrates that dialogic competency does not end with the ability to debate in class. Dialogic competency encompasses the capacity to translate Islamic values into a social language that other groups can understand. This is a broader form of competency rationality: students are able to maintain their religious identity while building consensus with diverse parties.

A different situation was observed at Jamia Uloom al-Islamiyah Karachi. Classroom communication was more frequently one-directional. The teacher held full authority over the interpretation of texts, while students were positioned to receive, note, and memorize. Questions were still possible, but generally of a clarificatory rather than critical nature. Questions that challenged premises, compared interpretations, or connected texts to contemporary social problems risked being perceived as disrespectful. Consequently, students learned to master texts, but did not always learn to test and communicate those texts in the plural public sphere."*I have many questions that I dare not raise in class. I fear being seen as disrespectful.* (Final-Year Student, Jamia Uloom al-Islamiyah, informal interview, June 2024, personal communication, n.d.)"

This quotation reveals a gap between cognitive competency and communicative courage. Students may possess questions and thinking capacity, but the structure of the classroom does not grant them the psychological safety to articulate those questions. In Habermas's perspective, this is a form of communication distortion: not because there is no language or interaction, but because power relations prevent certain arguments from surfacing (Bonell & Melendez-Torres, 2023). This distortion is dangerous because it creates apparent compliance while concealing intellectual anxiety in informal spaces.

Yet field findings also reveal that communication distortion in formal spaces does not entirely extinguish competency rationality. Some Pakistani madrasah students seek alternative spaces for dialogue through YouTube, WhatsApp groups, Islamic podcasts, and lectures by scholars from other countries, including Indonesia. In these digital spaces, they encounter a variety of interpretations, more conversational styles

of religious explanation, and ways of articulating religion that are not always confrontational. This phenomenon indicates that the digital realm has become a new public space capable of loosening the grip of formal institutions.

Theoretically, these findings connect Bourdieu and Habermas productively. Bourdieu explains why communication is always shaped by the distribution of capital and position within the field; Habermas explains why partial communication can open emancipatory possibilities when claims are given space to be tested. In Indonesian pesantren, the distribution of symbolic capital can be converted into more open dialogic procedures. In Pakistani madrasah, scholars' symbolic capital more frequently sustains vertical communication structures. This difference explains why competency rationality grows more strongly when the habitus of baraka does not obstruct communicative action (Bonell & Melendez-Torres, 2023; Bourdieu, 1977,; Boyne & Habermas, 1986).

The question 'is genuine dialogue occurring?' therefore cannot be answered in black-and-white terms. Dialogue occurs at various levels. In some pesantren, dialogue occurs through deliberative forums, student organizations, interfaith forums, and community service practices. In some madrasah, dialogue emerges more at the margins of the institution: informal conversations, alumni networks, or digital spaces. What matters is the quality of dialogue: whether it builds argumentative courage, the capacity to listen, and the willingness to reach consensusor whether it is merely a formality that reinforces old authority.

The Dialectic of the Habitus of Baraka and Competency Rationality: Three Relational Patterns

From cross-case analysis, this study identifies three relational patterns between the habitus of baraka and competency rationality. These three patterns need not be understood as rigid and final categories; they are more accurately read as relational tendencies that can shift, overlap, and change in response to the dynamics of the environment, institutional leadership, curriculum, alumni networks, and the socio-political pressures that surround them. An institution may display one pattern as dominant while containing elements of another in particular spaces or moments (Bourdieu, 2002; Boyne & Habermas, 1986; Fowler, 2020; Habibi & Sholikha, 2025).

The three patterns are: productive co-evolution, asymmetric subordination, and emancipatory rupture. The first pattern describes a mutually reinforcing relationship between baraka and competency. The second describes a situation in which competency falls under the control of a conservative habitus of baraka. The third describes the emergence of spaces of change within apparently closed structures. By mapping these three patterns, the research moves beyond the simple dichotomy of 'modern pesantren vs. traditional madrasah,' since what is being analyzed is not an institutional label but the mechanism of the relationship between authority, capital, and communication (Bourdieu, 2002; Boyne & Habermas, 1986).

Productive Co-Evolution

The first pattern, productive co-evolution, is most strongly evidenced at Pesantren Gontor and partially at Pesantren Ngalah. In this pattern, the habitus of baraka and competency rationality grow together. The kiai remains a source of moral legitimacy,

but that legitimacy is not used to freeze the capacity for thought. On the contrary, the kiai's authority provides an ethical direction for the development of competency. Students are encouraged to speak fluently, organize actively, argue effectively, master general knowledge, and maintain spiritual closeness to their teacher and tradition.

Productive co-evolution operates through a mechanism of value translation. Sincerity is translated into a work ethic; obedience is translated into organizational discipline; respect for the kiai is translated into a responsibility to uphold the institution's good name; and the pursuit of baraka is translated into an impetus to generate benefit for society. Through this mechanism, traditional values are not abandoned but given new social form. The pesantren need not choose between tradition and competency, for the two are mutually supportive (Bonell & Melendez-Torres, 2023).

This pattern is also enabled by institutional governance. Student organizations, public speaking activities, leadership training, entrepreneurship, community service, and interfaith dialogue function as spaces of capital conversion. The kiai's symbolic capital provides legitimacy; the pesantren's cultural capital provides knowledge; the alumni's social capital opens networks; and the institution's economic capital creates sustainability. Here Bourdieu's theory proves accurate: social transformation occurs when various forms of capital can be dynamically converted, not merely when institutions add new subjects to their curricula (Fowler, 2020).

Yet productive co-evolution is not without risk. When the orientation toward competency is too strongly channeled toward achievement, management, and public image, there is a possibility that the value of baraka is reduced to a slogan of legitimation. This pattern therefore requires constant balance: competency rationality must remain governed by the ethics of sincerity, while the habitus of baraka must remain open to critique and renewal. This balance is what makes productive co-evolution the most potent pattern for the social transformation of Islamic education (Baianstovu & Ablett, 2020).

Asymmetric Subordination

The second pattern, asymmetric subordination, is dominant in traditional Pakistani madrasah, particularly Jamia Uloom. In this pattern, competency rationality is not absent, but is placed under the strict control of a conservative habitus of baraka. The competency recognized is primarily memorization, comprehension, and reproduction of texts in accordance with the lines of sectarian authority. Argumentative, dialogic, and socio-political competency is not fully developed, as it is seen as potentially disrupting the established epistemic order (Fowler, 2020).

The pattern of asymmetric subordination must be read carefully to avoid the stereotype that madrasah are anti-intellectual. The data clearly show that madrasah possess a strong depth of textual literacy. Students are trained to read complex books, follow jurisprudential logic, and honor scholarly traditions. The problem lies in the asymmetry: the competency produced is unbalanced, leaning more toward mastery of the internal tradition than toward the capacity to communicate with broader society. As a result, graduates can be highly influential within their own communities but less flexible when navigating social plurality(Boyne & Habermas, 1986).

The primary mechanism of asymmetric subordination is an excessively narrow definition of proper conduct (Adab). If adab is defined only as silence, acceptance, and non-testing of the teacher's views, then communicative action cannot develop. Students learn that academic security is obtained by following established paths. In the short term, this mechanism preserves institutional stability. In the long term, it can impede innovation, reinforce exclusivism, and limit graduates' ability to respond to contemporary social problems that require cross-disciplinary and cross-community dialogue.

The policy implication of this pattern is not the forcible replacement of the madrasah tradition, since external coercion can paradoxically strengthen resistance. Reform must proceed through internally legitimate language: adab can be expanded into dialogic adab; sanad can be understood as maintaining the quality of argumentation responsibly; and baraka can be interpreted as social utility, not merely as loyalty to authority. With this strategy, competency rationality does not appear as a threat, but as a means of enhancing the dignity of madrasah knowledge itself.

Emancipatory Rupture

The third pattern is emancipatory rupturethe emergence of spaces of change within structures that appear settled. Such ruptures are found in both contexts, but take different forms. At Pesantren Ngalah, rupture appears more institutionally, through interfaith dialogue forums, community engagement, and the courage to formulate baraka as a social ethic. At Pakistani madrasah, rupture more frequently appears informally, through digital spaces, alumni conversations, exchange experiences, and students' encounters with global Islamic discourse.

Emancipatory rupture demonstrates that transformation does not always originate from large-scale state programs or formal curricular changes. Such changes are often born of small experiences that disturb old habits: a student hears a more dialogic scholarly lecture; an alumnus observes an open pesantren model; a student participates in an interfaith forum; or a teacher begins to allow questions previously considered sensitive. These small experiences do not directly alter structure, but they create an alternative imagination of how Islamic education can be conducted.

Within Bourdieu's framework, emancipatory rupture occurs when an old habitus encounters a new field that it cannot fully control. The digital field, transnational alumni networks, educational mobility, and demands for global competency compel the habitus of baraka to renegotiate (Pöllmann, 2016). Within Habermas's framework, rupture becomes significant because it opens space for claims previously unable to be articulated (Bonell & Melendez-Torres, 2023). Questions that cannot arise in class can emerge in discussion groups; critiques that cannot be directed at the teacher can be tested through digital conversation; and transnational experience can generate fresh reflection on the relationship between scholars, citizens, and plural society.

The strength of emancipatory rupture lies in its organic character. Because it grows from the experiences of students, teachers, and alumni, educational reform is not easily dismissed as foreign intervention. Yet the downside is fragmentation. Without institutional support, these ruptures may remain personal experiences and fail to

produce structural change. The task of Islamic educational reform is therefore to transform ruptures into bridges: providing forums for legitimate dialogue, tradition-sensitive teacher training, cross-national academic exchange, and curricula that connect classical texts to public concerns. The three relational patterns thus reveal that the dialectic of the habitus of baraka and competency rationality is always moving between reproduction and transformation.

Social Transformation as a Product of the Dialectic: From Tolerance to Economic Empowerment

The most concrete evidence of the success of the habitus-competency rationality dialectic is the measurable social transformation impact in communities surrounding the pesantren. Field data from Pasuruan Regency show that Pesantren Ngalah which serves students from kindergarten through higher education produces alumni who are active not only in religious life but also in social entrepreneurship, legal advocacy, and interfaith dialogue. In several villages surrounding the pesantren, alumni-led economic initiatives have significantly increased the incomes of farming familiesa form of economic empowerment that Abubakar et al., 2025 describe as 'religiosity-based edupreneurship.' Samindjaya et al., 2024 add the dimension of waqf as a mechanism for sustainable economic capital accumulation; Suwendi et al. (2024) reinforce this by demonstrating the role of pesantren intellectual networks in transmitting symbolic capital across diverse social arenas.

Field data from the Pakistani context reveal a more complex pattern. Alumni of Barelvi madrasah in Lahore are relatively more active in community social activities and cross-community tolerance than alumni of Deobandi madrasah. This pattern is consistent with findings in the literature on the differing social orientations of these two major traditions (Hassan, 2000; Syukron et al., 2023). Some alumni of the more open-minded madrasahincluding those who participated in scholarship programs in Indonesia reported significant transformations in their perspective upon returning, with the Indonesian pesantren model serving as a reference for reform. One young alumnus of Jamia Ashrafia who participated in an exchange program at Gontor stated in an interview:"*In Indonesia, I learned that being a good scholar and being an active citizen are not two contradictory things*(*Alumnus of Jamia Ashrafia, Exchange Program to Gontor, Interview, August 2024*, personal communication, n.d.)"

This statement aptly encapsulates what this study formulates as competency rationality in the context of Islamic education: the capacity to integrate spiritual orientation with active participation in public life. Mukhlis et al., 2024 document the role of Madurese pesantren in shaping a legal culture that prevents radicalism; our field findings reinforce and extend this, showing that the mechanism at work is not merely an anti-radicalism curriculum, but a habitus of baraka that structurally fosters adherence to broader social normsincluding legal norms and norms of citizenship. Affirm that religious moderation is not merely a product of policy, but a product of the habitus formed through the process of religious knowledge transmission (Athoillah et al., 2024;Rahman, 2022).

Based on the comparative analysis presented above, this study yields six principal findings that together constitute its scholarly contribution:

Finding 1: The habitus of baraka constitutes a valid and productive analytical category within Bourdieusian sociology for the context of Islamic education. It is not merely 'religious values,' but a dispositional system that can be operationalized, analyzed, and compared across cultural contexts (Darmawan, 2024; Habibi & Sholikha, 2025). The habitus of baraka functions as a motor for the production of cultural, social, and symbolic capital in both Indonesian pesantren and Pakistani madrasah, but with very different configurations in accordance with the social field structure of each context.

Finding 2: A traceable causal relationship exists between the quality of communicative action in educational processes and the degree of social transformation produced by the institution. Institutions that provide more open communicative spacesboth formal and informaltend to produce alumni who are more actively engaged in civic life, social entrepreneurship, and religious moderation. This confirms the relevance of Habermas's communicative action theory for reading Islamic educational phenomena (Englund, 2006; Koomen, 2020).

Finding 3: Digital platforms have become a new social field (new field) that intervenes in the habitus of baraka–competency rationality dialectic outside the control of formal institutions. Pakistani madrasah students who cannot engage in critical dialogue in class find that space on YouTube and Islamic podcasts. This is a phenomenon demanding serious attention in future research (Mutammam et al., 2025): digital media is not merely a communication tool, but a new social field producing new forms of habitus.

Finding 4: The difference between the Indonesian citizenship context and the Pakistani post-Zia-ul-Haq national framework constitutes a highly determinative field variable in shaping habitus configuration and capital production patterns at each institution. This confirms Bourdieu's view that field and habitus cannot be separated from the historical and structural context that shapes them (Fowler, 2020; Yang, 2014).

Finding 5: Emancipatory rupturethe spaces in which competency rationality finds openings within the dominance of a conservative habitus of barakais a mechanism of transformation that works from within, not from without. This carries an important policy implication: effective Islamic educational reform must be able to identify and strengthen these emancipatory ruptures, rather than imposing change from outside in ways that provoke habitus resistance (Baianstovu & Ablett, 2020).

Finding 6: Pakistan is actively positioning Indonesia as a reference model for madrasah reform. This opens genuine opportunities for policy collaboration and academic exchange that have not yet been optimally exploited. Several Pakistani madrasah alumni who have visited Indonesia report significant transformations of perspectiveempirical evidence that cross-field exchange can be an effective instrument of habitus transformation (Pöllmann, 2016; Sumanti et al., 2024).

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study is the formulation of the Habitus-Competency Dialectic (HCD) analytical model as a new framework for reading social transformation through Islamic education. This model does not merely combine Bourdieu and Habermas eclectically, but builds a critical dialogue between

them: the tension between habitus as a structure of reproduction (Bourdieu) and communicative rationality as emancipatory potential (Habermas) serves as the analytical motor that synthesizes rather than compromises. Pöllmann, 2016 has called for the development of Bourdieusian frameworks more sensitive to intercultural transformation; this study responds to that call by presenting Habermas as a critical partner who does not replace, but enriches, the Bourdieusian analysis.

The second contribution is the elaboration of the concept of the habitus of baraka as an independent analytical category within the sociology of Islamic education. Prior to this study, concepts of baraka, sincerity, and obedience in Islamic education were read more as normative values or cultural descriptions than as habitus in the strict Bourdieusian sense. This study demonstrates that the habitus of baraka can be operationalized through observable indicators: patterns of teacher-student interaction, structures of deliberation, the distribution of decision-making authority, and the career orientations of alumni. Habibi & Sholikha, 2025 opened this path within the context of a single pesantren; this study extends it to a cross-national comparative dimension not previously undertaken.

Third, this study contributes to the expansion of comparative Islamic educational sociology by demonstrating that comparison of Indonesian pesantren and Pakistani madrasah is not only methodologically feasible but also theoretically productive. Both share the same epistemological roots (The tradition of classical Islamic scholarship, kitab kuning/dars-e-nizami teaching, hierarchical teacher-student structures) yet produce very different configurations of habitus and capital; these differences are themselves sources of valuable knowledge.

The first and most substantive novelty is the formulation of the HCD (Habitus-Competency Dialectic) model as an analytical model that can be replicated and developed for Islamic educational contexts in other countries. The model consists of three mutually interacting components: field configuration, capital production, and quality of communicative action. These three components together determine the pattern of social transformation produced by Islamic educational institutionsa formulation that moves beyond the descriptive models that have dominated studies of pesantren and madrasah (Wajdi, 2022; Rini Nopita & Decky Saputra, 2025).

The second novelty is the systematic Indonesia–Pakistan comparison that, for the first time, places both contexts within a single integrated analytical framework. Until now, literature on Indonesian pesantren and Pakistani madrasah has traveled separate pathseach with its own normative framework and contextual assumptions. This study demonstrates that comparing the two rigorously yields insights not obtainable from mono-contextual studies, particularly regarding how field variables (National context, history, civic framework) shape habitus and capital. Harjatanaya, 2025 has demonstrated the value of such comparison in other Indonesian contexts; our study extends it to Pakistan as a highly contrasting mirror.

The third novelty is the identification of digital platforms as a new social field that intervenes in the habitus-competency dialectic beyond the control of formal institutions. This is a finding that was not anticipated at the outset of the research, but

consistently emerged in both contexts and therefore possesses sufficient empirical weight to be claimed as a new finding requiring more focused future research (Muhammad Akmansyah et al., 2025; Mutammam et al., 2025).

This study proposes an important modification to the standard application of Bourdieu's theory in educational contexts: habitus is not only a product of the existing field, but also an agent that actively renegotiates that field, particularly when there is pressure from other fieldsthe global economic field and the impacted political field (National civic framework). Yang, 2014 has warned against the danger of determinism in readings of Bourdieu; this study provides empirical evidence from a non-Western context that habitus negotiation is a real and traceable process, not merely a theoretical concession. Fowler, 2020 reinforces this by showing how Bourdieu himself, in the later years of his career, increasingly allowed space for structural transformation initiated by reflexive agents.

A further implication is that the concept of symbolic capital needs to be extended to accommodate a spiritual-religious dimension that cannot be reduced to the secular symbolic capital categories Bourdieu typically employs. The habitus of baraka produces a form of symbolic capital whose legitimacy derives from sacred authorityand this operates according to a logic somewhat different from symbolic capital derived from academic prestige or conventional social status. Darmawan, 2024; Fowler, 2020 provide adequate conceptual grounding for this development; this study supplies the data from a highly specific and previously unexplored field.

For Habermas's theory, this study demonstrates that the concepts of communicative action and the public sphere need to be recontextualized when applied to societies with strong traditions of sacred authority. Habermas's ideal public sphere assumes participants who are equal, free from domination, and subject only to the force of argument. In the context of pesantren and madrasah, these conditions are never fully metnor do they need to be fully met in order to produce significant social transformation. What is relevant is the degree of communicative openness that exists, not the perfection of ideal conditions. Koomen, 2020 and Baianstovu & Ablett, 2020 have pointed in this direction; this study reinforces that trajectory with rich comparative field evidence from two structurally very different contexts.Tihnike, 2025 adds that within non-Western educational psychological traditions, Habermas's critical approach is most productive when applied not as a normative standard but as a diagnostic tool for identifying how far existing practices approach or deviate from the communicative ideal. This is precisely what this study does, and the results reveal gradations far richer than the overly simplified 'communicative/non-communicative' dichotomy that cannot capture the complexity of field realities.

The most pressing policy implication of this study is the recommendation to develop a systematic exchange program between Indonesian pesantren and Pakistani madrasahnot merely student exchanges, but exchanges of leaders, curricula, and governance models. Field evidence shows that direct exposure to the Indonesian pesantren model is capable of producing significant habitus transformation in Pakistani madrasah alumni. This represents an investment in soft power with returns far greater and more sustainable than conventional policy interventions that

frequently fail because they do not account for the habitus dimension (Harjatanaya, 2025; Pöllmann, 2016).

For educational policy in Indonesia, the findings of this study support the strategic step of establishing a Directorate General of Pesantren: this institutionalization strengthens the symbolic capital of pesantren as a whole and creates conditions more conducive to the co-evolution of the habitus of baraka and competency rationality. Harjatanaya, 2025; Sumanti et al., 2024 have identified the need for this institutional strengthening; our research provides a deeper theoretical justification. Also demonstrate that the development of kitab kuning learning models in pesantren-based higher education can serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity needed in the context of continuously evolving Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

This research began from a sense of dissatisfaction: dissatisfaction with studies of pesantren and madrasah that are empirically rich but theoretically thin; that are mono-contextual when the world increasingly demands cross-civilizational comparison; and that treat baraka and sincerity as mere cultural color rather than as serious analytical categories. By integrating the Bourdieu and Habermas frameworks in a productive dialoguenot merely eclecticallyand by drawing on field data from four institutions in two countries over a period of more than eight months, this study demonstrates that the transmission of religious knowledge is not a static process of reproducing tradition, but a dynamic dialectic between habitus and competency rationality that can drive real social transformation.

The Habitus-Competency Dialectic (HCD) model proposed in this study offers a more nuanced, contextually sensitive, and theoretically robust framework for reading Islamic educational institutionsone that goes beyond dichotomies of 'modern vs. traditional,' 'open vs. closed,' or 'moderate vs. radical.' What matters is the mechanism: how the habitus of baraka is configured, how capital is converted, and how communicative action is enabled or constrained. When these three elements move in mutually reinforcing circuits, social transformation becomes not only possible but inevitable.

The study also leaves open several important avenues for future research: the role of digital platforms as new social fields in the habitus-competency dialectic; the potential for systematic cross-national exchange programs to serve as instruments of habitus transformation; and the application of the HCD model to other Islamic educational contextsTurkey, Morocco, Bangladesh, or West Africawhere the interplay of tradition, modernity, and social transformation takes yet other forms. The dialogue between Bourdieu and Habermas, it turns out, has much more to say about non-Western religious education than scholars have yet allowed it to say.

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