

Bonding and Bridging: An Analysis of Putnam's Social Capital in Pesantren Community

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Abstract

This descriptive qualitative study aims to analyze the forms, roles, and implications of social capital in the lives of students at Al Hikmah Islamic Boarding School. Social capital is understood as a set of values, norms, networks, and beliefs that shape social interactions and cohesion in the boarding school environment. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The results show that the lives of santri reflect three main forms of social capital: bonding (solidarity among santri), bridging (relationships between groups and religious social activities), and linking (vertical relationships with caregivers and the surrounding community). These three forms play a significant role in building the religious character, discipline, and independence of santri. In addition, social capital at Al Hikmah is an important foundation for the formation of a culture of mutual cooperation, mutual trust, and collective responsibility. This study confirms that strengthening social capital in Islamic boarding schools not only strengthens internal relationships but is also strategic in developing the role of santri as agents of social change in society.

Keywords social capital, santri, pesantren, social trust, religious life

A. Introduction

Local communities are an important arena for the formation of social relationships, collective norms, and networks of mutual trust that enable cooperation to achieve common goals. The concept of *social capital* is the main theoretical framework to explain how social relations (trust, networks, norms) contribute to the collective capacity of a community in managing resources and dealing with social change. Robert D. Putnam (2000) classifies social capital into two main forms, namely bonding and bridging. *Social capital bonding* refers to strong bonds between homogeneous community members, while *social capital bridging* describes connectivity with socially, economically, or culturally different outsiders. Both serve as the foundation of social cohesion and participatory development.

In the Indonesian context, traditional Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools are one of the institutions that are rich in social capital practices. Pesantren not only function as educational and da'wah institutions, but also as centers for character development, social solidarity, and economic empowerment of the surrounding community. In the pesantren life system, social capital grows through the closeness between students, kyai, and the community. Trust, mutual cooperation, and alumni networks are the main assets that allow pesantren to survive and develop in the midst of changing times (Suryani, 2023).

One concrete example of the application of social capital can be seen at **the Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School, Gedanganak Village, East Ungaran District, Semarang Regency**. This Islamic boarding school is known as an institution that not only focuses on religious education, but is also active in social empowerment and community activities. In this pesantren environment, the values of bonding can be seen from the close relationship between students, ustaz, and kyai which is established through religious activities, community service, and the habituation of common discipline. Meanwhile, the bridging aspect can be seen from the involvement of Islamic boarding schools in the activities of the surrounding community, cooperation with government institutions and social organizations, and the participation of alumni in the development of socio-economic programs. This interaction pattern shows that the Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School has great potential in practicing social capital both inward and outward.

Previous studies have shown the important role of social capital in the context of pesantren. (Ihsan, n.d.) emphasized that the strengthening of the pesantren economy is largely supported by social networks based on trust and collaboration. Showing that pesantren social networks have a significant impact in expanding social and political influence at the local level. (Chawa et al., 2024) found that social capital is the key to social resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in mobilizing community participation. However, most of these studies have not specifically examined the balance between bonding and bridging social capital in one Islamic boarding school institution as a whole, especially in the context of Islamic boarding schools in Central Java such as Al-Hikmah, East Ungaran.

Theoretically, Putnam's (2000) framework asserts that the balance between bonding and bridging is important for maintaining social sustainability. When the bond is too strong, the

community can become exclusive and close itself off to change; On the other hand, bridging that is too dominant risks weakening internal identity. Thus, the balance of these two forms of social capital is key for institutions such as pesantren that play a dual role—maintaining tradition while interacting with modernity.

This research emerged because empirical studies on the application of Putnam's theory in the pesantren community at the micro level are still limited. There has not been much research that has in-depth examined how the two forms of social capital work simultaneously in one pesantren and how they contribute to the welfare of the pesantren community and the surrounding community. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how bonding and bridging social capital are formed, maintained, and utilized in the Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School, Gedanganak, East Ungaran, Semarang Regency.

This research is important because the results can expand theoretical understanding of the dynamics of social capital in Islamic religious institutions while making a practical contribution to strengthening the role of pesantren as agents of social cohesion, community empowerment, and economic development based on religious values.

Based on the description of the background, this research departs from the main question of how the form and mechanism of social capital bonding is formed in the Al-Hikmah Gedanganak Islamic Boarding School community and how the social capital bridging mechanism connects the pesantren with the community and various external institutions around it. This study also questions what factors affect the strength of the two forms of social capital and how bonding and bridging contribute to social cohesion and community empowerment around pesantren.

The purpose of this study is to describe the form and practice of social capital bonding in Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School and analyze how bridging social capital is formed through the interaction of pesantren with the external environment. This research also aims to identify the factors that strengthen or weaken the two forms of social capital and explain the contribution of social capital to strengthening social cohesion, community participation, and socio-economic development of the pesantren community.

This research is limited to the Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School community in Gedanganak Village, East Ungaran District, Semarang Regency, which includes students, kyai, ustaz, administrators, and alumni networks involved in pesantren life. The focus of the research is directed

at the two dimensions of social capital as stated by Putnam, namely bonding and bridging social capital. The research analysis is limited to the form of social relationships, norms, values, and internal and external cooperation networks formed in the educational, social, and economic activities of the Islamic boarding school. Using qualitative approaches and case study methods through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, this study only focuses on the dynamics of social capital as it appears in the social reality of Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School as a representation of Islamic boarding schools with dynamic social character.

B. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

The concept of social capital is the main analytical framework of this research. Robert D. Putnam describes social capital as a network of relationships, shared norms, and levels of trust that allow for coordination and collaboration for the common good; Putnam distinguishes social capital into *bonding* that strengthens internal bonds in homogeneous groups and *bridging* that bridges different groups so as to open access to new information and resources (Putnam, 2000). This framework is useful for analyzing how interpersonal relations and collective norms at the micro level affect the collective capacity of social institutions such as pesantren in mobilizing resources and dealing with external pressures (Putnam, 2000).

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, Indonesian empirical literature shows that social capital is actualized in daily practices such as mutual cooperation, alumni networks, Islamic boarding school cooperatives, and cooperation with local actors; Internal networks (bonding) are often the basis of commitment, discipline, and solidarity that allow the mobilization of social labor and capital for collective efforts, while external networks (bridging) allow access to markets, training, and institutional support that strengthen the capacity of Islamic boarding schools' economic empowerment. Case studies show how Islamic boarding schools and cooperatives supported by internal trust are able to grow when they are also supported by external networks that open market access and resources. Therefore, the analysis of the Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School needs to examine these two dimensions simultaneously.

Further studies emphasize the role of institutional and leadership variables in determining the effectiveness of bonding and bridging. The charismatic leadership of the kyai, the governance of the pesantren organization, the orientation of the curriculum (traditional vs. modern), and the demographic composition of the students (background, economic status) function as factors that

strengthen or weaken social capital; In other words, social capital is not a static condition, but rather a product of the interaction of cultural practices, institutional structures, and policies. Applied research on a number of Islamic boarding schools shows that institutional initiatives such as student entrepreneurship programs and participatory mechanisms of administrators facilitate bridging without eroding the bond when leadership is able to maintain shared values (Muammarulloh, 2022). Therefore, the analysis of Al-Hikmah must include institutional variables as an important context.

The literature also warns of the trade-offs and complementarity between bonding and bridging: excessive bonding can lead to exclusivity and resistance to change, while intense bridging without a strong bonding foundation can create loose networks that easily collapse in times of crisis. Therefore, many studies suggest the search for balance (orchestration) between the two as an ideal condition for maintaining identity while opening up opportunities for socio-economic adaptation and empowerment (La Ola et al., 2020). However, empirical evidence mapping the relative proportions and mechanisms of bonding-bridging interactions at the pesantren level is still limited, especially for small-medium scale pesantren in rural-semiurban contexts such as Al-Hikmah, so this case study is expected to fill this gap.

C. Research Method

Research on bonding and bridging in the social capital of students at the Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School, Gedang Anak, East Ungaran, Semarang Regency, relies on a qualitative paradigm with a phenomenological approach. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because it is able to reveal the meaning, experience, and social construction that lives in the pesantren community which has typical social relationship dynamics and cannot be reduced to statistical numbers (Widayanti, 2020). The phenomenological approach is used to explore the experiences of students in establishing internal, strong, and homogeneous bonding relationships as well as external bridging and bridging the wider social network as quoted from Putnam's theory of social capital (Putnam, 2000). In the context of pesantren, phenomenology allows researchers to capture the reality of relationships between students, students-teachers, and the relationship between pesantren and the surrounding community in depth, because these social relations cannot be understood only through surface observation but need to be interpreted through the subject's awareness and experience. Thus, the selection of this theoretical foundation is adequate to examine

the different social capital practices between internal and external networks in the pesantren community.

The research was conducted in several structured stages. The first stage is pre-field, which includes applying for permits to pesantren caregivers, determining key informants, and initial exploration to understand the local culture and research ethics in the pesantren environment. At this stage, the researcher also conducted an initial mapping of students' social relationships through non-participatory observation in the cottage environment. The second stage is the collection of field data that lasts for several weeks with a pattern of *prolonged engagement* to capture the dynamics of social relations that cannot be seen through short visits (Creswell, 2018). The interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach so that informants were free to express their views on bonding, such as room solidarity, seniority, and a sense of togetherness, as well as bridging, for example, the relationship between pesantren and villagers or alumni. Observations are carried out at strategic moments, such as mutual cooperation activities, grand recitations, and student interaction with the Gedang Anak community. The last stage is data analysis which is carried out using interactive models (Miles, 2019): data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. This implementation resulted in field findings that comprehensively reflect the real dynamics of bonding and bridging in the pesantren community.

D. Discussion

The study of social capital in the pesantren community has become an important discourse in the study of Indonesian Islamic society. Theoretically, (Putnam R.D, 2000) emphasizes two main dimensions of social capital: bonding (social bonds that strengthen the internal cohesion of the group) and bridging (outward relationships that build bridges with other communities). The findings of the study show that pesantren build social capital bonding through intense collective living practices. The same environment, shared routines, and culture help each other produce strong psychological attachment among students. Activities such as weekly mutual cooperation, room deliberations, evening recitations, and ta'dzim culture to teachers strengthen group cohesion and create a relatively stable internal support system. This phenomenon is in line with research (Marwa, 2021) which shows that social bonds in Islamic boarding schools are formed through routine religious activities, dormitory culture, and the enforcement of collective discipline. Pesantren is seen

as a *moral community* that binds its members through a common value system. In the context of Putnam, this kind of bonding strengthens *in-group loyalty* and internal trust (Putnam R.D, 2000)

Nevertheless, there is an important difference. Some previous studies have criticized that strong bonding can lead to exclusivity and social distancing from outsiders (Hasbullah, 2006). Dalam penelitian ini, eksklusivitas tersebut tidak tampak Dominant. The senior–junior system runs in a pattern of educational guidance, not a repressive hierarchy. These findings suggest that strong bonding isn't always self-closing; Islamic boarding schools can maintain internal cohesion without reducing the social adaptation ability of students.

Culture of manners and discipline are the main pillars in building bonding. This is consistent with studies (Dhofier, 2011) which describes pesantren as a community that maintains classical Islamic moral traditions through teacher-student relations based on respect. Your research strengthens this view by showing that the values of ta'dzim, awareness of maintaining the good name of the Islamic boarding school, and the habit of deliberation are internal mechanisms that create social stability.

The research found that the Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School established a harmonious relationship with the people of Gedang Anak Village through public recitation, social activities, and the participation of students in religious events. This interaction shows a pattern of *bridging social capital* that expands the network of Islamic boarding schools while strengthening their social position in society.

Previous studies on the social role of pesantren (Latief, 2012; Rohman, 2018) It also emphasized that pesantren is an institution that functions as an agent of social change through da'wah, informal education, and community empowerment. Thus, the findings of this study support the literature that bridging is an important factor that allows pesantren to be widely accepted by the community.

Field findings show that students are routinely involved with the community, starting from teaching ngaji, helping village activities, to daily interactions at the market or mosque. In Putnam's perspective, this practice forms *weak ties* that are important for the expansion of social networks and the formation of communication skills.

It is different from some studies that suggest that some pesantren are closed and lack interaction with the community (Fauzi, 2015; Nilan, 2009), This study shows that Al-Hikmah Islamic

Boarding School has a fairly high social openness. This indicates that the character of bridging in Islamic boarding schools is not homogeneous—but is greatly influenced by the local culture, kiai leadership, and institutional orientation of each Islamic boarding school.

Alumni involvement strengthens the external relationship of the pesantren. This is consistent with the findings (Azra, 2019) that the pesantren alumni network is one of the most important sources of social capital that extends the influence of pesantren to various social institutions. The findings of this study show that alumni function as a bridge that connects Islamic boarding schools with the outside world in a sustainable manner.

Research shows that bonding and bridging form the character of students in a complementary way. Bonding strengthens discipline, internal solidarity, and life skills in the community. Meanwhile, bridging fosters social trust, communication skills, and readiness to interact in public spaces.

These findings support Putnam's framework that social capital generates the ability of groups to create an environment that supports individual development. In Islamic boarding schools, the social capital equips students with relevant social competencies in society. However, there are critical notes. Some studies have suggested that too strong a bond without bridging balance can lead to isolation and resistance to change (Furbey, 2006).

E. Conclusion

The Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Gedanganak, East Ungaran, serves as a living arena for the actualization of social capital, a concept analyzed through Robert D. Putnam's framework of bonding and bridging. Internally, social bonding capital is intensely formed through daily routines that are held together—ranging from weekly cooperation, evening recitation, to *ta'dzim* culture to kyai and teachers—all of which work together to produce group cohesion, discipline, and a very strong internal psychological support system among the students.

Uniquely, this strong internal bond does not lead to exclusivity, but rather serves as a moral foundation and commitment. Meanwhile, bridging social capital has been successfully developed externally, where pesantren actively bridge themselves with the outside community through the involvement of students in village activities, public recitation, and most importantly, through alumni networks that act as sustainable connectors with various institutions in the outside world.

Thus, Al-Hikmah presents a balanced model, where *bonding* strengthens internal identity and solidarity, while *bridging* fosters social skills, trust, and external access. This dynamic balance allows pesantren to not only survive as religious educational institutions, but also to function effectively as agents of social cohesion and community empowerment that are able to adapt to the changing times.

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