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Piety, Prestige, and Moral Panic: Muslim Parents' Preferences for Tahfidz Schools in Kediri Following the Conservative Turn

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Abstract

Abstract: This study examines Muslim parents' preferences for tahfidz schools in Kediri following the conservative shift in Indonesia. The research aims to explain how the pursuit of piety, moral panic, and social prestige shape parental educational choices. Using a qualitative multi-sited design, the study was conducted in eight tahfidz-based schools and involved 35 informants consisting of parents, school leaders, and tahfidz teachers. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, then analyzed through data reduction, categorization, comparison across sites, and triangulation. The findings show that parents choose tahfidz schools not merely to ensure that their children memorize the Qur'an, but because these institutions are perceived as capable of forming disciplined, pious, and morally controlled children. Tahfidz schools are also viewed as moral strongholds against perceived threats such as digital media, permissive social norms, drugs, and the erosion of parental authority. At the same time, parents seek a model of Islamic education that is religiously robust yet avoids radicalism or social exclusion. Furthermore, Qur'anic memorization serves as symbolic capital that enhances family prestige and as a practical asset for securing scholarships, access to higher education, and future employment opportunities. Theoretically, this study demonstrates that the rising popularity of tahfidz schools cannot be attributed solely to religious motivation or conservative ideology. Rather, tahfidz education constitutes a space where piety, moral panic, symbolic capital, and aspirations for social mobility converge. The findings thus expand discussions on the conservative turn in Indonesia by demonstrating that contemporary Muslim families navigate the tension between religious commitment, social anxiety, and class aspirations when selecting Islamic educational institutions. The study concludes that the growing preference for tahfidz schools reflects the interplay of religious aspirations, moral anxieties, social status, and the pursuit of social mobility within contemporary Muslim families.

Keywords: conservative turn; moral panic; muslim parents; piety; social mobility; social prestige; tahfidz school

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, *tahfidz* education has emerged as one of the most sought-after forms of Islamic education in Indonesia (Anisaturrizqi et al., 2025; Kusnadi et al., 2025). Madrasahs, integrated Islamic schools, and modern pesantren are competing to make Quran memorization their primary identity and institutional selling point (Setiawan et al., 2025). Labels such as "tahfidz," "Qur'anic school," and "tahfidz-based Islamic boarding school" are now found not only in major cities but also in suburban and rural areas (Handayani et al., 2025). This phenomenon indicates that memorizing the Qur'an is no longer viewed merely as a supplement to religious education, but has become the primary focus in the educational choices of Muslim families.

The rising popularity of *tahfidz* schools cannot be separated from the shift in the religious orientation of Indonesian Muslims following the Reformation. A number of studies indicate that the post-2000 period was marked by a strengthening of *the "conservative turn"* (Assyaukanie, 2013; M. V. Bruinessen, 2011; M. van Bruinessen, 2014), that is, a religious orientation that is more scripturalist, symbolic, and focused on reinforcing Islamic identity in the public sphere (Wahid, 2014a). In this context, children's education becomes a crucial arena for negotiating the family's religious identity. Parents no longer merely consider a school's academic quality, facilities, or geographical proximity, but also the extent to which the school can embody the Islamic values they deem ideal (Nurani et al., 2022). Quranic memorization schools are then perceived as spaces capable of shaping children who are pious, disciplined, and have a life orientation centered on the Quran.

At the same time, the growing interest in *tahfidz* schools has coincided with increasing anxiety among Muslim parents regarding contemporary social changes. Modernization, social media, digital popular culture, promiscuity, drugs, and the weakening of family authority are often perceived as threats to children's morality (Rofhani, 2013; Sulaeman et al., 2024). In many Muslim families, there is a growing belief that public schools are no longer capable of providing sufficient moral protection and social control. In such situations, *tahfidz* schools are viewed not only as educational institutions but also as moral strongholds capable of shielding children from the negative influences of the outside world (Boyle, 2004, 2006; Ware, 2014). On the other hand, there are also concerns that some overly strict models of Islamic education may foster fanatical, exclusive attitudes and an inability to accept differences (Boyle, 2014). Consequently, parents face a dilemma between the need for a strong religious education and the desire for their children to remain capable of living in a pluralistic society.

In addition to being linked to the pursuit of piety and a sense of moral security, the choice of a *tahfidz* school is also increasingly associated with social prestige (Frishkopf, 2009; Hasan, 2009). In many Muslim communities, a child's

success in becoming a Qur'an memorizer is viewed as a symbol of the family's success in raising their children (Bakar, 2014). A child who memorizes the Qur'an is not only seen as a pious individual but also as a representation of the parents' moral and spiritual qualities (Rozaki et al., 2019). Therefore, choosing a *tahfidz* school is often linked to efforts to gain social recognition, enhance the family's religious image, and strengthen their position within the community (Lukens-Bull, 2010). Thus, the preference for *tahfidz* schools appears to be shaped by a complex interplay between piety, moral panic, and the pursuit of prestige.

Nevertheless, most previous research still tends to view the phenomenon of *tahfidz* schools in a fragmented manner. A number of studies emphasize the aspects of religiosity and parents' spiritual motivation (Abdullah et al., 2021; Taufikin et al., 2025) , while other studies focus more on tahfidz schools as a trend in modern Islamic education or as a form of the "living Qur'an" (Munirah, 2017; Nurani et al., 2022). There is still relatively little research that specifically links the increasing preference for *tahfidz* schools to three dynamics simultaneously: the pursuit of piety, moral anxiety regarding social change, and the need for social recognition within the context of *the conservative turn*. This gap is significant because *tahfidz* schools actually function not only as educational institutions but also as arenas for identity production, class reproduction, and the negotiation of religious values within contemporary Muslim society.

To address this gap, this article employs a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design. This approach was chosen because the research objective is not to statistically measure parental preferences, but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of how piety, moral panic, and social prestige shape their decisions when choosing a *tahfidz* school (Ellingson, 2017). A multi-site design was used so that the study could compare motives, mindsets, and educational practices across several different institutions, thereby allowing for the identification of general patterns as well as variations between cases (Jokela-Pansini, 2019).

Eight research sites were selected through purposive sampling based on three academic considerations. First, these locations represent a variety of ideological orientations among Islamic educational institutions, ranging from moderate pesantren-based madrasahs such as MTs Sunan Ampel Pare and MTs Hidayatul Muta'allimin Gurah, modern tahfidz schools such as SMP Rahmat Kota Kediri and SMP Tahfidz Insan Qur'ani Grogol, to institutions affiliated with the Salafi methodology such as STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo and SMP Tahfidz Al Hafidz Pare. Second, all institutions feature a *tahfidz* program as their primary identity, enabling a comparison of how *tahfidz* is constructed as a means of fostering piety, moral protection, and social prestige. Third, these eight locations are situated in distinct social contexts, urban, suburban, and rural, thereby illustrating how parental preferences are shaped by diverse social environments. Thus, this article seeks to explain how piety, prestige, and moral panic intertwine in shaping

Muslim parents' preferences for *tahfidz* schools in Indonesia following *the conservative turn*.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design to understand Muslim parents' preferences regarding *tahfidz* schools following *the conservative turn*. A multi-site design was chosen so that the researcher could compare educational motives, perceptions, and practices across various *tahfidz* institutions with different ideological orientations and management models (Falzon, 2009; Jokela-Pansini, 2019; LOUIS, 1982) . The research locations include MTs Sunan Ampel Pare, SMP Rahmat Kota Kediri, STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo, SMP Tahfidz Al Hafidz Pare, MTs Hidayatul Muta'allimin Gurah, SMP Tahfidz Insan Qur'ani Grogol, and SMP Tahfidz Al Mubarok Kota Kediri. The research was conducted over a six-month period, from July to December 2025. During this period, the researcher conducted phased field observations at each institution for 5–7 days, resulting in a total observation time of 41 days.

The research data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with 35 informants, consisting of 21 parents of students, 7 school principals or vice principals, and 7 *tahfidz* teachers and school administrators. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, taking into account their involvement in educational decision-making and school management (Malterud et al., 2016). The interviews were conducted in two stages. The first stage focused on parents' reasons for choosing a *tahfidz* school, their perceptions of public schools, and their hopes for their children's future. The second stage was conducted to delve deeper into emerging themes, particularly regarding piety, moral panic, social prestige, and pragmatic considerations (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). In addition to interviews, the researchers observed daily school activities, ranging from the *tahfidz* learning process, congregational prayer, religious practice, gadget use, patterns of interaction between teachers and students, to forms of supervision over student behavior. Observations were conducted by recording relevant situations, conversations, and behaviors in daily field notes (Ciesielska et al., 2018) .

A document analysis was conducted on 54 documents obtained from each institution. These documents included school profiles, curricula and class schedules, student handbooks, brochures and pamphlets for new student admissions, school social media posts, photos of activities, minutes of parent-teacher meetings, and school policy archives related to the *tahfidz* and character-building programs (Thorne, 2000). All data were analyzed interactively through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. During the reduction stage, results from interviews, observations, and documents were

coded and grouped into main themes, such as piety, moral panic, social prestige, and pragmatic motives. The next stage involved comparing data across institutions to identify recurring patterns and differences in the characteristics of each school (Creswell et al., 2007). Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking with nine key informants, ensuring the researcher's interpretations remained consistent with the participants' experiences and perspectives (Annells, 2006).

3. Findings

Research on Piety, Prestige, and Moral Panic: Muslim Parents' Preferences for Tahfidz Schools in Kediri Following the Conservative Turn at MTs Sunan Ampel Pare, SMP Rahmat Kota Kediri, STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo, SMP Tahfidz Al Hafidz Pare, MTs Hidayatul Muta'allimin Gurah, SMP Tahfidz Insan Qur'ani Grogol, and SMP Tahfidz Al Mubarok Kota Kediri indicate that parents' preferences for *tahfidz* schools are shaped by three main motives: the pursuit of piety, moral panic regarding social change, and the pursuit of social prestige. These three motives are further reinforced by pragmatic considerations regarding their children's educational and career futures.

3.1 Piety as the Basis of Preference

The most dominant factor in choosing a *tahfidz* school is parents' desire to raise children who are pious, disciplined, and have a life orientation centered on the Qur'an (Hasyim et al., 2024; Sabri, 2020). Unlike public schools, which are perceived as placing too much emphasis on academic achievement, *tahfidz* schools are seen as capable of integrating cognitive, spiritual, and moral aspects. In the 8 *tahfidz*-based schools in Kediri that were studied, parents tended to understand piety not only as the ability to memorize the Qur'an, but also as the ability to maintain prayer, have good character, be obedient to parents, and possess a strong religious identity.

At MTs Sunan Ampel Pare and MTs Hidayatul Muta'allimin Gurah, for example, the focus on piety is directed more toward fostering a moderate, Qur'anic character. Parents choose these two institutions because they are seen as capable of raising religious children without compromising their ability to adapt to their social environment. Conversely, at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo and SMP Tahfidz Al Hafidz Pare, the dimension of piety is more closely associated with a clear educational approach and a firm commitment to religious education. Parents believe that these institutions are capable of providing a stronger foundation of faith amidst the proliferation of religious information that is considered unclear.

> "I want my child to be a child of the Qur'an, not just academically smart, but strong in faith and character. These days, public schools focus more on

grades, whereas I want my child to also be able to maintain their prayers and show respect to their parents." (Parent of a student at MTs Sunan Ampel Pare)

"I chose this school because I want my child to be religious, yet still able to socialize well. What matters isn't just memorizing the Qur'an, but also having good character and being able to live in society." (Parent of a student at MTs Hidayatul Muta'allimin Gurah)

"These days, there's a lot of religious information out there that's unclear. That's why I chose a school with a clear educational approach, so that my child doesn't just memorize things, but also develops a strong faith and a sound way of thinking." (Parent of a student at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo)

Although there are differences in institutional orientation, all schools share the common view that memorizing the Qur'an serves as a means of character development. Memorization is not understood as an end in itself, but as a gateway to the habit of worship, discipline, and the internalization of religious values. Therefore, parents tend to choose *tahfidz* schools that not only focus on the number of *juz* memorized but are also capable of shaping children's behavior and way of thinking.

3.2 Moral Panic and *Tahfidz* Schools as Moral Strongholds

The preference for *tahfidz* schools cannot be separated from parents' fears of social change following the conservative turn in. Research findings indicate that globalization, social media, digital popular culture, promiscuity, and the weakening of parental authority are perceived as serious threats to children's moral development. In the informants' view, the outside world is understood as a space that is increasingly difficult to control because children are considered easily exposed to behaviors and values that contradict Islamic teachings. Consequently, the decision to choose a *tahfidz* school is not solely driven by the desire for children to memorize the Qur'an, but also by the need to protect them from environmental influences deemed increasingly unsafe.

These concerns primarily take the form of fears regarding the use of electronic devices, social media, dating, drugs, and a decline in children's respect for their parents. Parents at SMP Rahmat in Kediri City, SMP Tahfidz Al Mubarok in Kediri City, and STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo consistently describe public schools as being too closely tied to the internet, TikTok, and social environments they consider harmful. A parent at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo stated that they chose a *tahfidz* school out of concern that their child would follow the behavioral patterns prevalent among today's youth. They emphasized, "Many children nowadays defy their parents, are constantly on their phones, date, and end up going astray. I'm afraid my child will follow suit. That's why I enrolled them in a *tahfidz* school" (Interview with a parent of a student at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo, August 12,

2025). This statement indicates that *tahfidz* schools are viewed as a way to maintain a distance between children and various forms of social influence deemed harmful.

Similar concerns have also emerged at SMP Tahfidz Al Mubarok in Kediri City. One parent explained that changes in the behavior of children in the surrounding community were the main reason he chose a *tahfidz* school. According to him, "When they come home from school, kids these days are constantly on TikTok, using coarse language, and showing no respect for their parents. I'm afraid my child will be influenced by that" (Interview with a parent of a student at SMP Tahfidz Al Mubarok in Kediri City, September 3, 2025). This quote demonstrates that digital media and popular culture are perceived not only as a threat to daily behavior but also to the structure of family relationships, particularly the decline in obedience and respect toward parents.

In this context, *tahfidz* schools are understood as a "social firewall" or moral bulwark capable of limiting the influx of external values deemed destructive (Handayani et al., 2025; Sabri, 2020) . Parents view institutions such as MTs Sunan Ampel Pare and SMP Tahfidz Insan Qur'ani Grogol as capable of providing a more protected environment because children's activities take place within a relatively closed, disciplined system grounded in religious values. Through a structured daily routine, intensive supervision, the cultivation of religious practices, and control over social interactions, *tahfidz* schools are perceived as capable of providing a sense of security no longer found in public schools. Thus, the choice of a *tahfidz* school is not merely an educational decision but a parental strategy to protect children from the moral uncertainties arising from digital modernity.

3.3 Between Fear of Liberalism and Radicalism

Interestingly, parents' moral panic is directed not only at the threat of the liberalization of values, but also at the possibility of their children being exposed to radicalism and ultra-conservatism (Amal et al., 2024). Parents desire a strong religious education, but at the same time do not want their children to become fanatical, exclusive, or intolerant of differences (Setiawan et al., 2025). These findings indicate that a preference for *tahfidz* schools is always accompanied by a rigorous ideological selection process. Parents not only consider the quality of memorization, discipline, and school facilities, but also pay attention to the religious character, the teachers' teaching methods, and the extent to which the institution is able to instill Islamic values without promoting social alienation (Ramli, 2024).

At MTs Sunan Ampel Pare, SMP Rahmat in Kediri City, and SMP Tahfidz Al Hafidz Pare, for example, parents explicitly reject overly strict models of religious education. They want their children to be devout, yet still able to interact with a pluralistic society and respect differences. One parent at MTs Sunan Ampel Pare

stated, "I want my child to memorize the Qur'an, but I don't want them to become fanatical or follow strange sects. What's important is that they have a strong faith, but can still get along with others" (Interview with a parent at MTs Sunan Ampel Pare, July 18, 2025). This statement indicates that the piety desired by parents is not an exclusive piety, but rather a piety that still allows children to live within a diverse society.

A similar view was expressed at Rahmat Junior High School in Kediri. A parent emphasized that the chosen religious education must be able to raise religious children without losing their social openness. He stated, "I don't want my child to be too rigid or think they're always right. I want them to understand religion, but also to be able to respect others and not be quick to blame" (Interview with a parent at SMP Rahmat in Kediri City, August 27, 2025). This quote demonstrates that parents are not only concerned about the erosion of values but also about the possibility of their children becoming trapped in an overly narrow and rigid understanding of religion.

Even at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo, which is affiliated with the Salafi approach, many parents still consider the institution moderate because it is seen as not promoting social exclusivism. In their view, what matters most is not the institution's ideological affiliation, but rather how religious values are taught in a balanced manner: neither liberal nor extreme. One parent at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo explained, "I know this school follows the *Salafi* methodology, but I see that here the children are still taught to respect others and not to hate those who are different. That's what puts my mind at ease" (Interview with a parent at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo, August 14, 2025). Thus, *tahfidz* schools are chosen because they are seen as capable of fostering a safe form of piety: strong enough to protect children from moral crises, yet not so strict as to alienate them from social life.

3.4 Social Prestige and a Symbol of Family Success

In addition to being driven by religious and protective motives, the choice of a *tahfidz* school is also related to the pursuit of social prestige. In religious Muslim communities, a child's success in becoming a memorizer of the Qur'an is viewed as a symbol of the family's success in raising their child. A child in a *tahfidz* school is not only seen as a pious individual but also as a representation of the parents' moral and spiritual qualities (Harahap, 2024; Rozaki et al., 2019). Thus, a child's success in memorizing the Qur'an yields what can be termed symbolic capital, a form of social recognition that elevates the family's standing within the community.

Findings at SMP Tahfidz Al Mubarok in Kediri City, MTs Hidayatul Muta'allimin in Gurah, and SMP Tahfidz Insan Qur'ani in Grogol indicate that parents feel an increase in social respect after their children become Quran memorizers. They feel more valued within their extended families, more trusted

in religious activities, and more frequently involved in social forums at the village and mosque levels. One parent at SMP Tahfidz Al Mubarok in Kediri City stated, "If a child memorizes the Qur'an, it becomes a source of family pride. In the village, people see us differently. That is an honor" (Interview with a parent of a student at SMP Tahfidz Al Mubarok, Kediri City, September 3, 2025). This statement indicates that memorizing the Qur'an is not only viewed as an individual achievement of the child but also as a source of moral legitimacy for the family.

At MTs Hidayatul Muta'allimin Gurah, one of the parents shared that after their child became a Quran memorizer, their standing in the community changed. According to them, "Now, whenever there's a religious gathering or event in the village, I'm often asked to share how I raised my child to memorize the Quran. People have come to respect us more" (Interview with a parent of a student at MTs Hidayatul Muta'allimin Gurah, September 22, 2025). This quote demonstrates that families with children who have memorized the Qur'an are perceived as families that have successfully upheld religious values, thereby earning greater trust and serving as role models within the community. Consequently, the social prestige that emerges is not merely a matter of personal pride but also broader social recognition, even influencing the family's standing within social and religious relationships.

In addition to these religious and symbolic motivations, this study also found pragmatic considerations in the choice of a *tahfidz* school. Many parents view memorizing the Qur'an as an asset that can open up educational and career opportunities in the future. This finding was particularly evident at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo, SMP Rahmat in Kediri City, and SMP Tahfidz Al Hafidz in Pare. Parents believe that children who have memorized the Qur'an have a greater chance of obtaining scholarships, being accepted into Islamic-based universities, or continuing their studies in the Middle East. Furthermore, memorizing the Qur'an is also perceived as a form of social capital that is useful for entering careers in Islamic education, da'wah, and religious institutions.

One of the parents at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo explained that the decision to enroll their child in a Quran memorization school was also influenced by considerations for the future. He stated, "There are many scholarships available now for children who have memorized the Qur'an. If my child can memorize it, he'll have a better chance of studying in the Middle East or working at a religious institution" (Interview with a parent at STQ Al-Qudwah Ringinrejo, August 14, 2025). A similar perspective emerged at SMP Rahmat in Kediri City. A parent remarked, "I see that memorizing the Qur'an is not only important for religion but can also serve as a foundation for the future. Children who have memorized the Qur'an are more easily accepted into certain schools and universities" (Interview with a parent of a student at SMP Rahmat in Kediri City, August 27, 2025). These quotes indicate that *tahfidz* education is understood not only as a spiritual

investment but also as a rational investment that yields academic and economic benefits.

Thus, parents' preference for *tahfidz* schools following the conservative turn cannot be explained by a single factor. This choice is the result of a convergence of the pursuit of piety, fear of a moral crisis, the need for social recognition, and pragmatic calculations regarding the child's future. *Tahfidz* schools are chosen because they are seen as capable of addressing all these needs simultaneously: upholding religion, protecting the child, enhancing family prestige, and opening opportunities for social mobility.

4. Discussion

The growing preference among Muslim parents for *tahfidz* schools indicates that contemporary Islamic education is no longer chosen solely for religious reasons, but also for its ability to address the various social needs of Muslim families (Hasan, 2009). *Tahfidz* schools are perceived simultaneously as spaces for fostering piety, moral strongholds, means of gaining social prestige, and instruments for future social mobility (Setiawan et al., 2025). Therefore, the choice of a *tahfidz* school demonstrates that religiosity, social status, and modern rationality do not operate in isolation but are intertwined in the educational practices of Muslim families (Bakar, 2014).

The choice of a *tahfidz* school is primarily based on parents' desire to raise children who are pious, disciplined, and have a life orientation centered on the Qur'an. However, the piety in question is no longer understood merely as ritual proficiency or rote memorization alone (Ware, 2014) . Parents desire children who are able to maintain their prayers, possess good character, are obedient to their parents, and demonstrate a strong religious identity in daily life (Hasyim et al., 2024). From Bryan S. Turner's perspective, this phenomenon indicates that religion in modern society functions as a means of shaping the body, discipline, and social identity. In Religion and Social Theory, (Turner, 1991), Turner explains that religious practice involves not only belief but also the formation of habitus through control over the body and behavior. The memorization of the Qur'an in *tahfidz* schools, therefore, is not understood as an end in itself, but rather as an instrument for producing embodied Islamic knowledge: religious knowledge manifested in actions, discipline, and daily life patterns (Ware, 2014).

Parents' deep-seated anxieties regarding social media, popular culture, promiscuity, and the weakening of family authority also indicate that *tahfidz* schools are chosen as a response to the perceived moral crisis in modern life. Parents view the outside world as an increasingly uncontrollable space, leading them to believe that public schools are no longer capable of providing sufficient moral protection for their children. In this situation, *tahfidz* schools are positioned

as a social firewall capable of limiting external influences through a disciplined daily routine, intensive supervision, the cultivation of religious practices, and a more homogeneous social environment. Turner's perspective helps explain this phenomenon. According to him, religion in modern society often functions as a source of moral regulation and ontological security, that is, a sense of safety and certainty of identity amidst rapid social change. Thus, the choice of a *tahfidz* school reflects not only a desire to strengthen religious practice but also a need to address the anxiety and uncertainty generated by digital modernity.

However, parents' concerns are not limited to the threat of the liberalization of values, but also extend to the possibility of their children being exposed to radicalism and ultra-conservatism. Parents desire a strong religious education, yet at the same time reject overly rigid, fanatical, and exclusive models of religiosity. Consequently, they tend to choose *tahfidz* schools perceived as moderate, institutions capable of balancing the reinforcement of Islamic identity with openness toward a pluralistic society (Bakar, 2014). This trend indicates that the "conservative turn" in Indonesia does not always result in radical forms of conservatism. On the contrary, as explained by Martin van Bruinessen, the conservative turn in Indonesian Islam often gives rise to forms of conservatism negotiated with local social realities (M. van Bruinessen, 2014) . In the context of this study, what emerges is not a conservatism that completely rejects the outside world, but rather a moderate conservatism: strong in moral and religious terms, yet still accepting of social plurality. Parents reject the liberalization of values, but at the same time also reject religious education that risks making their children exclusive and unable to thrive in a diverse society.

In addition to serving as a venue for fostering piety and moral protection, Quran memorization schools also serve as a means of gaining social prestige. A child who memorizes the Quran is viewed as a symbol of the family's success in raising children and upholding religious values. Therefore, a child's success in Quran memorization enhances social respect, strengthens moral legitimacy, and expands the family's standing within social and religious circles. This phenomenon can be understood through Robert W. Hefner's work regarding the Muslim middle class in Indonesia. Hefner demonstrates that the Muslim middle class utilizes Islamic symbols as a means of constructing identity and social status. While in the past these symbols were primarily manifested in clothing, religious consumption, or elite Islamic schools, this study indicates that memorizing the Qur'an has now become a new form of cultural capital. Children who memorize the Qur'an are not only seen as a sign of piety but also as a symbol that the family is successful, religious, and deserving of social respect.

This dimension of prestige is then intertwined with pragmatic considerations regarding the child's future. Parents not only hope their children will become pious, but also view memorizing the Qur'an as a means to secure

scholarships, pursue further studies in the Middle East, or enter careers in Islamic education and religious institutions (Wahid, 2014b) . In this context, *tahfidz* schools are chosen because they are perceived as capable of combining spiritual benefits with socio-economic advantages. This trend aligns with Hefner's analysis that modern Islamic education in Indonesia has developed alongside the aspirations of the Muslim middle class to integrate religiosity with social mobility. *Tahfidz* education is no longer understood as a choice that contradicts modern logic, but rather as a rational strategy for securing a better future. Thus, *tahfidz* schools have become spaces where piety, social status, and class aspirations converge within a single educational choice.

Therefore, the growing interest in *tahfidz* schools following the "conservative turn" should not be understood solely as a sign of rising religious conservatism. The choice of *tahfidz* schools actually demonstrates how Indonesian Muslim families are striving to respond to social change, manage moral anxieties, preserve religious identity, and simultaneously pursue social mobility. *Tahfidz* schools have become a complex arena of negotiation: a place where Muslim families strive to uphold their faith, gain a sense of security, enhance their social standing, and shape their children's future.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Muslim parents' preferences for *tahfidz* schools in Kediri following the conservative turn are shaped by the intersection of three major orientations: the pursuit of piety, moral panic regarding social change, and the search for social prestige. *Tahfidz* schools are chosen not merely for their ability to produce Qur'anic memorization, but because they are perceived as capable of cultivating embodied Islamic knowledge through discipline, moral conduct, and a strong religious identity, while simultaneously functioning as a moral fortress against the influences of digital media, permissive social relations, and the weakening of parental authority. At the same time, parents seek a form of piety that remains moderate: religiously strong but not exclusive, and still able to coexist within a pluralistic society. Qur'anic memorization also functions as a form of symbolic capital that enhances the family's social standing and as a pragmatic asset for securing educational opportunities and social mobility.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to eight *tahfidz* institutions in Kediri with specific socio-religious characteristics, and therefore does not fully represent the diversity of parental preferences in other regions or social classes. Future research should expand the geographical scope and compare different models of *tahfidz* schools across Indonesia, while also examining longitudinally how *tahfidz* education shapes children's religious identity, worldview, and social mobility as they enter adulthood.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT to assist with language refinement, improving readability, translation, and the organization of several sections of the manuscript. The authors also used DeepL to check for linguistic accuracy and improve the clarity of English expressions. All outputs generated by these tools were carefully reviewed, revised, and validated by the authors. The authors assume full responsibility for the content of this publication, including its interpretations, arguments, and conclusions.

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