

Student Delinquency at Prestigious Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of student delinquency within elite boarding schools, challenging the dominant assumption that prestigious educational institutions inherently guarantee holistic student development. Using a qualitative exploratory case study design, research was conducted in three upper-class boarding schools in Indonesia. Data were collected over a three-month period through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, involving 29 participants consisting of students, teachers, dormitory supervisors, counselors, and parents. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and underlying meanings in participants' lived experiences. The findings reveal four interconnected themes: symbolic pressure within dormitory environments, student resistance to institutional rules, cold and functional patterns of parental communication, and delinquency as a form of identity expression. Symbolic competition related to lifestyle, family background, and social status shapes peer interactions and generates psychosocial strain. Institutional discipline, while designed to foster excellence, may unintentionally restrict identity exploration, leading students to express autonomy through rule-breaking behaviors. Furthermore, achievement-oriented and emotionally distant parenting patterns contribute to feelings of alienation and limited affective support. The study integrates sociological, psychological, and Islamic educational perspectives to interpret delinquency as a relational and structural response rather than mere deviance. The findings suggest that elite educational settings require a balanced approach that integrates academic rigor, moral cultivation, and emotional well-being. This research contributes to broader discussions on educational quality by highlighting the need to reconsider how prestige, discipline, and family expectations shape adolescent development in competitive schooling environments.

1. Introduction

Schools exist in society to preserve and develop civilization. They serve not only as institutions for knowledge transfer but also as agents that shape character, values, and social order. In the Indonesian context, the national education system aims to develop intelligent, morally upright individuals who contribute to both national progress and the international order. From September to December 2024, researchers collected data on the reasons parents send their children to prestigious schools, even though in many cases these prestigious schools are located outside the region (Prasetya et al., 2024). Figure 1 are the results of the data collection:

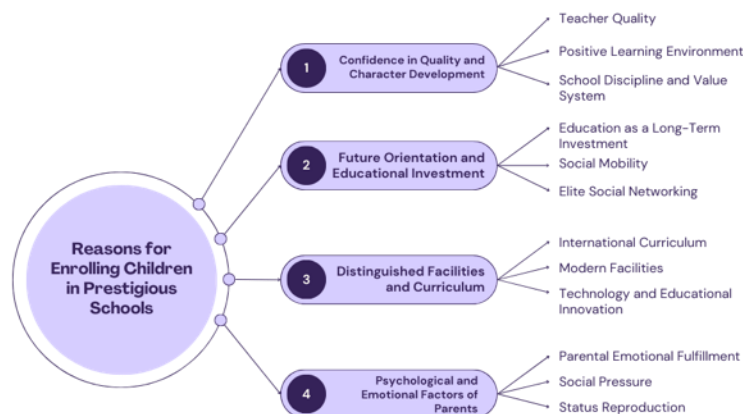


Figure 1. Node Tree "Reasons for Enrolling Children in Prestigious Schools"

However, contemporary social realities have begun to challenge this idealistic assumption. Many families, particularly from the middle and upper classes, increasingly choose prestigious private schools often international or integrated Islamic schools despite high costs and sometimes considerable distance (Baltabekovna et al., 2025; DeLisi et al., 2021; Leban & Delacruz, 2023; Lynne et al., 2025). This trend is evident in the significant growth of student enrollment in international schools by 40% in 2017, alongside a fourfold increase in integrated Islamic schools from kindergarten to high school level. In contrast, public schools in several regions, such as Kerinci Regency (Jambi), Bukittinggi (West Sumatra), and Bandung Regency (West Java), have experienced declining enrollment, school closures, and mergers, often being perceived as the last resort or even as environments associated with juvenile delinquency (Borualogo & Casas, 2024; Fahmy et al., 2015).

This societal shift toward prestigious schools undermines the foundational belief that schools function as inclusive agents of civilization. While the preference for elite education reflects growing public awareness of educational quality, it also risks reinforcing social inequality through what Freire termed the reproduction of status and class structures. Education, in this view, is never neutral; it can either liberate or perpetuate existing power relations (Freire, 1976; Hirnawan, 2020).

Behind the image of luxury facilities and academic excellence, students in prestigious schools often face intense academic and social pressures stemming from high parental expectations and competitive environments. Research indicates that children from affluent families are paradoxically more vulnerable to behavioral and psychological issues due to emotional disconnection and excessive demands (Cohen, 1964; Querengässer & Bezzel, 2025; Zhang & Zhao, 2025). This raises a critical question: does juvenile delinquency also exist within these elite educational spaces that society has long considered immune to such problems?

Juvenile delinquency is not merely an expression of uncontrolled youthful impulses, as often viewed in psychoanalytic perspectives. Cohen argued that delinquency is normalized through elements within the educational system itself, including schools, families, and regulatory frameworks. Cloward and Ohlin further explained that delinquent behavior emerges when legitimate opportunities for success are blocked, pushing individuals toward illegitimate pathways (Cohen, 1964). Importantly, this phenomenon occurs not only among lower socioeconomic groups but also among middle- and upper-class students, albeit with more organized patterns in the latter. Prestigious or elite schools, characterized by superior facilities and exclusive reputations, are commonly perceived as environments free from delinquency. However, the rapid expansion of private and international schools in Indonesia has left public schools stigmatized as “hotbeds of child delinquency,” while elite institutions remain largely unexamined in terms of their internal behavioral dynamics (Assaraf & Factor, 2025; Brundidge & Leban, 2024; Frazier et al., 2024; Leban & Delacruz, 2023).

The family plays a central role in Ki Hadjar Dewantara’s *Tripusat Pendidikan* concept, which emphasizes collaboration among school, family, and community. In practice, however, parents from middle- and upper-class backgrounds often impose predetermined career paths on their children, sometimes even before birth. While this provides strong material support, it frequently creates discomfort and mental health challenges for the children (Prasetya et al., 2024). Identity Delinquency among students in elite schools can be understood as a form of identity expression arising from structural tensions between personal self-identity, environmental demands, and the values imposed by the education system. Students may experience alienation when navigating the gap between their inner world and the “ideal” expectations of their prestigious educational environment.

Although extensive research has addressed juvenile delinquency in general and in public schools, as well as academic pressure among affluent families, a significant gap remains in understanding the lived experiences of delinquency specifically within prestigious schools in Indonesia. Existing literature tends to assume that elite schools are largely immune to behavioral problems due to their superior resources and reputation. Consequently, few studies have explored the hidden internal dynamics faced by students, including pressure, identity conflicts, and power relations in environments widely regarded as “perfect.” There is a notable lack of phenomenological inquiry that listens directly to students’ own voices regarding how they experience, interpret, and internalize delinquency in such high-expectation settings. This study aims to understand how students in prestigious schools experience, interpret, and internalize delinquency through a phenomenological approach.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design. This approach was chosen because it provides space to understand the phenomenon of student delinquency in depth and contextually, especially in the environment of elite-prestigious boarding schools. The research location was conducted in three boarding schools that socially and symbolically represent the upper class in Indonesia. These three schools were selected purposively because they share similar characteristics: they are expensive, have national and international networks, and are seen by parents as places for reproducing social status. Informants in this study consisted of students who had been involved in deviant behavior, teachers, boarding school principals, school counselors, and several relevant parents. The *snowball sampling* technique was used to reach informants gradually and strategically according to the depth of data required (Forman et al., 2008). The research subjects

were collected over a period of three months, from January to March 2025, using *snowball sampling*. This technique was chosen because it was relevant to the focus of the study, which highlighted the delinquent behavior of students in elite boarding schools a topic that is not always easily accessible through formal sampling procedures. The process began with the selection of initial informants at each school, namely guidance and counseling teachers and boarding house supervisors who had direct knowledge and experience related to student behavior dynamics. From these key informants, the researchers obtained referrals to other relevant individuals, including students who had shown deviant behavior tendencies and those who had a close relationship with them.

Through the gradual development of a referral network over three months, this study successfully involved a total of 29 subjects. The participants consisted of 11 students in grades 10 to 12, 6 teachers (including subject teachers and guidance counselors), 4 dormitory supervisors, and 8 parents who were contacted based on recommendations from students and the school. Parental involvement is important in order to explore the family's perspective on the causes and dynamics of delinquency in an upper socioeconomic context. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured approach, and all participants provided written consent to participate voluntarily. The entire process was carried out in accordance with the ethical principles of qualitative research, particularly in maintaining the confidentiality of identities and respecting the sensitivity of the narratives presented (Creswell & Poth, 2016). For example.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document reviews such as school regulations, violation records, and dormitory policies. A question in interview like *In what ways does the emphasis on "who your parents are, where they work, and who they know" contribute to the emergence or normalization of delinquent behaviors among students in prestigious schools?* Data analysis used a thematic approach with reference to the steps described by Braun and Clarke, namely transcription, initial coding, theme search, theme review, and thematic conclusion drawing (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as confirmation of results with informants (member checking). In this way, the study aimed to reveal the dynamics of student delinquency in its entirety, including its relationship with the social, symbolic, and institutional pressures that accompany life in elite schools.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Symbolic Pressure in the Dormitory Environment

Symbolic pressure is one of the most noticeable dynamics in the lives of students at elite boarding schools. At first glance, symbols such as luxurious facilities, branded goods, a lifestyle that is "above standard" in every way, and high academic expectations may seem normal in the context of a prestigious school. However, behind all that, there is a burden for students who do not have the same economic and cultural background. They are not only expected to perform well academically but also to adapt to unwritten symbolic norms. In Bourdieu's terms, this relates to symbolic capital, which plays a significant role in shaping social relations within such environments (Bourdieu, 1994).



Figure 2 . Wordcloud; Symbolic Pressure in the Dormitory Environment

Some students revealed that the pressure to "fit in" with the dormitory environment was sometimes greater than the academic pressure itself. "If you don't bring expensive-looking items, sometimes you feel like you are not being accepted," said one informant. This situation shows that there is competition that is not always healthy, where students feel they have to project a certain image for social acceptance. This pressure, although not always visible, slowly shapes students' identities and perspectives of themselves and others. Therefore,

understanding this symbolic pressure is important for understanding how students' behavior and responses (including potential delinquency) are formed in an environment that is socially laden with expectations and comparisons.

3.1.2. Student Resistance to School Rules

Resistance to school rules is a symptom that cannot be ignored in the context of prestigious boarding schools. Although schools have designed a set of regulations with the aim of establishing discipline and values in line with the institution's vision, students often show forms of resistance, both explicit and covert. Some students openly question the relevance of rules, such as the obligation to participate in certain religious activities every morning, while others choose more subtle methods, such as pretending to obey the rules but secretly violating them. This narrative reveals the existence of a discursive space in which students are not merely objects of control, but actors who redefine power relations through their daily action.

Within Michel de Certeau's theoretical framework, this resistance can be interpreted as a "tactic" a way for individuals who are not in positions of power to survive within a system that they cannot fully change (De Certeau, 2016). Actions such as manipulating absences, circumventing curfew rules, or strategizing around collective tasks are forms of articulation that show students are not merely "accepting" structures but actively intervening in them. Therefore, understanding these forms of resistance is important not only for interpreting expressions of dissent but also as an entry point for evaluating the legitimacy of rules and how institutions can build dialogical and adaptive authority.



Figure 3. Wordcloud; Student Resistance to School Rules

3.1.3. Cold and Functional Communication Patterns of Parents

One important finding in this study is the emergence of a pattern of cold and functional communication between parents and their children who attend elite boarding schools. The communication tends to focus on technical matters such as academic reports, logistical needs, or future planning but lacks emotional closeness. Several student informants stated that when they called their parents, the conversations were brief and consisted of practical questions such as "How are your grades?" or "Do you need extra money?" Questions such as "How are you feeling?" or "What are you going through?" rarely came up. This shows how the relationships built are more instrumental than affective.

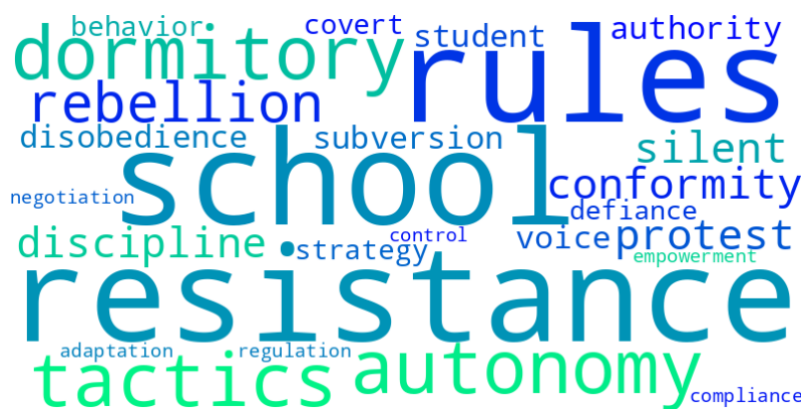


Figure 4. Wordcloud; Cold and Functional Communication Patterns of Parents

This phenomenon can be interpreted as a form of emotional distancing closely related to the habitus of upper-class families, where efficiency, achievement, and social mobility are often prioritized over intimate emotional bonds (Qin et al., 2024). Within Hochschild's framework, family relationships in the professional-elite

class tend to experience outsourcing of intimacy, which is the tendency to delegate emotional functions to other parties such as schools, teachers, or counsellors (Hochschild, 2012) . Thus, children who live in functional communication relationships without emotional warmth are prone to developing feelings of alienation and seeking affective compensation through deviant behavior or unhealthy identity searches. Therefore, parental communication patterns are an important variable in understanding the psychosocial dynamics of students in prestigious boarding schools.

Delinquency as a Form of Self-Identity Expression

In the context of boarding schools, which are steeped in social norms, high expectations, and strict authority structures, delinquent behavior among students often cannot be interpreted solely as a form of deviance. Several field findings actually show that actions such as breaking rules, challenging authority, and exhibiting "out-of-scenario" behavior are part of the process of articulating one's identity (Trimbur, 1993) . One student stated that smoking secretly in the bathroom was not just a prank, but "a way to feel free from suffocating supervision." In this context, delinquency is not merely a reaction, but a symbolic expression of the need to be recognized as an autonomous individual.

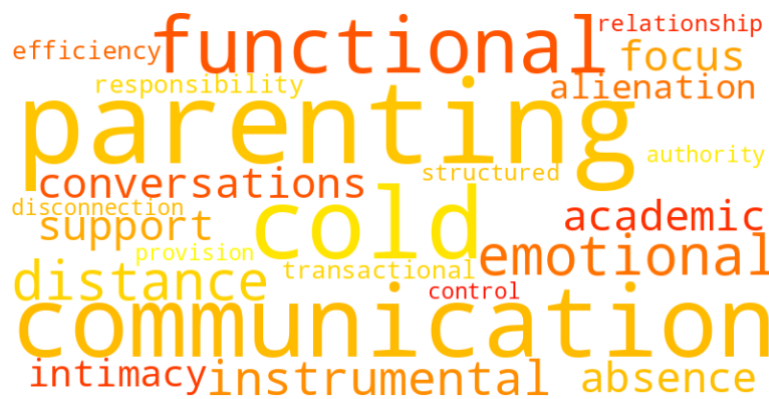


Figure 5. Wordcloud; Cold and Functional Communication Patterns of Parents

This concept is relevant to Erikson's view of identity search in adolescents, where this phase is characterized by experimentation with various social roles. When legitimate channels of identity expression are restricted by a rigid and perfectionist environment, some students use resistance as an existential space (Erikson, 1959) . From a sociocultural perspective, these actions become a "symbolic" form of affirming one's existence in a world full of representational pressure (Houtsonen & Antikainen, 2008) . Thus, delinquency in this framework is not merely a behavioral problem, but also a reflection of the system's failure to provide a safe space for the growth of authentic and humane identity.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Symbolic Pressure in the Dormitory Environment

The findings show a pattern that points to symbolic pressure emerging in elite boarding school environments. A fundamental debate arises when we ask: do these prestigious schools truly create an excellent educational environment, or do they reproduce symbolic inequalities that alienate some of their students? There is an ambivalence between the "privileges" offered by these institutions and the psychosocial burden experienced by students in facing invisible social standards. As Bourdieu argues, status symbols such as body language, dress, and even aesthetic taste can become forms of symbolic *capital* that determine a person's position in the social structure (Bourdieu, 1994) . In this case, students who do not come from dominant economic or cultural backgrounds feel compelled to conform to dominant norms that they sometimes do not understand or have access to. Foucault defines this from the concept of the discourse of power that leads to symbolic traditions and then produces trends that inevitably become ambitious achievements (Foucault et al., 2001) .

During interviews with parents, the stigma surrounding education (especially in Indonesia) idealizes schools without caste systems, schools with equal status, and schools with standards of behavior and intellectual achievement as the norm for students. This ideal condition was the goal of the first Minister of Education of the Republic of Indonesia.

However, with this finding, prestigious modern schools provide the best effects of education itself. In an interview with one of the students, student 04 said:

"...When I first entered, I was embarrassed to bring my old-fashioned suitcase from home. The next day, I immediately asked my mom to buy me a new one..."

Another statement was made by Student 09:

"...Sometimes I pretend to understand about shoe brands or vacations to Europe, so I don't look 'out of place' in front of my friends..."

In line with that, Student 11 explains:

"...At this school, it's not just your ranking that makes you respected, but also who your parents are, where they work, and who they know..."

Quotes from Students 04, 09, and 11 show strong social dynamics with status symbolism in elite school environments. The pressure to fit in is not only related to academic achievement, but also cultural and symbolic attributes such as lifestyle, appearance, and social affiliation. From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *status reproduction*, school is not only a space for the transmission of knowledge, but also an arena for symbolic struggle, a place where cultural and economic capital are exchanged and capitalized upon to gain dominance in the social structure of students (Bourdieu, 1994). The statements of students who feel ashamed of their old suitcases, or who pretend to understand expensive brands and vacation destinations, are concrete evidence of how habitus and symbolic capital work in restructuring individual identities in the realm of formal education. In addition to this, Bourdieu also argues that the emergence of *Doxa* exacerbates this status reproduction. *Doxa* is a belief or assumption that is unquestioned and considered to be a shared truth in a particular arena (Eagleton & Bourdieu, 1992). In your context, the assumption that "elite school children must have branded goods, vacation abroad, and appear smart and exclusive" is a form of *doxa* that is accepted and reproduced without question. Exploring how students adapt to, resist, or become aware of this *doxa* can open up a critical discussion about class consciousness and social construction in the world of education.

This assumption about *Doxa* is reinforced by findings obtained from schools and parents:

Parent 01:

"...it should be that way, I also don't want my child to be looked down upon. Of course, I will facilitate whatever he wants in order to be considered equal to his friends..."

Parent 04:

"...I always plan a trip abroad every year, and this is intentional because my child often tells me that his friends have been to Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, or South Korea. This bothers me personally. That's why I always make plans with his father for trips abroad..."

In the Islamic perspective, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas views education as a process of instilling manners that produce knowledgeable and moral individuals (Sassi, 2018). When education becomes a tool for reinforcing social status, there is a disorientation of purpose from *ta'dib* to *tamyiz* social class. Within the framework of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's thinking, the concept of *tamyiz* does not merely refer to a child's ability to cognitively distinguish between right and wrong, but is part of the structure of human spiritual education that is integral to the main objective of Islamic education, namely the cultivation of manners and the introduction to the meaning of truth (Anugrah & Syahidin). Al-Attas considers Islamic education to be a process of "instilling manners in human beings," and this is highly dependent on stages of spiritual and intellectual readiness, one of which is the *tamyiz* phase.

According to Al-Attas, *tamyiz* is the beginning of human epistemological awareness of reality and values, when a child begins to be able to correctly construct meaning from the information he receives (Anugrah & Syahidin). This is related to his view of *ta'dib* education that is not only the transmission of knowledge, but also a process of spiritual, moral, and intellectual orderly soul building (Hirnawan, 2020). In his book *The Concept of Education in Islam* (1980), Al-Attas wrote that education must "produce good human beings, not just good citizens," and this begins when a child reaches the age of discernment. *Tamyiz*, in Al-Attas' view, is also closely related to the concept of *fitrah*. Children who reach *tamyiz* begin to show their potential as ethical subjects able to take responsibility for their choices and understand the essence of what they do (Al-Attas, 1980). Thus, education at this stage must be directed towards maintaining *fitrah*, guiding the mind to submit to revelation, and strengthening manners as the axis of knowledge.

When read in conjunction with the findings from parents, it can be seen in practice that parents create disorientation in the interpretation of social class distinctions. In Al's view, this is the result of inappropriate

education, creating people who are not good even in terms of their outlook for the future, which can lead children to become bad citizens as well. Critical reflection needs to be directed at the fact that this system indirectly imposes a certain identity on students, without sufficient space for their individual expression. The pressure to "fit in" with symbols of luxury and high academic expectations often gives rise to anxiety, feelings of inferiority, and even social isolation. Therefore, the question is not only how students survive amid these demands, but also to what extent the elite education system contributes to constructing student identities through covert symbolic mechanisms. When schools become not only places of learning, but also symbolic arenas for status competition, the urgency to review the values that are promoted becomes increasingly important.

3.2.2. Student Resistance to School Rules

Findings show a pattern of student resistance to school rules, particularly in elite school environments, reflecting the tension between institutional discipline and students' desire to express their individual identities. A fundamental debate arises when we question whether strict school rules actually create a conducive educational environment, or whether they trigger resistance that alienates students. There is ambivalence between the goal of school rules to create discipline and the psychosocial pressure felt by students due to standards that are rigid and not always relevant to their reality. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's theory, school rules often become a form of *symbolic capital* that reinforces certain social structures, where students who do not conform to the dominant norms feel marginalized (Bourdieu, 1994). Foucault also highlights how school rules reflect the discourse of power, creating control mechanisms that shape student behavior through surveillance and normalization (Foucault et al., 2001).

In interviews with students, the dynamics of resistance that arise from pressure to comply with rules that are perceived as restrictive were revealed. Student 03 stated:

"...The rules about uniforms and haircuts make me feel like I can't be myself. I once deliberately didn't wear a tie to be different, but I was punished for it..."

Student 07 added:

"...Sometimes I feel like the rules are just meant to make us all the same, like robots. If we break them even a little, we are immediately labeled as naughty..."

Student 12 also expressed:

"...The teacher said the rules are for our own good, but why does it feel like we're being forced to obey? I once sang loudly in class to protest, but instead I was sent to the guidance counselor..."

These quotes show that school rules, although intended to create discipline, are often perceived as a tool of standardization that suppresses individual expression. In Bourdieu's framework, school rules can be seen as *doxa* assumptions accepted without question that discipline can only be achieved through absolute compliance with institutional norms. Student resistance, such as violating uniform rules or behaving "deviantly," is a form of negotiation against the *habitus* imposed by the school (Eagleton & Bourdieu, 1992). This resistance not only shows rejection of the rules, but also students' efforts to reclaim autonomy in a highly structured environment.

From the parents' perspective, there are various views regarding school rules. Parent 02 stated:

"...I agree with strict rules, because children need to learn discipline. But sometimes I see my child getting stressed because there are too many rules..."

Parent 05 adds:

"...Rules are important, but I'm worried that my child will be afraid to speak honestly with the teacher if there is a problem. He says he's afraid of being punished..."

This statement reflects the dilemma between supporting discipline and recognizing the negative impact of rigid rules on students' psychological well-being. In Michel Foucault's view, school rules function as a technology of power that creates "*docile bodies*," but at the same time provokes resistance in response to such control (Foucault, 2012).

Within the framework of Islamic thought, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1980) asserts that true education is a process of *ta'dib*, namely the instilling of manners that shape knowledgeable and noble-minded individuals (Al-Attas, 1980). School rules that focus only on uniformity and obedience risk neglecting the

dimension of *tamyiz* the ability of students to distinguish between right and wrong morally and intellectually. Al-Attas emphasizes that education must preserve the nature of students, not impose norms that suppress individual potential (Al-Attas, 1980). When school rules prioritize external compliance over character building, there is a disorientation from the true purpose of education, which is to create civilized human beings who are responsible for their choices.

A critical reflection on these findings shows that school rules, especially in elite environments, can be a tool for reproducing social structures that reinforce inequality and suppress individual expression. Student resistance, whether in the form of minor violations or open protests, reflects a desire to negotiate their identity amid institutional pressure. A critical question that arises is: how can schools design rules that not only enforce discipline, but also provide space for individual expression and the development of manners? The urgency to review the *ta'dib-oriented* approach to education is becoming increasingly important, so that schools are not only arenas of control, but also spaces for the formation of people of integrity and dignity.

3.2.3. Cold and Functional Parent Communication

Research findings indicate that cold and functional parenting communication patterns, characterized by minimal emotional interaction, task orientation, and a lack of affective warmth, have a significant impact on children's psychosocial development (Marta, 1997). This pattern often emerges in families that prioritize efficient communication to achieve practical goals, such as completing school assignments or complying with rules, without considering the child's emotional needs. The fundamental question that arises is: can a cold and functional communication pattern support the formation of a child's character and psychological well-being, or does it create an emotional distance that hinders their identity development? There is a tension between the functional goals of parental communication and the child's need for an empathetic and supportive relationship.

Referring to John Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, cold and functional communication can weaken the emotional bond between parents and children, which is the foundation for a child's sense of security and self-esteem (Bowlby & Solomon, 1989). Furthermore, Michel Foucault's perspective highlights that functional communication often reflects the dynamics of power within the family, where parents use authoritarian language to control their children's behavior without opening up space for dialogue (Foucault et al., 2001). This can create a hierarchical relationship, where children feel less valued as individuals.

In interviews with children, it was revealed that this communication pattern affects their perception of their relationship with their parents. Student 04 stated:

"...Mom only asks about my test scores or school assignments. When I talk about my feelings, she says it's not important and that I should just focus on my studies..."

Student 08 added:

"...Dad always says 'do this, do that.' I want to have a normal conversation, but it feels like he's not interested..."

Student 11 also shared:

"...When I complain about being tired, Mom says, 'Don't be spoiled.' I end up not wanting to talk about anything anymore..."

These quotes show that cold and functional communication often makes children feel unheard or emotionally unappreciated. Within Bowlby's framework, this pattern can hinder the formation of secure attachment, which in turn affects children's ability to develop self-confidence and emotional resilience (Bowlby, 1988). Task-focused communication can also be seen as a form of "doxa" according to Pierre Bourdieu, which is the unspoken assumption that the parent-child relationship only needs to function to achieve practical goals, ignoring the affective dimension that is essential for child development (Bourdieu, 1994).

From the parents' perspective, this communication pattern is often considered an effective way to discipline children. Parent 03 stated:

"...I don't have time for long conversations. The important thing is that children know what to do and obey..."

Parent 06 adds:

"...If we talk too much about feelings, children can lose focus. I just want to make sure they do well in school..."

This statement reflects the view that functional communication is a pragmatic strategy to ensure children's success, especially in an academic context. However, this statement also shows a lack of awareness of the long-term impact of a lack of emotional warmth. In Foucault's view, this type of communication functions as a technology of power that creates "docile bodies," but risks creating emotional distance that makes children feel isolated (Foucault, 2012).

Within the framework of Islamic thought, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1980) asserts that communication within the family must reflect *adab*, which is interaction that is full of love, mutual respect, and support for the development of children's natural disposition. Al-Attas stresses that true education (*ta'dib*) is not only about transferring knowledge or enforcing rules, but also about shaping people of noble character through meaningful relationships (Al-Attas, 1980). A cold and functional communication pattern risks neglecting the dimension of *tamyiz* a child's ability to understand and manage their emotions morally and intellectually which is the core of education according to al-Attas. In the Qur'an, Surah Luqman (31:13-19) provides an example of Luqman's wise and compassionate communication in advising his son, demonstrating the importance of balance between guidance and empathy.

A critical reflection on these findings shows that cold and functional parental communication patterns can reinforce power structures within the family, but risk damaging the emotional relationships that are essential for child development. Children who grow up in such environments may face difficulties in developing a strong identity and the ability to express emotions in a healthy way. A critical question that arises is: how can parents balance the need to discipline their children with the need to build loving relationships? The *ta'dib* approach proposed by al-Attas offers a solution, whereby communication should be oriented towards the formation of manners, not just obedience. The urgency to integrate emotional warmth into parental communication is becoming increasingly important, so that children can grow up as individuals of integrity and dignity, capable of facing life's challenges with confidence.

3.2.4. Delinquency as a Form of Self-Identity Expression

Research findings show that delinquency among adolescents, such as breaking school rules, using foul language, or acting aggressively, is often a manifestation of their attempts to express their identity amid social and institutional pressures. This phenomenon reflects the conflict between adolescents' desire for autonomy and the expectations of an environment that demands conformity. The fundamental question that arises is: does delinquency always reflect deviant behavior, or can it be understood as a form of identity negotiation in a restrictive context? There is ambivalence between the view of delinquency as a social disorder and its interpretation as a creative expression or rebellion against perceived oppressive norms.

Referring to Erik Erikson's theory of identity crisis, adolescents are at a stage of development where they struggle to form a coherent identity (Erikson, 1959). Delinquency can be seen as a response to the failure of the environment whether family, school, or society to provide space for healthy identity exploration. In addition, Pierre Bourdieu's perspective highlights that delinquent acts are often a form of resistance to the symbolic capital imposed by institutions, such as school rules or family norms, which enforce certain habits (Bourdieu, 1994). Michel Foucault also asserts that delinquency can be understood as a response to social control mechanisms that seek to normalize behavior through surveillance and punishment (Foucault et al., 2001).

In interviews with teenagers, it was revealed that delinquent behavior is often motivated by a desire to assert their existence. Teenager 05 stated:

"...I once graffitied the school walls. It wasn't just for fun, but because I wanted people to know I exist, that I'm not just a student number..."

Student 09 added:

"...When I fight with my friends, it's because I'm sick of always being told what to do. I want people to see that I have my own opinions..."

Student 14 also revealed:

"...I often skip class because I'm tired of teachers who only talk about rules. I want to be free, to be myself..."

These quotes show that delinquency is not always destructive, but is often a way for adolescents to negotiate their identity in an environment they perceive as restrictive. Within Erikson's framework, these actions reflect an attempt to overcome an identity crisis through expressions that, although considered deviant, provide a sense of autonomy and self-recognition. According to Bourdieu, delinquency can be seen as a form of resistance against doxa norms that are accepted without question which suppress adolescent individuality (Eagleton & Bourdieu, 1992).

From a parent's perspective, delinquency is often seen as a child's failure to comply with norms. Parent 04 stated:

"...My child likes to rebel, like deliberately embarrassing the family. But I just want him to be a good child..."

Parent 07 added:

"...If my child skips school or misbehaves, I worry that he will fail in the future. But I am confused as to why he won't listen to my advice..."

This statement reflects the gap in perception between parents and children, where parents see delinquency as a threat to social order, while children see it as a means of self-assertion. In Foucault's view, delinquent acts trigger a controlling response from family and school institutions, which seek to create a "compliant body" through punishment or sanctions, but this can actually reinforce the cycle of resistance (Foucault, 2012).

Within the framework of Islamic thought, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1980) emphasizes that true education (*ta'dib*) aims to shape civilized human beings who are able to use *tamyiz* the ability to distinguish right from wrong to guide their behavior (Al-Attas, 1980). Delinquency, in this context, can be seen as a sign that adolescents have not received adequate guidance to channel their nature in a constructive direction. Al-Attas asserts that education must nurture individual potential, not just suppress behavior through rules (Al-Attas, 1980). The Qur'an, through the story of Prophet Musa and Khidir (Surah Al-Kahf, 18:60-82), illustrates that actions that appear "deviant" sometimes have a deeper meaning, which requires understanding and guidance to be directed to the right path.

Critical reflection on these findings shows that delinquency as an expression of self-identity reflects the failure of social institutions to provide space for adolescents to explore their identities in a positive manner. Delinquent acts, such as truancy or rule-breaking, are attempts to seize autonomy within rigid structures. The critical question that arises is: how can families and schools create an environment that supports the expression of adolescent identity without encouraging delinquent behavior? The *ta'dib* approach proposed by al-Attas offers a solution, whereby loving guidance oriented towards good manners can help adolescents channel their desire to assert their identity into constructive forms. The urgency to design educational systems and parenting patterns that combine discipline with space for expression is becoming increasingly important, so that adolescents can develop as individuals of integrity who are responsible for their choices.

3.3. Implications

This study contributes theoretically by repositioning delinquency in elite schools not merely as behavioral deviance but as a relational response to symbolic pressure, institutional discipline, and identity crisis. The findings demonstrate the intersection of symbolic capital reproduction (Bourdieu), disciplinary power and normalization (Foucault), and adolescent identity formation (Erikson) in shaping students' behaviors. The integration of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' concepts of *ta'dib* and *tamyiz* further enriches the analysis by introducing a moral-epistemological dimension, suggesting that delinquency may reflect a disorientation in the purpose of education from the cultivation of adab to the reproduction of social status.

Practically, the findings call on elite boarding schools to critically reassess their symbolic culture and disciplinary systems. Institutions are encouraged to adopt more dialogical and restorative approaches, provide legitimate spaces for constructive identity expression, and reduce excessive symbolic competition within dormitory life. For counselors and educators, identity-oriented interventions, attachment-informed practices, and substantive character education become essential. At the family level, overly functional communication patterns should be reoriented toward emotionally responsive and reflective relationships, ensuring that academic achievement does not come at the expense of students' psychosocial well-being.

At the policy level, the study highlights the need to redefine educational quality indicators beyond academic performance and infrastructural excellence. Delinquency within prestigious institutions challenges the assumption that institutional superiority guarantees moral and psychological maturity. Therefore, educational systems both in Indonesia and in broader competitive global contexts should integrate intellectual,

affective, and ethical dimensions in a balanced manner, ensuring that education functions as a means of holistic human formation rather than merely a mechanism of social status reproduction.

3.4. Limitations

A This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in three elite boarding schools in Indonesia selected purposively due to their symbolic representation of upper-class education. While this design allowed for in-depth exploration, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings, such as public schools, non-boarding institutions, or schools in different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. The dynamics of symbolic pressure and delinquency identified in this study may manifest differently in institutions with distinct structural and cultural characteristics.

Second, the qualitative case study approach, although suitable for capturing lived experiences and subjective meanings, relies heavily on self-reported narratives from students, parents, and school staff. Such narratives may be influenced by social desirability bias, selective memory, or the sensitivity of discussing delinquent behavior in prestigious environments. Additionally, the use of snowball sampling, while effective for accessing hidden participants, may have resulted in a networked sample that reflects particular relational circles rather than a fully diverse range of perspectives within each school.

Third, the study focuses primarily on psychosocial, symbolic, and institutional dimensions of delinquency without incorporating longitudinal observation or quantitative measurement of behavioral outcomes. As a result, the findings illuminate processes and meanings rather than causal relationships or prevalence rates. Future research could expand the scope by employing mixed-method or longitudinal designs to examine how symbolic pressure, parental communication, and institutional discipline interact over time in shaping student development across broader educational contexts.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that delinquency in elite boarding schools cannot be reduced to individual moral failure or mere misconduct. Instead, it emerges from the complex interplay of symbolic pressures, institutional regulations, performance-oriented parental communication, and adolescents' ongoing struggles for identity formation. Within these prestigious institutions often perceived as ideal spaces of excellence students navigate intense symbolic competition where academic achievement, family background, social capital, and lifestyle displays shape everyday hierarchies of respect and belonging. Delinquent behaviors, ranging from minor rule violations to covert resistance, frequently function as coping mechanisms or subtle negotiations against unspoken expectations, emotional disconnection, and suppressed opportunities for authentic self-expression. The findings highlight that rigid institutional discipline and emotionally distant family patterns may inadvertently intensify these tensions, turning schools into arenas of hidden anxiety and stratified microcultures. Ultimately, this research calls for a fundamental reorientation of educational purpose: moving beyond narrow definitions of prestige and measurable success toward a more holistic approach that prioritizes human dignity, genuine dialogue, emotional well-being, and the ethical formation of fully developed individuals.

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The author is solely responsible for all aspects of this manuscript. The author has read and approved the final manuscript

Declaration on AI Use

AI were used only to improve readability and language under strict human oversight; no content, ideas, analyses, or conclusions were generated by AI.

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