

Educational stratification and social dynamics of regular and plus class programs at Muhammadiyah 2 Senior High School Medan

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Received 12 September 2025

Revised 22 October 2025

Accepted 19 November 2025

ABSTRACT

Educational stratification has become increasingly evident in the Indonesian school system through the differentiation of learning programs, one of which is the division between regular and additional classes. This study examines educational stratification and social dynamics through the implementation of regular and additional class programs at Muhammadiyah 2 Senior High School Medan. The establishment of the plus class program, initiated in 2013, was largely driven by parental aspirations to provide enhanced educational facilities and differentiated learning approaches for gifted students. Although the program introduces distinctions in tuition fees, facilities, and academic expectations, its impact on students' motivation and social interaction remains underexplored. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with a teacher, a regular class student, and a plus class student, complemented by participatory observation and document analysis. The findings reveal that although structural differences exist between the two programs, students perceive no significant social divisions. Interactions between regular and plus-class students remain harmonious, and teachers ensure equal treatment in the learning process. The results further indicate that stratification is not primarily an institutional initiative but rather a response to parental demand. From a sociological perspective, this study demonstrates that educational stratification does not necessarily produce social inequality. Instead, it can be understood as a form of differentiation that, if managed inclusively, supports both parental expectations and institutional goals without undermining social cohesion. This study contributes to the discourse on education and stratification by highlighting how schools can manage program differentiation while promoting equity and inclusiveness.

Keywords: Education, Educational Stratification, Social Dynamics, Sociology of Education, Class Programs

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is not merely a process of transferring knowledge and skills; it also serves as a medium for shaping individual character in accordance with prevailing social norms and values (Puspita & Abbas, 2024). In sociology, social stratification refers to the hierarchical arrangement of individuals or groups within a society (Taufik, 2018). The relationship between education and social stratification is deeply intertwined: education influences opportunities and equity, while stratification affects the extent to which individuals succeed across different layers of society (F. A. Sari & Yasin, 2022). Sociology provides a framework for understanding how education functions as an academic pathway and a mechanism of socialization and identity formation (Santika Viridi et al., 2023). This indicates that education is not merely responsible for transferring knowledge but also for shaping the character, attitudes, and skills necessary to face global challenges. Education serves as a means that is believed to develop one's intelligence and personality for the better (Yasin, 2021).

These shortcomings are typically rooted in bureaucratic inefficiencies and school management practices, resulting in differentiated tracks within the same educational system. In Indonesia, the Merdeka Belajar policy initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has become a strategic step to create education that is flexible, relevant, and in accordance with the needs of society (Aldi & Khairanis, 2025). frequently manifests in the form of separate class programs—regular, accelerated, or international—designed to meet both student needs and parental expectations. One example is Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan, a private faith-based institution that has offered regular and plus class programs since 2013. The implementation process will be carried out if policies are issued by the school principal, deputy head of curriculum, deputy student affairs, teachers, and the program management team (Rustanto et al., 2023). The primary differences between these programs lie in their tuition fees, facilities, instructional hours, and symbolic markers.

For instance, Plus class students are required to wear blazers and attend extended sessions, whereas regular class students follow standard schedules and uniforms. The transformation of education into a high-cost commodity in Indonesia is marked by several observable phenomena that demonstrate inequality (K. A. Sari et al., 2025). Despite these distinctions, teachers emphasized that students are treated equally and fairly across both tracks. The study of the sociology of education cannot be separated from such a comprehensive examination, as the emergence of this discipline represents the intersection between sociology and educational sciences (Maksum & Ag MSi, 2013). This phenomenon raises important sociological questions: Does such differentiation foster social stratification and segregation among students, or can it be managed inclusively to prevent inequality? From the students' perspective, the programs are perceived differently; some consider regular classes more conducive to socialization, while others see plus classes as an intensive pathway encouraged by parental aspirations.

From a sociological perspective, this reflects broader patterns of educational stratification and the reproduction of social hierarchies. As Weber argued, stratification is shaped not only by economic capital, but also by status and power. Bourdieu highlights the role of cultural and social capital in reproducing privilege across generations. Preliminary findings suggest that differentiation at Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan does not necessarily lead to exclusion or social distancing. Instead, the school appears to successfully maintain integration by upholding fairness and inclusivity in its practice. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how educational stratification through regular and additional class programs shapes social dynamics and student motivation, while also contributing to broader discussions in the sociology of education field. This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of a holistic and inclusive concept of education (Gibbons, 1998).

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to analyze the differences between the regular and plus class systems at Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan, particularly regarding tuition, facilities, and learning patterns; (2) to examine the social dynamics emerging from these class structures; and (3) to interpret the phenomenon of educational stratification through the lens of sociological theory.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in post-positivist philosophy and emphasized natural settings where the researcher acted as the primary instrument (Sugiyono, 2019). Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis (Aryabima, 2025). Teachers and students were selected as respondents to obtain authentic, unmanipulated insights into how the existence of two class programs is perceived and experienced. The study was conducted at Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan, located in Medan Selayang, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school was selected as the research site because of its unique implementation of regular and plus class programs since 2013, a policy that originated from parental demand rather than top-down directives. Data collection will be conducted between February and March 2024.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, ensuring that the informants selected were directly relevant to the research focus. The participants consisted of one teacher, one regular class student, and one plus class student, enabling a comparative perspective. This sampling strategy aligns with the descriptive qualitative design, which relies on inductive reasoning to explore and interpret social realities in depth (Yuliani, 2017).

Data collection was carried out through three techniques: (1) in-depth interviews were used to explore respondents' perspectives on the origins of the class system, differences in facilities, learning experiences, and social interactions; (2) participatory observation allowed the researcher to directly witness classroom activities, student interactions, and extracurricular engagements to capture the lived dynamics of the school environment; (3) document analysis provided supporting information through school profiles, program histories, and official regulations governing the plus class initiative; (4) together, these methods provided a holistic understanding of how the school manages differentiation and how students and teachers negotiate the potential implications of educational stratification.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the primary differences between the regular and plus class programs at Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan lie in the instructional hours, tuition fees, facilities, and symbolic identity markers. Regular classes end at 14:30, whereas plus classes extend until 16:00, reflecting a longer instructional period than regular classes. The tuition fees for plus-class students are notably higher, justified by the provision of additional facilities and services. In terms of identity, plus class students wear blazers as a symbolic distinction, while regular class students wear the standard white and gray uniform. These differences indicate the presence of educational stratification, albeit more administrative than substantive differences. Interviews with students revealed that such distinctions did not create a significant social distance. For instance, Habib Pohan, a regular class student, explained that he chose the regular track for social reasons, valuing broader opportunities for interaction and friendship. He did not perceive the plus class as a source of social pressure or as inferior. Conversely, Lutfhi Ahmad Fahrezy, a plus-class student, acknowledged that his enrollment was largely influenced by parental encouragement for a more intensive academic environment. Nevertheless, he emphasized that his daily interactions with his regular-class peers remained harmonious and inclusive.

The school administration reinforced this perception. According to Susilawati, S.Pd., the Vice Principal for Curriculum, the plus class was not a discriminatory policy but rather a response to parental demand. Teachers were instructed to treat all students equitably, ensuring that the curriculum, assessments, and classroom interactions were applied fairly across both groups. This highlights the school's efforts to prevent structural differentiation from escalating into social segregation. From a theoretical standpoint, this phenomenon can be analyzed through Max Weber's perspective on stratification, which emphasizes economic, status, and opportunity dimensions. The plus-class program reflects economic capital (higher tuition), status differentiation (the "plus" label and symbolic attire), and expanded opportunities (longer instructional time and enhanced facilities). Inclusive education and affirmative policies are also essential to ensure that all children, regardless of their social and economic conditions, have equal opportunities to access quality education (Hanifah et al., 2025). However, these distinctions did not translate into rigid

social divisions among students, owing to the school's proactive management of fairness issues. The educational process carried out will help the community grow and develop optimally to become independent and responsible individuals in society (Liyana, 2023).

The findings are also consistent with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of reproduction, particularly the roles of economic and cultural capital. Parents who enrolled their children in the plus class effectively mobilized economic capital to access cultural capital in the form of additional learning hours, facilities, and academic resources for their children. This represents a strategy of social reproduction commonly found in middle-class families aiming to secure better educational outcomes for their children. However, unlike elite private schools, where such distinctions often produce social exclusivity, at Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan, these forms of capital did not result in symbolic domination. Instead, student relationships remained relatively egalitarian, with class students not claiming superiority over their regular class peers.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the existence of regular and plus classes at Muhammadiyah 2 Senior High School Medan reflects a form of administrative educational stratification shaped by parental aspirations. Importantly, this differentiation has not led to social exclusion. The distinctions in tuition, facilities, and symbolic markers serve more as adaptive responses to family demands than as instruments of inequality. This case illustrates that educational stratification does not always produce negative consequences; when managed inclusively, it can coexist with social integration and equity. The issue of educational inequality in Indonesia is driven by a complex interplay of factors, including regional disparities, socioeconomic barriers, and infrastructure limitations (Sidauruk et al., 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated educational stratification through the implementation of regular and additional class programs at Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan. The results show that although differences exist in terms of tuition fees, learning facilities, and instructional approaches, these variations do not create significant social gaps among the students. Both groups of students, regular and plus class, interact harmoniously, and teachers treat them equally in the learning process. The establishment of the plus class program is largely influenced by parents' demands and aspirations rather than institutional efforts to segregate students. From a sociological standpoint, this finding indicates that educational stratification is not always synonymous with social inequity. Instead, stratification in this context reflects a form of differentiation that can be managed without diminishing students' sense of fairness and inclusivity.

The school's role in maintaining equality and minimizing potential tensions is crucial in preventing the emergence of symbolic domination between the two groups. In conclusion, the Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan case highlights that educational stratification, when handled inclusively, can function as a structural arrangement to accommodate parental expectations without undermining social cohesion. This provides an important lesson for other educational institutions in managing program differentiation while ensuring equal opportunities for all students.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Gratitude is extended to the teachers, students, and staff of Muhammadiyah Senior High School 2 Medan for their invaluable participation and support throughout this study. Appreciation is also conveyed to all parties who contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of this research.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study.

Informed Consent Statement

This study did not involve human participants; therefore, informed consent was not required for this study.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Notes on Contributors

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