

Matchmaking Strategies for Marital Success: A Case Study of Nurul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Tegal, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The practice of matchmaking at Nurul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Tuwel, Tegal, constitutes a distinctive socio-religious tradition that warrants scholarly examination, as it involves not only the prospective couple but also the active participation of the *Kyai* (Islamic religious leader) and parents in facilitating marital success. This study aims to analyze matchmaking strategies and their influence on marital success at Nurul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, involving nine purposively selected informants comprising Masayikh, students, alumni, married couples, and community leaders. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, with trustworthiness ensured through methodological and source triangulation. The findings reveal that: (1) the matchmaking strategy at Nurul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School is grounded in religious considerations, alignment of life vision, and shared *pesantren* educational backgrounds, with the *Kyai* and parents serving as advisors and mediators who ensure couple compatibility (*kafa'ah*) based on Islamic values; and (2) several interconnected factors, including strong religious commitment, effective communication, family and community support, and the psychological-emotional readiness of the couple influence marital success. This study concludes that matchmaking strategies grounded in Islamic values, coupled with the active involvement of the *Kyai* and parents, can foster harmonious, spiritually blessed marriages characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage constitutes a sacred bond between a man and a woman, serving as a foundational institution for a harmonious society. In Islamic teachings, marriage is described in the Qur'an as *mitsaqan ghalizhan* (a solemn covenant), emphasizing the profound commitment required from both parties (Malisi, 2022; Fu'ad et al., 2025). Within this framework, husband and wife bear mutual responsibilities to maintain integrity and harmony in family life. The realization of a successful marriage extends beyond romantic attachment; it requires multiple foundational pillars that ensure the relationship remains *sakinah* (tranquil), *mawaddah* (affectionate), and *warahmah* (compassionate), particularly as the initial intensity of romantic feelings naturally evolves (Said & Rahmah, 2024; Bedir Akpınarlı & Eryücel, 2024).

Islamic tradition outlines four primary criteria for selecting a spouse, applicable to both men and women. The hadith emphasizes consideration of wealth, lineage (*nasab*), physical appearance, and religious commitment, with the latter being accorded the highest priority as it fundamentally shapes an individual's character and conduct (Suraiya & Jauhari, 2019; Septiani, 2025). These criteria, when examined from a contemporary psychological perspective, align with the natural disposition and intellectual capacity of human beings as creations of Allah SWT, and have been reaffirmed in recent studies on marital adjustment and spiritual well-being (Bedir Akpınarlı & Eryücel, 2024).

Matchmaking, in its essential meaning, refers to the effort to unite two individuals, potentially involving elements of arrangement or facilitation by a third party. According to scholarly definitions, arranged marriage encompasses unions conducted not solely on personal choice but may involve varying degrees of guidance or influence from parents, religious leaders, or other intermediaries (Maghfiroh, 2024; Salam et al., 2025). Within the Indonesian legal framework, Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage and the Compilation of Islamic Law (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam/KHI*) stipulates that a valid marriage requires the consent of both prospective spouses, thereby ensuring individual agency within the process (Marriage Law, 1974; KHI, Article 16, Paragraph 1).

Within Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) communities, matchmaking practices have evolved along a spectrum of approaches. Studies have identified two principal patterns: the first

involves matchmaking entirely regulated by religious scholars (*Kyai*) or caregivers for students deemed ready for marriage, while the second entails full delegation of spouse selection to the *Kyai*, with subsequent formal introductions of the candidates (Huda, 2020; Paryadi, 2024). These practices are commonly observed in both *salaf* (traditional) and semi-modern Islamic boarding schools. In such institutions, matchmaking generally affords students the right to accept or reject proposed candidates following the introduction process (*ta'aruf*) facilitated by the *Kyai* (Salam et al., 2025). However, divergent perspectives suggest that matchmaking in *pesantren* contexts may still be influenced by the symbolic authority of the *Kyai* or extended family, as students may feel bound by respect (*ta'dhim*) and reverence to accept proposed matches even when personal preferences differ (Juhariyanto, 2023; Al-Ghifari et al., 2024).

For certain students, matchmaking represents a significant occasion and a form of recognition from the *Kyai*, a phenomenon commonly encountered among communities that maintain strong adherence to *pesantren* customs and traditions (Juhariyanto, 2023; Wafiroh, 2023). The matchmaking phenomenon at Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School is an expression of the teacher's local wisdom toward students, grounded in competence, experience, and considerations aimed at creating harmonious families characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah*, as prescribed in the Qur'an. Although legal frameworks and conventional understandings affirm that individuals possess the right to choose their life partners independently, the consent of both prospective parties remains a fundamental condition for the validity of marriage (Marriage Law, 1974; Khakim, 2024).

Nevertheless, marital life does not invariably proceed without challenges. Differences in perception between spouses encompassing variations in tendencies, educational backgrounds, family influences, and habits frequently give rise to domestic problems (Lestari et al., 2023; Said & Rahmah, 2024). Marital discord, including conflicts, disagreements, and disputes between spouses, can stem from a range of factors, including economic pressures, social dynamics, communication breakdowns, and external stressors. These challenges affect couples across all age demographics, with multiple factors contributing to the dynamics of the marital relationship (Malisi, 2022; Zarei et al., 2025). Consequently, every couple experiences fluctuations in their married life, commonly referred to as marital dynamics, which can be influenced by the readiness of both husband and wife to fulfill their respective roles within the marriage.

Several recent studies have examined matchmaking and arranged marriages in Indonesian *pesantren* contexts. Salam et al. (2025) investigated mass marriage matchmaking at Pesantren Hidayatullah Balikpapan using hadith and sociological perspectives, while Paryadi (2024) analyzed

the *mubarakah* marriage model in modern *pesantren* communities. Wafiroh (2023) examined women's agency in arranged marriages in Indonesia, and Al-Ghifari et al. (2024) explored the traditional authority of *Kyais* in East Java *pesantren*. However, scholarly attention to the matchmaking practices at Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School—a *pesantren* in Tegal Regency, Central Java, that exhibits distinctive matchmaking traditions involving senior religious scholars (*Masayikh*) and parents as active mediators—remains limited. Existing studies tend to focus either on the authority dimension or the legal dimension of matchmaking, with relatively few works integrating both strategy formulation and the analysis of subsequent marital success factors within a single case-study framework.

Given this gap, the present research addresses the urgency of analyzing matchmaking strategies and the factors affecting marital success following matchmaking, examining how such strategies can be oriented toward fostering households characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah*. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analysis that combines the strategic dimension of matchmaking drawing on Mintzberg's conception of strategy as a coherent pattern integrating goals, policies, and actions, and Porter's notion of strategy as the creation of unique and valuable positions (Maghfiroh, 2024) with an examination of post-matchmaking marital success in a specific *pesantren* setting that has not been previously documented in the academic literature. This research, therefore, addresses two principal questions: (1) How are matchmaking strategies formulated and implemented at Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School? and (2) What factors influence the marital success of couples matched through this institution?

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach, which is suited for in-depth exploration of bounded social phenomena within their real-life contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Oranga & Matere, 2023). Qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral accounts derived from observed behaviors of individuals as a whole, with the principal objective of obtaining detailed and contextually rich information about the phenomenon under investigation. Through this design, the researcher examined the factors underlying matchmaking practices among couples within Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School. The research was conducted at Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School, located in Bojong District, Tegal Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, over twelve months from March 2024 to March 2025. The research site was purposively selected based on its distinctive matchmaking practices and phenomena, which represent unique circumstances, facts, and traditions within the *pesantren* community of Tegal.

Participants in this study comprised 9 individuals selected through purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement or experience in the institution's matchmaking process. The participants included *Masayikh* (senior religious scholars) of Nurul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School, current students, alums who had married through the matchmaking process, married couples who had undergone matchmaking at the institution, and local community leaders. These diverse participant categories were selected to ensure comprehensive perspectives on the matchmaking phenomenon and to enable cross-verification of findings.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. *First*, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the *Masayikh* and married couples, guided by an interview protocol developed to align with the research objectives and focused on matchmaking strategies and factors influencing marital success. *Second*, participant observation was conducted at the research site to gather firsthand information on matchmaking strategies and marital dynamics within the *pesantren* setting, with observational notes systematically recorded to capture relevant phenomena and interactions. *Third*, documentation analysis was performed to supplement interview and observation data, including the examination of institutional records, marriage documentation, and relevant archival materials.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which involves three concurrent and iterative activities: data condensation, encompassing the selection, focusing, simplification, and transformation of raw data; data display, organizing information into accessible formats that enable conclusion drawing; and conclusion drawing and verification, identifying patterns, explanations, and configurations from the analyzed data. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed both methodological triangulation, achieved through the combination of interviews, observations, and documentation, and source triangulation, implemented by gathering information from diverse participant categories. These validation strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Oranga & Matere, 2023).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Matchmaking Practices and Strategies at Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School

The findings indicate that the concept of matchmaking in Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from matchmaking practices among the general public. Within the *pesantren* context, matchmaking is perceived as an integral component of the educational and moral development process, conducted with strong

adherence to Islamic values (Observation, December 6, 2024). The roles of *Kyai*, *Ustadz*, and *pesantren* leaders are central, as they frequently serve as mediators or advisors, providing guidance based on their understanding of prospective partners' character, morals, and readiness. The *Kyai* is regarded as *Murobbi Ruh* (nurturer of the soul), possessing the spiritual sensitivity required to assess compatibility between two individuals, which contributes to the perception that arranged marriages in Islamic boarding schools carry their own blessings (Interview with Ustadz Iman, December 7, 2024). This finding aligns with Al-Ghifari et al. (2024), who argue that the traditional authority of the *Kyai* in East Java *pesantren* continues to shape religious and social decision-making among santri families, and with Wafiroh (2023), who notes that the *pesantren* context represents a distinctive socio-religious space in which arranged marriage retains cultural legitimacy.

Religious and moral considerations emerged as the primary priority in the matchmaking process, in which prospective couples are evaluated based on their level of religious knowledge, devotion in worship, and noble character (*akhlakul karimah*). This emphasis is consistent with the contemporary reinterpretation of *kafa'ah* (compatibility) advanced by Septiani (2025) and Kusrin et al. (2024), who maintain that *kafa'ah* should not be understood as an absolute requirement based on lineage or social status alone, but as a flexible factor primarily oriented toward faith, piety, and morality. Reconstructing *kafa'ah* through the lens of *maqashid sharia* enables matchmaking practices to remain relevant to contemporary social realities while preserving their religious foundation.

The process of *ta'aruf* (introduction) at Nurul Hikmah is conducted meticulously within the framework of *sharia*, often under the direct supervision of the institution. This *ta'aruf* process extends beyond mere acquaintance with physical attributes or background; it fundamentally concerns understanding the prospective spouse's vision, mission, and readiness for establishing an Islamic household. Such a model resonates with recent scholarship on Indonesian *ta'aruf* practices, which emphasize that authentic *ta'aruf* should not be reduced to a transactional matching procedure but should rather function as a structured pathway toward marital readiness (Salwa Shofiatul Khulqi et al., 2023; Saleh et al., 2025). The purpose of matchmaking in this *pesantren* therefore transcends mere marriage facilitation; it aims to build pious families and contribute to the broader *ummah*.

This practice aligns with Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage, Article 6, Paragraph 1, which stipulates that marriage must be based on the consent of both prospective spouses (Marriage Law, 1974). The Compilation of Islamic Law further regulates marital consent in Article 16, specifying that marriage is based on the consent of the prospective bride, and that consent may be expressed through firm and tangible statements in writing, verbally, or through gestures, and may also take

the form of silence provided there is no definitive refusal (Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 1991 on KHI). The integration of religious authority and legal compliance thus reflects the broader pattern identified by Khakim (2024), who observes that contemporary Indonesian Islamic family law increasingly accommodates both normative-juridical and socio-cultural dimensions of marriage.

Couples matched through this process are expected to become role models in society, raise knowledgeable, noble-character children, and continue the mission of Islamic *da'wah*. Support from the *pesantren* community, including fellow students, alumni, and administrators, constitutes an important factor that strengthens the bond between prospective spouses (Observation, December 6, 2024). The religious and family-oriented environment of the *pesantren* further supports the success of this matchmaking practice. Interaction between men and women within the institution is typically restricted in accordance with Islamic values; consequently, matchmaking often serves to unite two individuals who share the same vision and mission for establishing a family without transgressing the boundaries of *sharia* (Salam et al., 2025; Paryadi, 2024).

Blessings and the pleasure of Allah SWT constitute the foremost priority in the concept of matchmaking at Nurul Hikmah, wherein marriage is regarded as an act of worship and a means to draw closer to Allah, not merely a fulfillment of worldly needs. With the *Kyai's* guidance and the religious environment of the *pesantren*, matchmaking is expected to produce households characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah*, serving as exemplars for the broader community in building Islamic and blessed families (Fu'ad et al., 2025).

Based on the researcher's observations, several factors contribute to the persistence of matchmaking at Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School (Observation, December 6, 2024). The first factor concerns the guardians' desire for their children to find suitable partners. Guardians of students play a significant role in the matchmaking process, driven by their aspiration for their children to marry religiously devout, morally upright, and ethically sound partners. They believe that the *pesantren* environment, deeply rooted in Islamic values, is an appropriate setting for identifying potential partners meeting these criteria.

The second factor concerns age considerations, particularly when students have reached the age deemed mature for marriage. Guardians and caregivers frequently recommend timely marriage as a preventive measure to avoid undesirable circumstances while ensuring that students can lead fulfilling married lives. The third factor relates to the avoidance of adultery (*zina*) and the maintenance of self-purity. One of the motivations for matchmaking within the *pesantren* environment is the effort to prevent *zina* and preserve chastity. By facilitating marriage for students

who have reached adulthood, the institution anticipates that they can protect themselves from temptation and avoid actions contrary to religious values—a rationale consistent with the *maqashid sharia* principle of *hifz al-nasl* (protection of lineage) discussed by Septiani (2025) and Kusrin et al. (2024).

Synthesizing these findings, the matchmaking process at Nurul Hikmah is grounded in three primary foundations: religious considerations, a shared vision of a harmonious life, and similar educational backgrounds. The involvement of *Kyais* and parents as advisors and mediators ensures that matched couples conform to Islamic values, thereby strengthening the marital bond. This integrative strategy resonates with both Mintzberg's conception of strategy as a coherent pattern of goals, policies, and actions, and Porter's emphasis on the creation of unique and valuable positions through differentiation (Maghfiroh, 2024), confirming that the *pasantren* matchmaking model functions not merely as a cultural tradition but as a deliberately formulated strategic practice.

Factors Influencing Marital Success among Matched Couples

The relationship between matchmaking and marital success is closely interconnected, particularly from an Islamic perspective. The findings indicate that a sound matchmaking process should be grounded in compatibility (*kafa'ah*) between the prospective husband and wife, encompassing aspects of religion, morals, education, and life goals (Interview with H. Fauzi Musawa, December 6, 2024). This conformity lays a fundamental foundation for a harmonious and blessed household. When both partners share aligned visions and missions, particularly in the practice of Islamic teachings, the probability of achieving a family characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah* is substantially enhanced (Interview with KH Irham ZA, December 6, 2024). This finding is reinforced by Kusrin et al. (2024), who demonstrate that the absence of *kafa'ah* often correlates with marital disharmony, and by Septiani (2025), who argues for a *maqashid*-oriented reconstruction of *kafa'ah* emphasizing piety and moral character.

Furthermore, a wholesome ta'aruf process in accordance with *sharia* helps prospective couples understand each other's characters, life goals, and readiness for marriage. Mental and spiritual preparation before marriage also assumes a crucial role, as couples who are psychologically and spiritually prepared will be better equipped to confront household challenges with patience and *tawakal* (reliance upon Allah) (Interview with Nyai Hj. Ummu I'lah, December 6, 2024). Recent quantitative evidence from Bedir Akpınarlı and Eryücel (2024) confirms that spiritual well-being and an internal locus of control are significantly associated with marital

adjustment, supporting the present finding that pre-marital spiritual preparation is foundational to long-term marital success.

Support from family and the surrounding community also significantly influences household success. A supportive family that provides prayer, advice, and guidance helps couples navigate the dynamics of married life more effectively. Additionally, awareness of the substantial responsibility entailed by marriage must be comprehended by both prospective partners from the outset. As articulated by KH Irham ZA (December 6, 2024), commitment to mutual respect, the preservation of honor, and collaborative effort in building a blessed family constitute the key to a successful marriage. The explicit purpose of marriage—to establish a family characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah*, and to raise pious descendants—also serves as a determining factor. When both partners share identical goals, they tend to focus more effectively on fulfilling their respective roles and avoiding unnecessary conflicts (Fu'ad et al., 2025; Said & Rahmah, 2024).

An effective matchmaking process also cultivates the partners' capacity to communicate openly and constructively. The ability to deliberate (*musyawarah*) and collaboratively resolve problems represents an essential factor in household success. Couples accustomed to communicating effectively since the *ta'aruf* period find it easier to establish cooperation within the household (Interview with Mba Mutmainah, December 6, 2024). This pattern is consistent with the findings of Lestari et al. (2023) and Said and Rahmah (2024), who identify open communication and conflict-resolution skills as central determinants of marital satisfaction in Indonesian Muslim families. Consequently, matchmaking conducted with careful consideration, in accordance with *sharia*, and involving a wholesome *ta'aruf* process, substantially influences household success. Well-prepared couples are better equipped to confront challenges and establish a harmonious, loving, and blessed family.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that even when matchmaking is conducted carefully and in accordance with *sharia*, challenges within the household may still emerge. This phenomenon is attributable to the complexity of human relationship dynamics, differences in character, and external factors such as social, economic, or environmental pressures that can affect the harmony of the couple (Interview with Nyai Hj. Nur Azizah, December 6, 2024). In addition to adequate pre-marital preparation, married couples must continue to learn and adapt throughout their lives together. Open communication, patience, and mutual understanding constitute the primary keys to overcoming differences and conflicts that may arise (Interview with Mba Mutmainah, December 6, 2024). Zarei et al. (2025) similarly emphasize that ongoing psychological resilience and shared family activities serve as protective factors against marital distress.

Conversely, it is important to recognize that the absence of conflict does not solely measure household success, but also by the couple's ability to grow together, support one another, and create a comfortable environment for their children. Children's education, financial management, and the equitable division of household roles also determine the family's sustainability and happiness (Interview with KH Irham ZA, December 6, 2024). No household is perfect; every couple inevitably encounters trials and tribulations. What distinguishes resilient households is how they address these challenges. Couples who learn from mistakes, forgive one another, and continuously strive to improve their relationship are more likely to achieve genuine happiness.

Additionally, Nyai Hj. Ummu I'lah (Interview, December 6, 2024) offered practical guidance on the keys to household success. *First*, respecting one's spouse entails listening to their feelings and thoughts, valuing their opinions, and not underestimating their emotions; affection should be demonstrated through genuine actions, not merely words. *Second*, couples should never neglect prayer (*shalat*) and seeking guidance from Allah, recognizing that marriage encompasses not only love but also mutual support, kindness, and patience; partners should not hesitate to apologize and forgive, as this is the key to marital harmony. *Third*, domestic happiness is not measured by wealth but by the tranquility and joy shared by spouses; couples should strive to transform their home into a small paradise on earth, filled with love and faith. These practical principles align with the integrated psychological-spiritual model of *sakinah* proposed by Fu'ad et al. (2025), which conceptualizes *sakinah* as spiritual-emotional equilibrium, *mawaddah* as emotional affection, and *warahmah* as compassion sustained by mutual obligation.

Taken together, the findings reveal that marital success among matched couples at Nurul Hikmah is shaped by an interconnected set of factors: religious commitment grounded in *kafa'ah*, effective and continuous communication, supportive family and *pesantren* communities, and the couple's psychological and spiritual readiness. The convergence of these factors confirms that the matchmaking strategy implemented at Nurul Hikmah functions not as an isolated event but as the initial phase of a sustained process oriented toward the construction of a *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, *warahmah* household.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, two principal conclusions can be drawn. *First*, the matchmaking practices and strategies implemented at Nurul Hikmah Tuwel Islamic Boarding School are grounded in Islamic values and strong *pesantren* traditions. The matchmaking process involves the active participation of the *Kyai*, parents, and the *pesantren* community, who serve as

advisors and mediators throughout. The primary considerations encompass similar *pesantren* educational backgrounds, alignment of life vision, and individual piety. The *ta'aruf* process is conducted meticulously within the framework of *sharia*, focusing on understanding prospective spouses' visions, missions, and readiness to build an Islamic family. Several factors contribute to the persistence of matchmaking at this institution, including guardians' aspirations for their children to obtain suitable partners, age considerations, and the objective of avoiding *zina* while maintaining self-purity. *Second*, the marital success of matched couples is influenced by several interrelated factors: strong religious commitment expressed through *kafa'ah* in faith and morality, effective communication and mutual understanding, support from extended family and the *pesantren* community, and the couple's psychological and emotional readiness. Couples who are spiritually prepared and equipped with patience (*sabr*) and *tawakal* are better positioned to confront household challenges and to establish households characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah*.

This study contributes to the literature on Islamic family law and *pesantren* studies by integrating strategic and outcome dimensions of matchmaking within a single case-study framework. The findings are nonetheless limited by the single-site design and the relatively small number of informants; future research is therefore recommended to conduct comparative studies across multiple *pesantren* settings and to employ longitudinal designs that track marital outcomes over extended periods. Mixed-methods approaches incorporating standardized marital satisfaction measures alongside qualitative data would further enrich understanding of the long-term effects of *pesantren*-based matchmaking on family well-being.

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