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Educational Justice through Boarding Schools in Côte d'Ivoire

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ABSTRACT: *This article analyzes the role and challenges of public boarding schools in Côte d'Ivoire, based on a study conducted in two institutions in Dabou: Lycée Moderne Leboutou and Collège Moderne Bessio De Lambert. Originally created to promote equal opportunity, these boarding schools mainly host students from low-income and rural families. Today, they face serious difficulties such as deteriorating infrastructure, insufficient meals, and limited supervision, which threaten their educational mission. Using the theoretical frameworks of Rawls, Sen, Bourdieu, and Dubet, this study highlights the contradictions between the ideal of educational justice and the realities observed in practice. Despite their current limitations, boarding schools remain spaces that foster discipline, solidarity, and academic achievement. The article recommends the rehabilitation of infrastructures and greater involvement of local authorities to restore the role of these institutions as instruments of educational justice*.

Key words*: Academic achievement, boarding school, educational justice, social inequalities.*

1. Introduction

Educational justice, a concept closely linked to primary and secondary education, is part of the broader quest for fairness within the school system. Its main goal is to ensure a fair distribution of resources, equal access to educational opportunities, and the recognition of students' diverse needs Sand backgrounds (Tsarkos, A., 2024).

Educational justice guarantees equitable access to high-quality education (Harel Ben Shahar, T., 2024) for all learners, regardless of origin, by addressing disparities in opportunity and resources (Zugelder & L'Esperance, 2022).

For Ferrero (2023), educational justice aims to reduce inequalities in order to build a fairer society where everyone has an equal chance to participate in democratic processes. It includes certain aspects of restorative justice, such as focusing on community and the idea that inequalities concern everyone, without resorting to purely compensatory pedagogy. Educational justice therefore implies social inclusion, the pursuit of equity, and access to quality education for all students by tackling systemic barriers and inequalities within the educational system.

Since the 1960s, public boarding schools in Côte d'Ivoire have been designed as a pillar of the national education system. They were not simply dormitories but genuine instruments for democratizing education and promoting social mobility. In a country where access to secondary education was often limited by distance and poverty, boarding schools represented a form of social justice: they offered a structured, supervised, and disciplined environment conducive to academic success (Boli, Ramirez & Meyer, 1985; Ndimurwimo, 2016).

Beyond their educational purpose, boarding schools were also places of social, ethnic, and religious integration, providing a common living experience that contributed to building a national identity. As Glasman (2012) observed, boarding schools everywhere serve as both educational institutions and spaces of secondary socialization where collective practices and values of solidarity are developed.

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This integrative function was confirmed by many former Ivorian boarders themselves: "*At the boarding school, there was no difference of ethnicity or religion; we were one family*." (Interview, Dabou, 2025)

However, this ideal gradually weakened. From the 1990s onward, the progressive withdrawal of the State, the structural adjustment policies imposed by international institutions, and the deterioration of infrastructure led to the closure of many public boarding schools (Proteau, 1996; Kouadio, 2014).

The case of Collège Moderne Bessio De Lambert in Dabou, whose boarding section was closed following government decisions in 1994, clearly illustrates this turning point.

Today, the remaining functional boarding schools, such as Lycée Moderne Leboutou, still host students but under precarious material conditions: dilapidated dormitories, obsolete kitchens, insufficient food budgets, and a lack of educational staff (Field interviews, 2025).

In this context, Ivorian boarding schools appear as institutions that are both essential and fragile, whose future remains uncertain unless their living and learning conditions are reimagined.

The central question, therefore, is the following: Do public boarding schools in Côte d'Ivoire still fulfill their mission of educational justice?

Initially conceived as instruments to reduce social inequalities, they now seem threatened by their own structural limitations.

By mobilizing the frameworks of Rawls's theory of justice as fairness (1971) and Sen's capability approach (2000), this study asks whether boarding schools still provide each student with a real opportunity to succeed. Field data collected in Dabou reveal a significant gap between the ideology of equal opportunity and the actual experiences of boarders: inadequate housing, insufficient food, and limited supervision. These conditions reduce the effectiveness of boarding schools as tools for social compensation (Blimpo, Gajigo & Pugatch, 2019).

Thus, two key questions guide this research:

1. Access and equity: Who has access to public boarding schools today, and according to which social and geographical criteria?
2. Impact on academic success: Does the boarding environment still promote equal opportunity, or does it contribute to the reproduction of inequalities?

Answering these questions is essential to determine whether public boarding schools in Côte d'Ivoire can still be considered instruments of educational justice or whether they have become only a shadow of the hopeful institutions they once were.

2. Theoretical Framework from the Literature

Analyzing public boarding schools in Côte d'Ivoire from the perspective of educational justice requires drawing on several theoretical approaches from political philosophy and the sociology of education.

Three perspectives are particularly relevant: the theory of educational justice developed by John Rawls (1971) and extended by Amartya Sen (2000) through the concept of capabilities; the theory of social reproduction proposed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1970), which emphasizes how the school system contributes to reproducing social inequalities; and finally, François Dubet's (1994) approach, which considers schools and boarding institutions as spaces of secondary socialization.

2.1. Educational Justice According to Rawls and Sen

In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls defines justice as fairness. For him, a just society is one that organizes its institutions so that the least advantaged members benefit from real opportunities for improvement. He writes: *"Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society"* (Rawls, 1971, p. 83).

Applied to education, this perspective means that public boarding schools must provide students from low-income families not only access to schooling but also living conditions that support their academic success. What matters is not only formal equality of access but also real equality in conditions.

Amartya Sen (2000) extends this debate in *Development as Freedom* by introducing the concept of capabilities. For Sen, justice cannot be measured only by the distribution of resources but also by the individual's real ability to transform those resources into genuine opportunities for life. He explains: *"Equality of capabilities means that each person should have the opportunity to choose and to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value"* (Sen, 2000, p. 74).

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In the Ivorian context, when a boarding school provides a bed, regular meals, and an educational environment, it increases students' capabilities. However, when dormitories are old, food is insufficient, and supervision is limited, it offers only a superficial form of equality. In such conditions, boarding students do not have the necessary means to fully develop their potential.

2.2. Social Reproduction through Boarding Schools

The reflection on educational justice must also take into account the sociological critique of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. In *La Reproduction* (1970), the authors show that the school system, far from being a simple means of social mobility, tends to reproduce existing inequalities. They state: *"The school, which appears to be neutral, legitimizes social inequalities by transforming social differences into academic inequalities"* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 206).

The Ivorian public boarding school clearly illustrates this ambivalence. Although it was designed to reduce educational inequalities, in practice it can reinforce them. Wealthier families, who can afford private boarding schools or decent housing, manage to avoid the difficulties. Poorer families remain confined to precarious public boarding schools. In such cases, the boarding school ceases to be a tool of social compensation and instead becomes a marker of structural inequality.

The closure of the boarding facility at *Collège Moderne Bessio De Lambert*, for example, forced many students to turn to private hostels without supervision. This situation particularly exposed young girls to the risks of early pregnancy and school failure. As Bourdieu and Passeron write, *"The school institution helps to make social inequalities appear natural, even though it actually contributes to reproducing them"* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 211).

2.3. Boarding Schools as Spaces of Secondary Socialization

In *Sociologie de l'expérience* (1994), François Dubet reminds us that school is not only a place of instruction but also a space of socialization where individuals acquire norms, behaviors, and social skills. He writes: *"The school experience is not only an intellectual training; it is also a learning process in discipline, rules of life, and social relationships"* (Dubet, 1994, p. 53).

The boarding school, in particular, represents a key setting for this secondary socialization. Students live together, share dormitories, follow strict schedules, and must comply with clear rules. This discipline helps them develop study habits, autonomy, and a relationship with authority that shapes their life trajectories in lasting ways.

However, Dubet also notes that this process of socialization can involve tensions. When the rules are too rigid or the living conditions deteriorate, students develop ways to bypass the system, such as disobedience, peer solidarity against educators, or even rejection of the institution. As he explains: *"Social actors do not simply internalize norms; they interpret, transform, and sometimes challenge them"* (Dubet, 1994, p. 61).

In current Ivorian boarding schools, educators often report these same tensions. They mention indiscipline and difficulties in supervision that are closely linked to limited material resources. Thus, the boarding school—intended as a space for education and discipline—can also become a place of frustration and resistance, revealing the contradictions between the educational ideal and the lived reality.

2.4. Connection between the Approaches

These three theoretical perspectives are complementary. Rawls and Sen focus on equity and real opportunities; Bourdieu and Passeron reveal how education systems reproduce inequalities; Dubet examines the lived experience of socialization and its contradictions.

Together, they portray Ivorian boarding schools as ambivalent institutions—potential tools of educational justice, yet weakened by inequality and poor living conditions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Dabou: A School Town

Located about fifty kilometers from Abidjan in southern Côte d'Ivoire, Dabou is the regional capital of the administrative area known as *Les Grands-Ponts* and belongs to the Autonomous District of *Les Lagunes*. The town covers approximately 600 square kilometers and stretches on both sides of the Agnéby River, which flows into the Ébrié Lagoon. This geographical setting, combined with a subequatorial climate moderated by

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sea and lagoon breezes, provides relatively favorable conditions for schooling and for accommodating boarding students.

Dabou also holds an important place in the political and colonial history of the country. It is the land of the Adioukrou people, a branch of the larger Akan group settled in the region since the late fifteenth century. Dabou was one of the first localities to come into contact with French settlers. As early as 1843, treaties were signed between local chiefs and France, marking the progressive integration of the region into the Ivorian colonial territory. The construction of a military post and later a wharf in 1932 strengthened its strategic position, promoting the export of products such as rubber, palm oil, and cocoa. The local economy remains strongly shaped by industrial plantations, especially rubber and oil palm, operated by the SAPH company.

With more than 138,000 inhabitants in its sub-prefecture alone (INS, 2022), the city has expanded toward its surrounding villages such as Akradio, Cosrou, and Lopou, which were upgraded to communes in 2005. Dabou has experienced rapid population growth, but its infrastructure has struggled to keep pace. The town has about 14 kilometers of paved roads and 55 kilometers of dirt tracks, making mobility and access to schools difficult, especially for students coming from rural areas.

Despite these constraints, Dabou stands out as a true educational hub. It hosts four public secondary schools, seventeen private institutions, and several vocational training centers. Boarding facilities such as Sainte-Marie, Liberté, and Agba complement this educational network by accommodating students from surrounding villages or low-income families. These structures reflect Dabou's central role in promoting education among the youth of the region.

3.2. Selected Secondary Schools

Our study focused on two emblematic schools in the city. The first is Lycée Moderne Leboutou, located in the heart of Dabou. Founded in 1966 under the name *Collège Moderne 1*, it later developed into a high school covering both lower and upper secondary levels. Built on a site of about 20 hectares, the school currently hosts nearly 4,200 students, from grade 6 to the final year. The institution has a boarding facility reserved exclusively for girls, accommodating around 65 boarders. Initially mixed, the dormitory was reorganized to strengthen academic supervision and support girls' success, particularly in the BEPC and baccalaureate examinations.

The boarding school consists of two large buildings that include dormitories, a dining hall, a study room, a laundry area, restrooms, and a small infirmary. These facilities, designed according to the educational standards of the 1960s, were intended to provide students with a safe and comprehensive learning environment. However, due to a lack of regular maintenance, the premises have deteriorated significantly: aging buildings, obsolete kitchens and sanitation facilities, and limited living conditions. This deterioration reflects recurring challenges such as insufficient funding, poor upkeep, and sometimes weak management. The contrast between the institution's initial ambition and its current condition is striking.

The second institution is Collège Moderne Bessio de Lambert, one of the oldest schools in the Grands-Ponts region. Its opening in 1949, during the colonial period, was part of a broader policy of establishing boarding schools in the colonies (Wolfenden, 1948; Lamy, 1946). Originally known as *École Normale de Dabou*, then as *Cours Normal*, and later as *Collège Moderne 2*, it eventually adopted its current name. For several decades, the school had a mixed boarding facility that played a crucial role in promoting education throughout the region.

However, in 1994—forty-five years after its creation—the boarding school was closed due to budgetary constraints. Since then, part of the former dormitories has been converted into classrooms, while other areas remain unused. Today, the school hosts about 2,500 students, all enrolled in the lower secondary cycle (from grade 6 to grade 9), but it no longer provides accommodation. The closure of the boarding facility has weakened access to education for students from surrounding villages, who are now forced to seek alternative and often precarious housing options such as private hostels or rented rooms without supervision.

Through their history and development, these two schools illustrate both the educational richness of Dabou and the current limitations of the public boarding school system in Côte d'Ivoire.

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3.3. Data Collection Tools

To meet the objectives of this research, three main data collection tools were used: quantitative questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and direct observation of school infrastructures. The combined use of these instruments made it possible to cross-check information, strengthen the validity of the findings, and obtain both statistical and qualitative insights into the realities of public boarding schools in Dabou.

3.3.1. Quantitative Questionnaires

The first tool consisted of administering standardized questionnaires to boarding students at *Lycée Moderne Leboutou*. These questionnaires were designed to collect precise and comparable data on:

- the students' social backgrounds (geographical origin, parents' occupation and socio-economic status, family education level, number of siblings, etc.);
- their living conditions in the boarding facility (type of accommodation, room sharing, hygiene, access to water and electricity, food quality, medical and educational supervision);
- their overall satisfaction with the services provided (food, pedagogical support, infrastructure, and quality of communal life).

The responses were coded and processed through descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) to provide an overall profile of the boarding students and identify the main areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The analysis of these data was based on the file *Synthesis of Leboutou Results* (see working document).

3.3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The second tool consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with various educational and social stakeholders. These interviews took two main forms:

i) Focus groups with groups of boarding students (both girls and boys), which helped to gather their perceptions, experiences, and expectations regarding boarding life;

ii) Individual interviews with key informants such as bursars, supervisory educators, kitchen staff, administrative officials, and former boarders who experienced the boarding school before its closure or deterioration.

The interview guide included specific themes such as the quality of food services, socio-educational supervision, discipline, safety, challenges faced, and perceptions of the boarding school as a tool for academic success. However, a certain degree of flexibility was allowed to encourage spontaneous expression and capture personal narratives and illustrative anecdotes.

These interviews, conducted in Dabou between April and May 2025, complemented the quantitative data with contextual and subjective insights.

3.3.3. Direct Observations

Finally, the third tool consisted of direct observations carried out in the schools studied, mainly at *Lycée Moderne Leboutou* and *Collège Moderne Bessio*. These field visits focused on:

i) the condition of dormitories (room size, number of beds per student, bedding quality, and cleanliness);

ii) the operation of dining halls and kitchens (hygiene, available equipment, condition of cooking and storage facilities, meal organization);

iii) the quality of sanitation and hygiene facilities (toilets, showers, water supply, and waste disposal systems).

Observation made it possible to compare the information gathered from questionnaires and interviews with the material reality on the ground. It also highlighted significant discrepancies between the institutional framework initially planned and the actual living conditions experienced by the students.

3.4. Data Analysis

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how boarding schools operate, two types of analysis were carried out: quantitative on the one hand, and qualitative on the other.

On the quantitative side, the responses to the questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistics. The aim was to outline a general profile of the students surveyed and to highlight the main trends. Some key variables were cross-tabulated — such as boarding status, gender, grade level, and perceptions of living and

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study conditions — in order to identify meaningful patterns. For example, we observed that a stable living environment appeared to be associated with better academic achievement.

All statistical processing was performed using Microsoft Excel, which allowed for the creation of clear and effective cross-tabulation tables to visualize the results.

In parallel, the semi-structured interviews added a more human dimension to the research. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and then divided into meaningful segments. These excerpts were grouped around recurring themes such as material conditions in the boarding school, discipline, quality of supervision, sense of safety, friendship networks, and relationships with educators.

This thematic content analysis allowed us to enter the subjective world of the various participants — students, former boarders, educational staff, and kitchen workers — and to better understand their lived experiences. Through their words, diverse and sometimes contrasting realities emerged, giving depth and nuance to the quantitative data.

Here again, the analysis was guided by grids designed according to the research objectives and processed in Excel to ensure a clear and systematic organization.

4. Results

4.1. Social Profile of Boarding Students

At Lycée Moderne Leboutou, only about 65 of 4,000 students live in the boarding section (less than 2%), showing both limited capacity and declining appeal.

Most boarders come from nearby rural villages (Mopoyem, Youhoulil, Akradio). Their parents are mostly farmers (33%), artisans, or small traders—confirming the role of boarding schools as compensatory structures for disadvantaged families.

4.1.1. Father's Occupation

The data show that the most common occupation among the fathers of boarding students is farmer (33.33%). This confirms the predominance of agricultural activity in the region and highlights the close link between rural conditions and boarding school attendance. Next come tradesmen and manual workers, such as masons (8.33%), as well as merchants (8.33%). Other more qualified professions, such as teacher (3.33%), are represented but remain in the minority. A significant number of fathers (8.33%) did not answer the question, which may reflect either discomfort due to socioeconomic insecurity or the absence of a stable occupation**.**

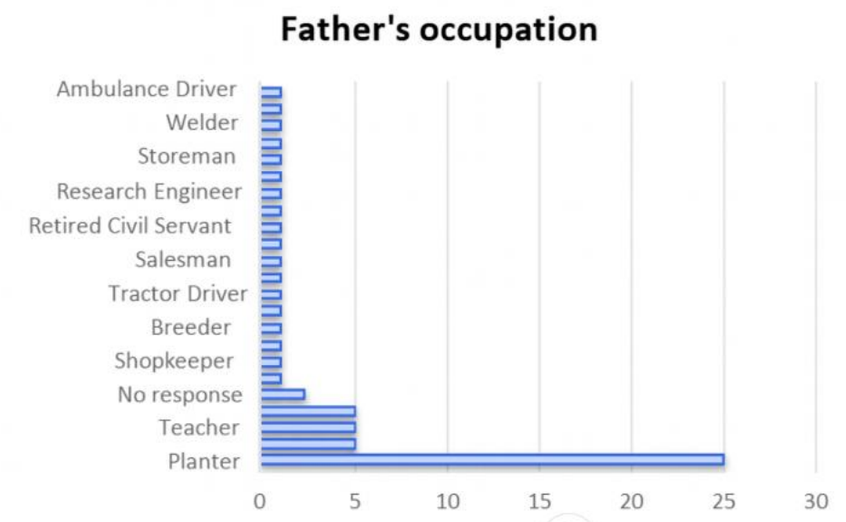


Figure 1. Father's occupation of the students.

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These results reflect a strong representation of the working classes, where the boarding school plays a compensatory role by allowing children from rural families to attend a public secondary school despite the constraints of distance and income.

4.1.2. Mother's Occupation

The data relating to the mothers' occupations support this observation. The majority of them identify as housewives (43.33%), closely followed by traders (41.67%). These two categories, representing more than 80% of the mothers, reveal an economic reality in which women actively participate in domestic work and small local trade, without having stable or high incomes. A few mothers, however, practice specific professions such as seamstress (5%) or nurse (1.67%), but they remain a small minority.

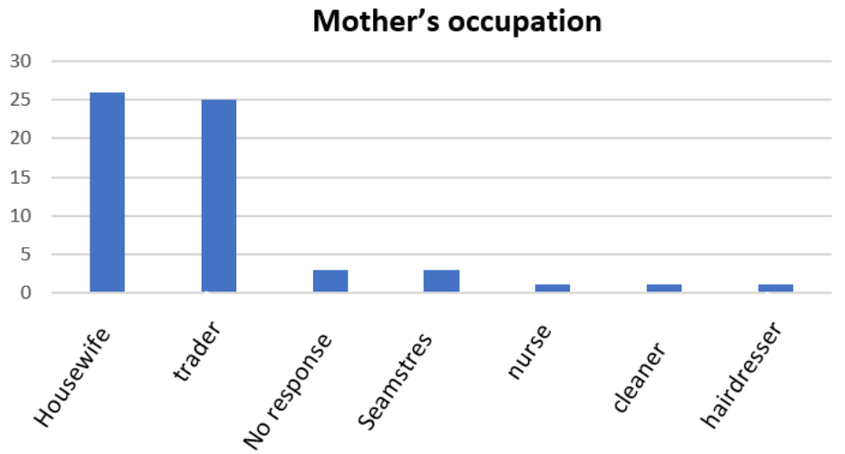


Figure 2. Mother's occupation.

This profile highlights the economic dependence of many families on the informal sector, which is characteristic of semi-urban and rural areas in Côte d'Ivoire. The boarding school therefore mainly accommodates children from modest families, whose parents are engaged in low-income and unstable activities.

In short, the social profile of boarding students reveals a predominance of pupils from families with limited economic and cultural capital, which confirms the social role of the boarding school as a compensatory structure against territorial and social inequalities.

4.2. Living Conditions

4.2.1. Dormitories and infrastructure

Dormitories are overcrowded and poorly maintained. Some rooms meant for six accommodate more than ten students. Toilets and showers are often out of service. The lack of cold storage complicates food preservation in the tropical climate.

4.2.2. Food

Students receive three meals daily, but quality and quantity are limited. Around 43% rate food as "average," 35% as "satisfactory," and 20% as "poor."

A cook explained:

"*Meat portions are very small, and the refrigerators are old*."

This highlights inadequate nutrition and failing facilities.

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4.2.3. Supervision and Discipline

Only three female educators oversee all the boarders—too few for proper supervision. Electricity cuts disrupt evening studies:

"*We want to study after dinner, but with power outages, it's almost impossible,"* said one student.

4.3. Perceptions of Boarding Schools

Students: Former boarders recall a disciplined, family-like environment, now degraded. Current students criticize the lack of structure and supervision.

Intendants : Highlight budget shortages and lack of maintenance.

Educators: Acknowledge discipline as a key strength but lament insufficient staff and resources.

4.4. Material and Social Conditions

Most students rate their housing as "average" (73%), with only 10% calling it "good."

Yet 95% believe boarding life helps them succeed academically; revealing that despite poor conditions, they value its discipline and stability.

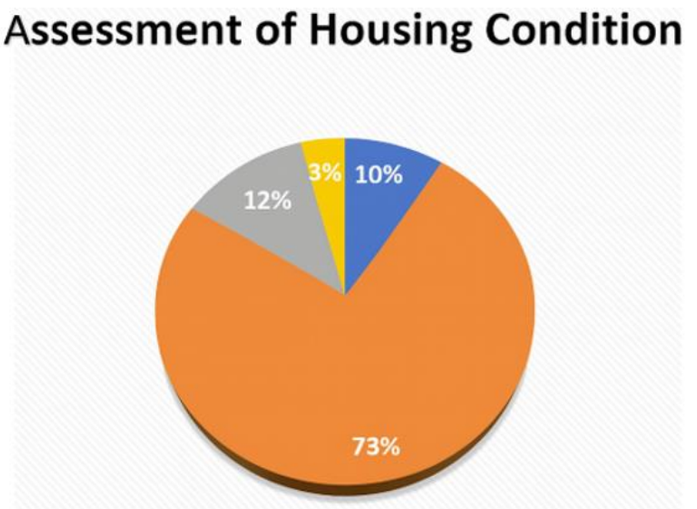


Figure 3. Assessment of students 'housing conditions.

The quality of meals was rated as "average" by 43.33% of the students, while 35% found it "satisfactory," and 20% considered it "unsatisfactory." Regarding the availability of school materials, 46.67% reported having the necessary teaching and learning resources, 41.67% said they did not have them, and 10% had them only partially. The time and space available for studying were highly appreciated by 95% of the students, who felt they had adequate study conditions, compared to only 5% who disagreed. Finally, 95% of the students stated that the boarding school contributes to their academic success, while 5% held the opposite view.

These results reveal a fundamental contradiction: students acknowledge real difficulties related to meals, housing, and educational materials, yet they continue to view the boarding school as a factor promoting success. This confirms the social compensatory function of the boarding school, which, despite its shortcomings, remains a structuring and supportive environment for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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4.5. Academic Results

Table 1. Progression of students' success rates.

Year	Exam	National Rate	Success rate of Lycée Moderne Leboutou	Boarding school success rate
2024	BAC	34.17 %	31.70 %	100 %
	BEPC	40.18 %	54.18 %	80 %
2023	BAC	32.09 %	—	62 %
	BEPC	31.47 %	—	100 %
2022	BAC	30.78 %	40.47 %	50 %
	BEPC	28.89 %	55.21 %	60 %
2021	BAC	29.24 %	—	67 %
	BEPC	41.27 %	48.38 %	100 %

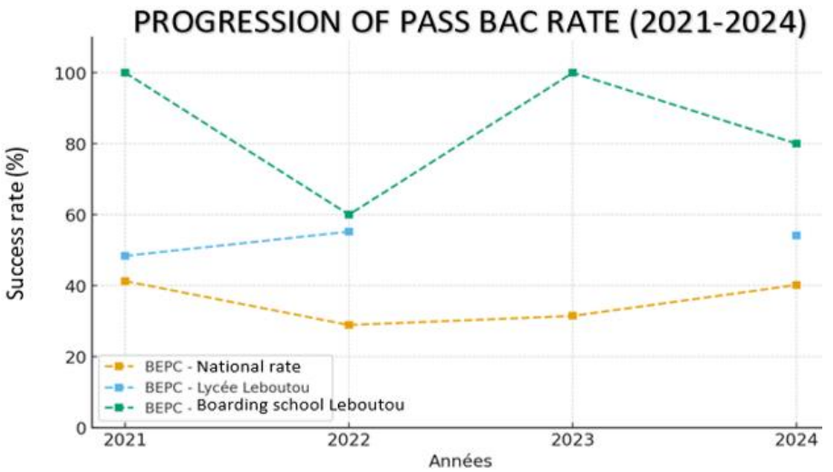


Figure 4a. Evolution of the BAC Pass Rate (2021–2024).

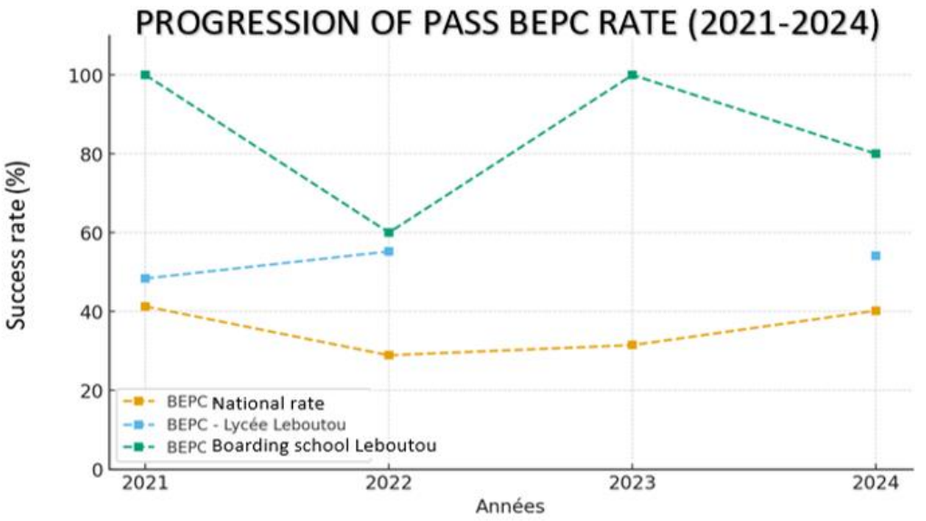


Figure 4b. Evolution of the BEPC Pass Rate (2021–2024).

Despite hardships, boarders often outperform national averages, especially in 2024, where all boarding students passed the BAC.

This success stems from structured routines, group solidarity, and discipline.

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5. Discussion

5.1. Public Boarding Schools: A Weakened Tool of Social Compensation

Since their creation in the 1960s, public boarding schools in Côte d'Ivoire were designed, among other goals, to reduce inequalities in access to education. They allowed children from rural and low-income families to attend school without being limited by distance or lack of financial resources. This idea echoes John Rawls' conception of justice, according to which a just society must organize its institutions so as to offer greater opportunities to the least advantaged. In this sense, the boarding school was meant to be an instrument of social justice, giving everyone equal chances to succeed. As Rawls states, *"Justice as fairness [...] requires that social and economic inequalities be arranged so that they are to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society"* (Rawls, 1987).

Even today, boarding schools continue to play this compensatory role. Most of the boarders interviewed in Dabou come from distant villages such as Mopoyem, Youhoulil, or Akradio, where there are no adequate facilities for regular schooling. For their parents — often farmers, artisans, or small traders — boarding school remains the only possible solution for their children to attend secondary education.

However, the reality of living conditions weakens this mission. Dormitories are old, sanitary facilities are damaged, and food is often considered insufficient. As one cook explained: *"The meat portions are very small and the refrigerators are old"* (Interview, Dabou, 2025).

This situation reflects Amartya Sen's (2000) concept of *capabilities*. For Sen, justice is not only about providing theoretical access to resources, but also about enabling individuals to make real use of them. As he emphasizes, *"The equality of capabilities focuses not merely on the means available, but on the real freedom people have to lead the kind of lives they have reason to value"* (*Development as Freedom*, p. 74).

Thus, even if students have a bed and meals, these conditions do not necessarily allow them to study effectively. Equality therefore remains an illusion. Boarding schools provide valuable but incomplete support, as they do not enable students to fully develop their potential — that is, to achieve true freedom to learn and to succeed.

5.2. Reproduction of Inequalities

The study also reveals a paradox: instead of reducing inequalities, public boarding schools sometimes risk reinforcing them. As Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1970) explain, the school system can transform social differences into academic inequalities by legitimizing what was originally only a social disadvantage. This is exactly what happens in Ivorian boarding schools.

Students from poor families, unable to rent a decent room or pay for a private boarding school, end up in dilapidated public dormitories. Meanwhile, children from wealthier families have access to better housing and study conditions. This gap contributes to maintaining an educational divide. Boarding schools once helped to correct this situation.

A former boarder recalls with nostalgia:

"*An anecdote: the two dishes that the small village boys disliked were spaghetti and couscous, but we ate them with great joy. There were desserts every day—sweet bananas, oranges depending on the season—and even on Saturdays and Sundays we had yogurt and curdled milk. Boarding school encouraged sports like volleyball and basketball for some. Those were times that will never come back in Côte d'Ivoire. There was discipline and time to study. Relationships were friendly. We were like a family, serving and helping one another."* (Interview, former boarder)

Today, boarding school is no longer popular among parents with relatively stable financial situations. It has become a last resort for those with limited means. This situation clearly illustrates Bourdieu and Passeron's idea that *"the school institution helps to make cultural inequalities appear natural, and thus the social inequalities it actually helps to reproduce"* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 211).

Thus, far from being an instrument of equality, the public boarding school can become a sign of segregation: the poorest remain confined in precarious conditions, while the better-off find alternative solutions.

5.3. Boarding Schools as Spaces of Discipline and Socialization

Despite material difficulties, the boarding school maintains a positive dimension recognized by many students and former boarders. It is a place that gives structure to daily life and encourages discipline.

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Academic results confirm this: at *Lycée Moderne Leboutou*, the success rate of boarders is often higher than that of day students and even exceeds the national average.

This success is linked to the regular school rhythm, community life, and educational supervision, even when limited. The female supervisors play a key role in this achievement, as they ensure discipline and encourage evening study sessions. As a former boarder once said, *"The boarding school was the best place to learn discipline"* (Interview, boarder from 1983–1987).

However, socialization within the boarding school is not always easy. François Dubet (1994) reminds us that school, and particularly the boarding school, is a space of secondary socialization where students learn community rules, autonomy, and the relationship to authority. Yet, he also emphasizes that students do not simply accept these rules; they interpret them and sometimes challenge them. In Dabou, some boarders develop strategies to bypass prohibitions such as communication bans during certain hours or disciplinary sanctions. As Dubet explains, *"Social actors do not merely internalize norms; they interpret, transform, and sometimes challenge them"* (1994, p. 61).

This analysis echoes the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that the school — and by extension the boarding school — does not only transmit knowledge but also imposes forms of discipline and lasting dispositions: *"Pedagogical action is a symbolic violence that imposes, through an arbitrary power, meanings and rules"* (*La Reproduction*, 1970, p. 20).

Thus, while the boarding school promotes academic success through regularity and supervision, it also contributes to a constraining form of socialization in which discipline serves both to maintain order and to transmit social norms.

In conclusion, the boarding school remains a place of learning, solidarity, and discipline, but it is also marked by tensions arising from frustration and material deprivation.

5.4. Toward Greater Educational Justice

This study invites us to look toward the future of public boarding schools with clarity and responsibility. If no action is taken, these institutions—once designed as genuine opportunities for children from low-income families—risk disappearing or losing their purpose. They would no longer be able to fulfill their mission as instruments of equal opportunity and academic success. Yet, the testimonies collected and the academic results of the boarders clearly show that boarding schools remain essential for many students, especially those from remote villages or disadvantaged families.

To prevent this decline, several actions can be considered.

First, the rehabilitation of infrastructure is essential. Housing students in old, unhygienic, and uncomfortable dormitories does not encourage concentration or motivation. Restoring students' dignity means providing them with clean dormitories, equipped kitchens, and decent sanitation facilities. These basic material conditions are essential for rebuilding motivation and confidence among young boarders. Rather than investing only in elite boarding schools and proximity colleges, the State would benefit from renovating boarding schools across all regions of the country.

Second, improving food and school health services is necessary. A student who is undernourished, tired, or ill cannot learn effectively. A balanced and sufficient meal is not a luxury but a necessity. Boarders should also benefit from insurance coverage for all potential health, accident, or safety risks during their stay. As Amartya Sen (2000) reminds us, justice is not limited to the distribution of resources; it consists in giving everyone the real ability to transform those resources into well-being and success. A boarding school that properly feeds its students gives them the concrete means to achieve success.

Third, educational and psychosocial support must be strengthened. Adolescents need attention, guidance, and moral support. Increasing the number of educators, improving their training, and especially involving families more closely in daily monitoring would provide students with more humane and effective supervision. The boarding school should not only be a place of lodging but also a space for learning about life, citizenship, and social coexistence.

More broadly, a reflection on funding is necessary. The State cannot bear this responsibility alone. Local authorities, parents' associations, civil society organizations, and even private partners all have a role to play. This shared responsibility is particularly important because, as Glasman (2012) points out, the boarding school is not only a place of study but also a space where broader social issues are at stake—socialization, solidarity, and the protection of the most vulnerable. The author emphasizes that *"the boarding school*

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appears as a unique educational setting where academic learning, collective life experiences, and mechanisms of social protection intersect" (Glasman, 2012).

In summary, the restructuring of boarding schools must be a collective project built around a shared vision of educational justice (Millington, 2023). If these institutions are restored with decent conditions, healthy food, and strong educational guidance, they will once again be able to fulfill their primary mission: offering every student, regardless of social background, the real opportunity to succeed in school and to build a hopeful future.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article on public boarding schools in Dabou has revealed a striking contrast between the ideal of educational justice and the daily reality experienced by students living in boarding facilities**.** At their creation, these schools were meant to offer equal opportunities to all children, especially those from low-income families living far from urban centers. They represented a true gateway to success and social mobility. Today, however, this noble mission has been weakened by the deterioration of infrastructure, poor living conditions, and limited supervision.

The findings from *Lycée Moderne Leboutou* confirm this situation: the majority of boarding students come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite the difficulties they face, they view the boarding school as a refuge that allows them to continue their education in a relatively stable environment. The excellent success rates achieved—often far above the national average—demonstrate the courage, discipline, and solidarity of these young people. Their success depends more on personal effort and group spirit than on the material support of the institution.

From a theoretical perspective, the analysis inspired by Rawls, Sen, Bourdieu, and Dubet shows that the boarding school is a space with two faces. It can serve as both a stepping stone to success and a mirror of social inequality. When it functions properly, it enables students to flourish and believe in their abilities. But when it deteriorates, it reproduces the very injustices it was created to fight. It is therefore urgent to rethink and rehabilitate public boarding schools. Material renovation, better nutrition, stronger educational supervision, and genuine involvement from the State, local authorities, and social partners are essential to restore their meaning. As Glasman (2012) reminds us, the boarding school should not be seen only as a place of study but also as a living space for socialization, solidarity, and protection for the most vulnerable youth.

Finally, this research opens the door to further studies. It would be useful to extend the analysis to other regions of Côte d'Ivoire in order to better understand the diversity of situations and identify best practices that could be replicated. The public boarding school is not a relic of the past; it remains a necessary institution and a source of hope for thousands of students. Its survival will depend on the collective will to restore its capacity to fulfill its mission: to offer every child, regardless of background, the real opportunity to learn, succeed, and build a meaningful future.

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