



Silent Pedagogies and Hidden Curriculum in Arabic Language Instruction Among Rural Madrasahs

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ABSTRACT

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This research is motivated by the need to understand the hidden dynamics in the Arabic language learning process in rural madrasahs, where non-explicit pedagogical practices and hidden curricula often shape students' learning experiences significantly but go unnoticed. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the forms of silent pedagogies and the implications of hidden curriculum in Arabic language teaching, especially in shaping values, attitudes, and power relations in the classroom. This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study method, involving two rural madrasahs as research locations. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with eight teachers and twelve students, and analysis of learning documents. The data were analyzed thematically to uncover patterns of interaction that reflected hidden educational practices. The results of the study show that Arabic learning in rural madrasahs is dominated by a conservative approach based on memorization and teacher authority, which indirectly shapes attitudes of obedience, homogenization of religious understanding, and emphasis on social hierarchy. The hidden curriculum is identified through one-way communication patterns, ritualistic habituation, and the absence of critical dialogue spaces. The conclusions of this study affirm the importance of critical reading of the implicit dimension in the Arabic language learning process in madrasahs, which has important implications for the development of a more reflective, participatory, and liberating contextual pedagogy in Islamic education.

Key Word

Silent Pedagogies, Hidden Curriculum, Arabic Language Education, Rural Madrasahs.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, learning Arabic is strategically positioned because it is the key to understanding classical Islamic literature, Qur'anic texts, and communication in international religious activities (Shidiq et al., 2023). However, behind seemingly formal and structured learning practices, there is a hidden dimension that also shapes the student learning experience. Especially in rural madrasahs, the learning process is often influenced by pedagogical practices that are not

always formulated in official curriculum documents, but present in the form of silent pedagogy and hidden curriculum (Pageh et al., 2025). This phenomenon shows how communication patterns, power relations, and religious routines can be a means to internalize certain values that are not always reflexively manifested by teachers and students.

The context of madrassas in rural areas often shows limited access to pedagogical innovation and a lack of ongoing professional training for teachers. As a result, Arabic teaching methods are still dominant with a rote learning approach and the teacher's sole authority, without much critical dialogue or participatory approach. Research by (Alroqi, 2024) suggests that Arabic language learning in non-urban areas tends to maintain traditional models that limit students' exploration of meaning and contextual understanding. This raises critical questions about how the hidden dimensions of teaching shape the way of thinking, values, and social structures inherited through education.

Despite the increasing attention to critical pedagogical issues and hidden curricula in global education studies, similar studies in the context of Arabic language education in Indonesian madrassas are still very limited (Qomari et al., 2022). Most research still focuses on the effectiveness of formal learning methods or students' cognitive achievement, without in-depth examining the implicit dynamics that shape the learning ecosystem in the classroom. Research by (Asse et al., 2024), For example, it only highlights the effectiveness of the qira'ah and tarjamah methods, without discussing how social interactions and power structures in the classroom help shape students' mindsets. In fact, these hidden aspects have a long-term impact on the formation of religious identity and social views of students.

This research fills this gap by examining the forms of silent pedagogy and hidden curricula in Arabic language learning in rural madrasahs. In contrast to the conventional approach that only assesses cognitive output, this research focuses on implicit dynamics in the learning process, such as teacher-student relationships, communication patterns, and ritual practices that are not written in the curriculum document. This focus allows for a more thorough understanding of how Arabic language education not only transmits linguistic knowledge, but also shapes students' social and religious attitudes through hidden mechanisms.

In particular, the aim of this study was to identify hidden pedagogical practices that occur in Arabic language classes in rural madrassas as well as to analyze their impact on the formation of values, attitudes, and social structures in the learning environment. This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study method, thus allowing an in-depth exploration of the socio-cultural context that frames the learning process. Through participatory observation and in-depth interviews, this

study reconstructs the reality of teaching and learning that is not fully captured by formal evaluation instruments.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in strengthening the critical pedagogical perspective in the study of Arabic language education, especially in the realm of Islamic education which has been more focused on normative and dogmatic aspects. By highlighting the role of hidden curriculum, this study adds an important dimension to the analysis of contemporary Islamic education, namely the structural and symbolic influence of teaching practices on the formation of student subjectivity (Abitolkha & Mas' ud, 2021). Practically, the findings of this research can be material for reflection and the development of teacher training programs that are more responsive to the reality of the classroom and the contextual needs of students in rural madrasas.

Within the framework of national education policy, this research also has strategic relevance given the importance of transforming Islamic education towards a more inclusive, reflective, and liberating model. In the midst of the challenges of globalization, digitalization, and socio-cultural diversity, the ability of madrasas to develop pedagogical approaches that are not only cognitively efficient but also ethical and participatory are critical. Therefore, critical reading of hidden curriculum is key to building a more equitable and socially conscious educational ecosystem (Dastgir & Fakhar-Ul-Zaman, 2023).

Finally, this research is expected to expand our understanding of Arabic language education not only as a process of knowledge transmission, but as a space for the production of social meaning and the formation of complex cultural identities. Thus, the implications of this study include the renewal of pedagogical practices, curriculum revisions, and strengthening the role of teachers as critical agents of social transformation. This research emphasizes the importance of dismantling hidden assumptions in learning and opening up space for a more dialogical and liberation-oriented model of Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design to explore the phenomenon of silent pedagogy and hidden curriculum in the context of Arabic language learning in rural madrasas. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for the exploration of meaning, experience, and social relationships that quantitative data does not achieve (Mulisa, 2022). Exploratory case study designs are used to contextually and deeply understand the hidden practices in the learning process that take place in a particular environment and cannot be generalized broadly, but are rich in contextual meaning (Pregoner, 2024).

Research Population

The research population included all Arabic teachers and madrasah aliyah students in rural areas of Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. The sampling technique was carried out by non-probability sampling, especially purposive sampling, taking into account the representation of certain characteristics, such as the background of the Islamic boarding school, the remote geographical location, and the continuity of traditional learning. Two madrassas were selected as study locations based on recommendations from the local Ministry of Religion office and the results of an initial survey. Participants consisted of 8 Arabic teachers and 12 students from the two madrassas. The selection of the number of participants takes into account the principle of data saturation, where the information obtained has shown sufficient repetition and depth (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through four main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observations, documentation, and field notes. The interviews used semi-structured guidelines compiled based on the initial findings of previous research, including hidden curriculum aspects. The interview guide partly refers to the instrument of (Fauzan et al., 2026) research related to hidden curriculum, which has been adapted to the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. Observations were made in Arabic classroom practice for two weeks, focusing on interaction patterns, teacher body language use, and students' affective responses. The documentation collected includes lesson plans (Learning Implementation Plan), textbooks, and schedules of routine religious activities. The validity of the data is ensured through source triangulation techniques and method triangulation, as well as re-checking findings to informants through member checking techniques (Fauzan et al., 2026).

Research Procedure

The research procedure was carried out in stages. First, the researcher conducted a preliminary study to identify the location and obtain research permits from the head of the madrasah and the local Ministry of Religious Affairs. Second, researchers establish social relationships with teachers and students to build trust. Third, data collection is carried out simultaneously through class observation and interviews. Fourth, data from observations and interviews were transcribed and coded manually using a thematic framework. Fifth, data analysis is carried out iteratively, and reflectively. Sixth, provisional results are analyzed and verified by member checking techniques.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic analysis approach such as that developed by Braun and Clarke (Byrne, 2022), which involves the process of data recognition, initial coding, theme search, theme study, theme definition and naming, and the preparation of a narrative of findings. The coding and analysis process is

assisted by NVivo 12 Plus software that facilitates the systematic management and grouping of qualitative data. The use of this software also supports audit trail traceability and increased transparency of the analysis process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dominance of the Memorization Approach and Teacher Authority

The results of observations in the two madrassas show that the Arabic learning process in general is still dominated by a conservative rote learning approach, with a rigid teaching structure and minimal participation. The teacher becomes the center of class control, while the students are only the recipients of information. An interview with one of the teachers revealed that this method was considered the most "efficient" due to time constraints and a busy curriculum:

"If they don't memorize, it will be difficult for children to get grades. They must first be able to read and memorize vocabulary, then they can continue." (GR-03, February 12, 2025 interview)

A similar view was also expressed by another teacher who stated that memorization is considered the safest way to ensure students do not misunderstand the text:

"Memorizing first is important so that you don't make mistakes. If given freedom of interpretation, later it can deviate from the meaning of the verse or hadith." (GR-07, interview February 14, 2025)

This situation shows the existence of silent pedagogy, where the form of pedagogy is not communicated explicitly, but still forms a pattern of student behavior, namely a passive and obedient attitude without room to question the content of the lesson. This context is consistent with the findings (Korol, 2022) which states that silent pedagogy often works through structures that seem "natural", but actually reproduce power relations. In this case, the classroom structure that places the teacher as the sole scientific authority is a means to establish discipline, obedience, and homogeneity of understanding, which occurs indirectly but continuously.

Hidden Curriculum through Ritual Practices and Unilateral Communication

Data from documentation and field records show that religious activities such as joint dhikr before study, congregational prayers, and tadarus activities are unwritten parts of the lesson plan, but are routinely carried out and have a normative function. This practice establishes a culture of discipline and obedience, but also closes the possibility of the emergence of a dialogical approach in learning. One student said:

"We usually just participate. If you have memorized prayers and dhikr, yes, that's part of the lesson too." (SW-05, interview February 15, 2025)

A similar quote is reinforced by another student's statement highlighting routines as something "automatic" and no longer critically thought-out:

"Every morning is always the same, read the prayer together, then the teacher immediately starts teaching. No one asks why or why, after all, just follow along." (SW-10, February 16, 2025 interview).

This is a strong indication of the existence of a hidden curriculum that shapes values and attitudes through collective habits without reflective processes. In the framework (Sanjakdar & Apple, 2024), This reflects the way education unconsciously reproduces ideological values and social hierarchies. This ritualistic practice, although seen as a form of strengthening religiosity, is actually also a social control mechanism that limits students' active participation in the learning process. Communication that is one-way and repetitive in the form of religious symbolism, creates a learning climate that emphasizes obedience rather than critical and dialogical understanding.

Lack of Dialogue and Critical Space in the Classroom

Classroom observations show that teacher-student interaction occurs in one direction. Teachers use more lecture models, with fewer open-ended questions or explorations from students. When students try to give a response that doesn't fit the textbook, the teacher tends to redirect it back to the text. This is reflected in the following quote:

"If the answer doesn't match the text, it's usually considered wrong. So we just memorized it first." (SW-09, interview February 17, 2025).

This condition is also reinforced by the statements of other students who feel that the desire to ask questions or discuss is often hampered by the teacher's high expectations of the appropriateness of the answers:

"If I ask further, sometimes the teacher says 'there is no need to discuss, it is not exam material'. So we had better keep quiet." (SW-11, interview February 17, 2025).

This situation reinforces the assumption that uncritical pedagogical practices have become part of a hidden value system. The absence of room for dissent or critical analysis also limits the formation of students' reflective and interpretive thinking skills. In the context of silent pedagogy, this is a strong indicator that the classroom is not a space for open dialogue, but rather an arena for the reproduction of a single discourse that closes off the potential for students to participate actively and independently. These limitations are not only a matter of methodology, but are closely related to the symbolic power structure between teachers and students that is legitimized by hierarchical and normative educational cultures.

The Influence of the Social and Cultural Environment of Islamic Boarding Schools

In interviews, some teachers admitted that the social environment of madrasas that are still affiliated with the pesantren system causes resistance to modern learning

methods. Traditional values such as ta'dzim (respect for teachers) are strictly defended and used as an excuse to maintain a hierarchical system in the classroom:

"Students should not ask many questions, it can be considered disrespectful. We keep that adab as part of our tradition." (GR-06, interview February 18, 2025)

This view is also supported by the statements of other teachers who assert that maintaining good manners is more important than encouraging open discussion:

"If students are too active in asking questions, sometimes we think they don't understand manners. Here, the main thing is attitude first, then knowledge." (GR-04, interview February 19, 2025)

Although the value of ta'dzim has a noble value in the Islamic educational tradition, if understood rigidly, it can strengthen power relations that silence students' aspirations and limit healthy two-way interactions. Students become accustomed to being silent and following directions with no room to develop critical thinking capacity or provide alternative views. This is in line with the findings (Christiansen, 2023) about how hidden curricula are often embedded in social norms that are taken for granted without criticism, and indirectly contribute to the continuity of hierarchical social structures in education. Thus, pesantren culture in its conservative form can become a field for the reproduction of subordinate values for students, not a space to cultivate intellect and dialogue.

Discussion

The main findings of this study suggest that Arabic language learning in rural madrassas is dominated by conservative pedagogical approaches that represent silent pedagogical practices and hidden curricula in the form of strong teacher authority, ritualistic practices, one-way communication, and a lack of critical dialogue spaces. These four thematic findings have significant implications for understanding how Arabic language education is not only a means of linguistic transmission, but also an instrument of reproduction of social values and power structures in the context of Islamic education in the region.

First, the dominance of memorization methods and the authority of teachers in Arabic language learning reflects a form of silent pedagogy that is not explicit, but works systematically in shaping student obedience and passivity. This approach is in line with criticism of the (Su et al., 2023), which states that silent pedagogies are a form of teaching that emphasizes implicit control over the way students think and act, as well as ignore their potential for active participation. In the context of rural madrasas, this condition is reinforced by limited resources, low participatory pedagogical training for teachers, and normative orientation towards the achievement of memorization as a measure of learning success (Koring'ura et al., 2024).

Second, the practice of religious rituals that are carried out routinely but not written in the formal curriculum indicates the existence of a hidden curriculum that

forms a pattern of discipline, uniformity, and collective obedience of students. The hidden curriculum concept developed by (Sanjakdar & Apple, 2024) shows that ideological values and social structures can be reproduced through the practice of habits that are considered reasonable, but never discussed reflectively in the classroom. In this study, practices such as congregational prayer, dhikr, and tadarus before learning become religious symbols that strengthen collective identity, but at the same time close the possibility of the emergence of reflective and dialogical approaches.

Third, the lack of dialogue and critical learning spaces shows how hidden curriculum operates through hierarchical classroom communication structures. When students are not given the space to express their views or question the text, then learning becomes a process of strengthening authority. These findings are in line with (Hiang-Chu, 2024) criticism, which emphasizes that education should involve "learning to be" and "learning to live together", not just mastering the content. The rigidity in the classroom structure also illustrates the role of teachers as guardians of knowledge authority, which limits the democratization of education in madrasas.

Fourth, the influence of pesantren culture that is oriented towards the value of ta'dzim on teachers contributes to the eternity of power relations and student subordination. Although respect for teachers is an important value in Islamic education, rigid definitions of manners and polite attitudes hinder the emergence of participatory and exploratory learning. (Sattar, 2024) affirming that traditional values that are not criticized can be the basis of hidden curricula that perpetuate inequality in education. Thus, the institutional culture of madrasas has a role in hindering pedagogical reform towards a more inclusive and transformative model.

The consequences of these findings suggest that Arabic language education in rural madrassas not only creates linguistic competence, but also subconsciously shapes conservative mindsets, passive attitudes, and acceptance of social hierarchies. This indicates that the learning process takes place in the context of symbolic power relations that normalize teacher dominance, standardize religious interpretations, and exclude from criticism or differences. An important contribution of these findings is to strengthen the argument in Islamic education studies that curriculum reform should include implicit and symbolic dimensions, not just changes in teaching materials.

Some of the factors supporting these findings include limited teacher professionalism, strong local traditions of pesantren in rural areas, lack of policy interventions that encourage reflective pedagogy, and rejection of modern pedagogical approaches in rural areas. However, it is necessary to acknowledge the potential bias in this study, mainly due to the limited number of study sites and short observation times. Additionally, there is a possibility of social bias in interviews as students tend to maintain the image of their teachers and institutions. Therefore, data triangulation and member checking are carried out as an effort to reduce this bias.

To deepen understanding of the issues of silent pedagogy and hidden curricula in Arabic language education, further research is recommended to involve longitudinal and blended method approaches. An in-depth study of the differences between boarding madrassas and urban madrassas can also provide a broader picture of how the social environment affects learning practices. Evaluation of teacher training programs and their involvement in the development of participatory curricula is also important to reduce the dominance of conservative pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the process of learning Arabic in rural madrassas is colored by silent pedagogical practices and hidden curricula that operate implicitly but strongly determine the formation of attitudes, values, and social relationship structures in the classroom. Through a qualitative approach with exploratory case studies in two rural madrassas, it was found that the dominance of memorization methods and teacher authority not only reflects pedagogical limitations, but also becomes a power reproduction mechanism that limits students' space for participation and critical thinking.

The hidden curriculum is evident in the religious routines and one-way communication that forms a culture of unreflective obedience. Minimal classroom interaction closes the possibility of intellectual autonomy, while traditional values such as *ta'dzim* towards teachers, if understood rigidly, actually reinforce hierarchical structures that hinder educational emancipation. All these practices show that Arabic language education contains not only a linguistic-religious content, but also contains a hidden and hegemonic process of social formation.

Theoretically, this research makes an important contribution in expanding the scope of critical pedagogical studies in the context of Islamic education, by emphasizing the importance of uncovering the implicit dimensions of learning as part of the educational ecosystem. Practically, these findings are an input for the development of teacher training and curriculum reform in madrassas to be more participatory, reflective, and contextual.

Further research is recommended to examine the long-term influence of silent pedagogy on students' affective, cognitive, and social development, as well as to make comparisons between pesantren-based madrassas and urban madrassas that are more open to pedagogical innovation. Critical reading of the hidden curriculum is an important step in designing a more transformative, equitable, and liberating Islamic education.

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