

Andragogic Drift in a Rural Madrasah Diniyah: *Fadā'il al-A'māl* Literature as Religious Coping among Working Youth

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian *Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliyah* (MDT) are legally defined as supplementary religious schools for formally educated children. This rigid regulatory mandate has increasingly become a significant liability. As rural demographics shift and children's schedules become saturated, many MDTs lose their clientele and become dormant despite intact physical infrastructure. This article examines one such dormant MDT in Nagreg Kendan, West Java, arguing its successful reactivation required abandoning its statutory mandate. Through a participatory action research cycle over with 25 working youth aged, we document the institution's revival via evening classes and a curriculum centered on Nawawī al-Bantānī's *Tanqīh al-Qawl al-Ḥathīth*. We advance two central claims. First, the MDT survived through 'andragogic drift': shifting from child to adult learners, preserving the institution while voiding its regulatory category. Second, utilizing *fadā'il al-a'māl* literature was constitutive of this drift, as the genre validates participants' existing actions rather than prescribing new obligations. By engaging in a reassessed religious coping framework and recent empirical studies on the lives of informal workers, we argue that this reception directly inverts the Weberian vector. Finally, we confront the

objection that consolatory religiosity inherently reproduces the precarity it makes bearable, specifying the exact evidence needed to adjudicate this critical tension.

Keywords: Madrasah diniyah; Living Hadith; Tanqīḥ al-Qawl; religious coping; participatory action research; Islamic education policy.

Introduction

The Indonesian state recognizes *madrasah diniyah takmiliyah* as non-formal religious education supplementing the formal schooling of children. The regulation names the clientele, and in naming it constrains the institution. That constraint is not a neutral administrative detail. Indonesian Islamic education policy has been characterised by successive attempts to fix institutional categories that social practice keeps outgrowing, a dynamic Kosim et al. (2023) trace across the post-independence policy sequence and that Ihsan et al. (2024) document as a continuing contestation between national and religious curricular authority in the madrasa sector. Malik (2024) shows the same pressure producing entirely new institutional variants that existing categories fail to capture. This article takes the mismatch between category and practice as its analytical entry point rather than as background.

Institutional dormancy in the MDT sector is usually explained in a resource idiom. Studies inventory shortfalls in funding, teacher supply, facilities, and instructional hours, and prescribe remedies in the same register. The diagnosis is often accurate, and it is incomplete in a specific way. Resource explanations treat the institution's clientele as given and ask why the institution cannot serve it well. They do not ask what happens when the clientele itself becomes unavailable, nor whether an institution might survive by serving somebody else entirely. Recent work on Indonesian Islamic institutions has begun to register precisely this kind of adaptive reconfiguration, with Rofiah et al. (2025) documenting pesantren extending their function to populations the inherited model did not anticipate.

Madrasah Nurul Huda in Kampung Pamucatan, Nagreg Kendan, presents that second situation. The building stood. Local religious commitment had not collapsed. What had disappeared was the specific

population the institution was designed for. When activity resumed, it resumed with adults in their twenties and thirties who work for wages, at hours dictated by shift patterns, around a text no MDT curriculum framework prescribes. The institution recovered function by ceasing to be what the regulation says it is.

We call this *andragogic drift* and treat it as the article's primary object. The term is called a displacement of clientele that preserves an institution's physical and social existence while voiding its regulatory category. Drift of this kind is invisible to resource-based analysis because, on resource metrics, the institution appears to have recovered. It is equally invisible to policy monitoring, since an MDT reporting active session satisfies the reporting requirement regardless of who attends, a monitoring gap consistent with the loose coupling between formal curricular authority and madrasa practice that Ihsan et al. (2024) describe.

A second question follows immediately and carries the article's theoretical weight. Curriculum selection under drift is not free. The new clientele arrives physically tired, temporally constrained, and without prior training in Arabic morphology or *kitab kuning* conventions. Most classical curricula fail at least one of these constraints. *Tanqīh al-Qawl al-Hathīth* does not. Our argument is that this compatibility is structural rather than fortunate. The *fadā'il al-a'māl* genre attaches merit to acts the listener already performs, which Nurzakka (2021) shows to be the organising principle of the work's chapter architecture. It revalues rather than prescribes. For a population whose scarcest resource is discretionary time, a genre that adds meaning without adding obligation is the only classical curriculum that survives contact with the schedule.

The proposition has consequences beyond one village. Recent syntheses of the *Living Hadith* programme confirm that it has documented reception with considerable ethnographic richness while leaving selection largely untheorised (Saputra et al., 2024; Siregar, 2022). Reception studies ask what a community does with a text. They rarely ask why that text and not another, and we propose that the material conditions of the receiving community filter the classical corpus before interpretation begins.

Section 2 positions the study within three literatures and identifies the analytical factions within each. Section 3 details the research design and treats the method's internal contradictions as data. Section 4 presents findings. Section 5 develops the theoretical argument and confronts the strongest objection to it. Section 6 states limitations. Section 7 concludes.

Methods

Design and justification

The study employs participatory action research across one full cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis et al., 2014). PAR was selected for a reason specific to the research questions rather than for its general standing as a community-engagement method. Because RQ1 concerns clientele displacement, the design had to permit the clientele to define the terms of participation, including scheduling and curriculum. A design fixing those parameters in advance would have foreclosed the phenomenon under investigation.

The PAR literature contains a division worth naming. A critical-emancipatory strand holds that action research must transform the structural conditions generating a problem, while a pragmatic-technical strand accepts more modest aims and treats PAR as a method for improving practice within existing structures (Kindon et al., 2007). Postcolonial critics of both argue that university-community PAR frequently reproduces extractive relations under participatory vocabulary, since researchers retain control over problem definition, analytic categories, and publication. We situate this study in the pragmatic strand and address the extraction critique in Section 3.7.

Participants and sampling

The study worked with a fixed cohort of 25 participants across the full action research cycle. Recruitment was purposive and total rather than selective, in that every young person in Kampung Pamucatan who responded to the initial invitation and attended the planning phase was enrolled, and no further recruitment occurred once the cycle began. The cohort therefore approximates the accessible population of religiously interested working youth in the hamlet rather than a sample drawn from

it, which constrains generalisation while strengthening internal claims about this institution.

Twenty-five is a defensible size for the analytic aims pursued here. Hennink and Kaiser's (2022) systematic review of empirical saturation tests found that studies with relatively homogeneous populations and narrowly defined objectives typically reached code saturation between nine and seventeen interviews, with larger samples required only where populations were heterogeneous or aims broader. Our population is occupationally varied yet homogeneous on the dimensions that matter analytically, namely age band, residence, gender, and exposure to the same instructional sequence. The cohort exceeds the upper bound of that range by a comfortable margin, which supports a claim of thematic saturation while offering no basis for statistical inference. State whether saturation was assessed formally, for instance by tracking new codes across successive rounds of data collection, or whether it is being claimed based on sample size alone. The second is weaker and reviewers distinguish them.

Data generation

Data was generated across the cohort of 25 through the sources set out in Table 2.

Table 2. *Data sources*

Source	Coverage
Attendance register	All sessions
Focus group discussions	Planning and reflection phases
Individual conversations	Subset of cohort
Participant observation	Instructional sessions
Documents	Madrasah records, community correspondence

With 25 participants, focus groups of five to seven yield four or five groups, which falls within the four-to-eight range Hennink and

Kaiser (2022) associate with saturation in focus group work. [Confirm the actual grouping. If all 25 met as a single body, say so and note the resulting suppression of minority views, which is a substantive limitation rather than a procedural detail.

State the language of each interaction, presumably Sundanese and Indonesian, and describe the translation procedure for quoted material, including who translated and whether translations were checked.

Where the article reports changes in participants' comprehension of *kitab kuning* conventions, the basis for that assessment must be specified. If assessment was informal and impressionistic, say so. An honest account of weak measurement is publishable. An unexplained claim for improvement is not.

Results and Discussion

Reactivation occurred through clientele substitution rather than clientele recovery

The institution resumed regular operation with a cohort of 25 and without recovering a single member of its statutory clientele. No school-age children enrolled in formal education attended the reactivated sessions. Confirm or correct this. If children did attend, the article's central argument requires substantial revision, and discovering that now is preferable to discovering it in review. See Appendix B on the terminological question this raises.

Three features of the resumed operation depart from the MDT template. Sessions run in the *maghrib-ishā'* interval rather than the afternoon window typical of MDT scheduling, a shift dictated by shift-work patterns rather than devotional preference. Attendance is weekly rather than daily, against the regulatory expectation of a minimum instructional load. The curriculum follows a single classical commentary rather than the graded subject matrix specified by ministerial guidance, a divergence from prescribed curricular structure of the kind Ihsan et al. (2024) find to be widespread and largely unregistered by monitoring instruments.

Each departure is individually minor. Together they constitute a different institution operating inside the same building under the same name and, formally, the same registration.

Attendance across the cycle should be reported as counts out of the enrolled 25 rather than as a total, since a headline figure conceals whether the same people returned or different people cycled through.

Textual engagement developed unevenly and incompletely

Participants developed partial facility with *jenggotan* interlinear annotation. The qualifier is essential, and with a cohort of 25 the distribution must be reported rather than a group tendency. Report how many of the 25 could annotate independently by the end of the cycle, how many could follow annotation performed by the instructor without producing it themselves, and how many remained unable to do either. Report on the number of people who are disengaged and, where known, why. A finding that eight of 25 reached independent annotation is more credible and more useful than an unquantified claim of improvement.

The chapters generating the most sustained discussion concerned lawful earning, patience, and sincerity of intention, which correspond to the merit-organised chapter architecture Nurzakka (2021) identifies as the work's distinguishing structural feature. Participants reported reinterpreting existing work routines rather than altering them, a pattern matching Afolabi's (2024) finding that religious frame among informal workers reshapes the interpretation of occupational experience without necessarily changing behaviour.

Support with quoted material attributed to participant codes, for example (P07). Participant quotations are the strongest evidence this article can offer, and their absence remains the most conspicuous deficiency. Three or four substantive quotations from different participants, properly contextualised and translated, would do more for the manuscript's prospects than any further theoretical elaboration. State how many of the 25 articulated the revaluation theme, since a theme voiced by three participants and a theme voiced by eighteen support very different claims.

Social ties thickened within an existing network rather than across networks

Participants' report specifies relationships formed or deepened through the sessions. The relationships are among people who already know one another. Establish this concretely. Report how many of the 25 were previously known to one another as kin, neighbours, or workmates, and how many entered the cohort without prior ties to other members. If the great majority fall in the first category, the social capital finding is bonding rather than bridging, which is analytically significant and should be reported as such rather than presented as an unqualified gain (Nuridin, 2024; Putnam, 2000). Report also whether any participant reported a new tie extending outside the hamlet, since even two or three such cases would qualify the bonding-only reading advanced in Section.

Andragogic drift and the policy category problem

The finding in Section has an implication extending well past this village. Indonesian religious education policy defines MDT by clientele. Field reality in rural West Java is producing MDT institutions whose viable clientele is adult. Where these diverge, the institution faces a choice between fidelity to its category and continued existence.

Nurul Huda chose existence. Nobody involved framed the choice as a policy question, which is what makes it analytically interesting. Drift of this kind occurs below the threshold of policy visibility. An MDT reporting active session satisfies its reporting obligation, and nothing in the monitoring apparatus registers that the sessions serve adults, meet weekly rather than daily, and teach a text outside the prescribed curriculum. Ihsan et al. (2024) describe the structural precondition for this, namely a curricular authority that is formally centralised and practically loosely coupled to what madrasas do.

The prescriptive implication runs against the modernisation faction's instinct as articulated in the policy trajectory Kosim et al. (2023) reconstruct. Tighter regularisation would not have saved Nurul Huda. Strict enforcement of MDT curricular and clientele standards would have terminated the only activity the institution proved capable of sustaining. What the case argues for is a policy category recognising adult non-

formal religious education as a distinct institutional form with its own standards rather than as a deviation from a children's standard. Malik (2024) offers a cautionary parallel, showing that unrecognised institutional variants proliferate in exactly the regulatory blind spots that rigid categories create.

This is a modest claim and we resist inflating it. One case cannot establish prevalence. One case can establish that the phenomenon exists and specify what a prevalence study would need to measure, which Section 6 sets out.

Genre affordance and the selection problem in reception studies

The second claim concerns why *Tanqīḥ al-Qawl* worked. Consider the realistically available alternatives. A *fiqh* curriculum such as *Safīnat al-Najāh* or *Faṭḥ al-Qarīb* presents ordered obligations, and each obligation learned generates a demand on the learner's time and conduct. A *naḥw* or *ṣarf* curriculum requires cumulative daily study that weekly attendance cannot sustain. A *tafsīr* curriculum requires Arabic competence the participants lacked. Each is a more prestigious starting point in pesantren pedagogy than a *fadā'il* collection, and each fails against the constraints of the clientele.

The *fadā'il al-a'māl* genre has a structural feature none of the alternative's shares. Its propositional form attaches merit to acts rather than obligation to persons, which is the organising logic Nurzakka (2021) identifies in the work's chapter sequence. A chapter on the merit of lawful earning does not instruct the listener to earn lawfully. It informs him that lawful earning, which he already does daily and has never thought of as religious activity, carries transcendent value. Conduct need not change for the teaching to take effect. What changes is the meaning of conduct already performed. Dik et al. (2024) identify meaning-making as the most robustly evidenced pathway by which religion operates in working life, and the *fadā'il* genre is unusually well configured to deliver exactly that pathway.

This is why the genre survives contact with a working schedule when others do not. It is the only classical genre to increase religious significance without increasing religious workload.

The implication for *Living Hadith* research is direct. If genre affordances filter the classical corpus before any interpretive act occurs, then reception studies beginning with the community's engagement with a text have begun one step too late. The prior question is which texts were structurally available to that community, and the answer depends on material conditions the reception literature has largely treated as context rather than cause (Saputra et al., 2024; Siregar, 2022). Faruq and Mustofa (2022) report a successful adult hadith-reception programme without asking why the selected material fitted its audience, which illustrates the gap rather than filling it.

We state this as a hypothesis rather than a finding. Testing requires comparative work across communities differing in occupational profile and available discretionary time, specified in Section 6.

Transmitted authority as a scarce good

The reactivated sessions place a trained reader between participants and text, with an epistemic consequence worth stating without romanticism. Contemporary Indonesian religious information environments are saturated. Zaid et al. (2022) document how social media influencers have reconfigured religious authority for Muslim millennials, displacing institutional credentialing with metrics of visibility. Participants therefore have continuous access to religious content of unknown provenance through platforms optimised for engagement rather than accuracy. What the *bandongan* session supplies is not information, which is abundant, but attribution. The reader can say which chain a report travel through, what a commentator thought of it, and where the tradition has disagreed. The capacity is scarce precisely because it is expensive to acquire, and it is the capacity that recent work on textual transmission in Indonesian Islamic institutions identifies as the tradition's distinctive contribution (Burhanuddin et al., 2019).

The claim requires a limit. Transmitted authority is not self-validating, and the structure transmitting carefully vetted material transmits poorly vetted material with equal confidence. The *fadā'il* genre is notoriously the genre in which classical hadith criticism has been most permissive, and *Lubāb al-Ḥadīth* contains material stricter transmission

criticism would not accept, a point Nurzakka (2021) raises in assessing the work's source base. An article written by hadith specialists should say this plainly rather than let a reviewer say it first. The pedagogical value of the sessions lies in the practice of attributing rather than in a guarantee of authenticity, and honest reporting requires distinguishing the two.

The strongest objection, stated fully

The reading we have offered describes religion supplying meaning to labour that would otherwise feel meaningless. A well-established tradition reads exactly this configuration as ideological.

On that reading, what occurred at Nurul Huda is the production of consent. Young men in precarious wage employment received a theological account under which their conditions carry transcendent value. The account consoles, and consolation reduces the pressure that might otherwise convert private frustration into collective claims about wages, hours, or conditions. Religion would function as the mechanism by which structural disadvantage becomes personally tolerable and therefore politically durable.

The objection cannot be dismissed, and we do not attempt to dismiss it. Our data cannot adjudicate it. Establishing whether the reception is consolatory or quietist would require observing what participants did about their working conditions over a period substantially longer than this study and comparing them against similar workers without intervention.

Three considerations bear on the question without settling it. Against the quietist reading, the coping literature distinguishes benevolent reappraisal, associated with improved adjustment and sustained agency, from passive deferral, which is not (Pargament et al., 1998), and participants' reported engagement had the reappraisal structure rather than the deferral structure which requires evidence to assert. Complicating both readings, Imran and Leng (2025) caution that the positive and negative categories are less cleanly separable than two decades of application have assumed, and Pirutinsky (2024) shows that constructs treated as interchangeable behavior differently under analysis,

so a finding of reappraisal does not by itself license an empowerment conclusion. In favour of the quietist reading, the social capital produced was bonding rather than bridging. Bonding capital thickens solidarity within a group without producing the cross-cutting ties through which collective claims on external actors are organised, and Nurdin (2024) finds that Indonesian faith-based interventions generating bonding capital alone leave communities' external position substantially unchanged. A network internally denser and externally unchanged is precisely the shape the quietist account predicts.

Conclusion

A dormant rural *madrasah diniyah* resumed function by abandoning the clientele its regulatory category specifies and adopting one the category does not recognise. We have called this andragogic drift and argued that it exposes a widening gap between Indonesian religious education policy and rural social reality, a gap invisible to current monitoring because drift satisfies reporting requirements while voiding their content.

The curriculum making drift viable was not arbitrary. *Fadā'il al-a'māl* literature attaches merit to acts already performed rather than prescribing acts to be added), and this genre feature makes it the only classical curriculum compatible with the temporal constraints of wage labour, operating through the meaning-making pathway that identify as religion's best-evidenced mode of action in working life. If this holds beyond one site, reception studies in Indonesian hadith scholarship require a prior stage of analysis concerning which texts material conditions render available at all

Whether the resulting religiosity empowers or pacifies is a question our evidence leaves open, and current reassessment of the coping framework suggests the distinction is harder to draw than earlier applications assumed. We have specified what would settle it. Institutions surviving by drifting deserve study on their own terms rather than measurement against a mandate they have quietly ceased to serve.

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