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The Curriculum Formation Of The Nizhamiyah Madrasah Baghdad: Power Relations, Sunni Orthodoxy, And The Production Of Islamic Knowledge In The 11th Century

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Abstract

This article examines the formation of the curriculum of the Nizhamiyah Madrasa in Baghdad in relation to power relations, Sunni orthodoxy, and the production of Islamic knowledge in the eleventh century. The study departs from the argument that curriculum is not a neutral pedagogical arrangement but a historical construction shaped by political patronage, institutional selection, and configurations of scholarly authority. Using qualitative library research and an intellectual-history approach, this article analyzes classical and modern sources on the Seljuq polity, Nizam al-Mulk, the madrasa institution, and the development of Islamic learning in medieval Baghdad. The findings indicate that the Nizhamiyah of Baghdad, founded under the patronage of Nizam al-Mulk in 1065 and inaugurated in 1067, functioned not merely as a center of instruction but also as a strategic institution for consolidating Sunni orthodoxy, especially Shafi'i jurisprudence and Ash'ari theology. Its curriculum privileged legal-religious sciences while subordinating other branches of knowledge, thereby shaping legitimate knowledge, stabilizing doctrinal authority, and reproducing scholarly elites aligned with the Seljuq-Abbasid political

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order. The article argues that the curriculum of classical Islamic education should be read as an arena in which pedagogy, political authority, and the production of religious legitimacy intersect.

Keywords: Islamic Curriculum; Knowledge Production; Nizhamiyah Madrasa; Power Relations; Sunni Orthodoxy.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the history of Islamic education often still moves in an inventoriary pattern: tracing who founded the institution, who was the main teacher, and what subjects were taught. This approach is useful as a basis for mapping, but it is not yet fully sufficient to explain that the curriculum is the result of a broader social configuration. In the context of medieval Islam, madrassas played a role not only as a space for the transmission of knowledge, but also as an institution that selects knowledge that is considered legitimate, regulates teaching authority, and reproduces educated elites who have socio-religious legitimacy (Arjomand, 1999; Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994).

A more critical reading of Islamic educational institutions shows that knowledge does not circulate in a vacuum. It is bound by patronage, legal structures, and social networks that determine who has the right to teach, what is required to be studied, and what kind of form of orthodoxy will be inherited. Therefore, the history of the classical Islamic curriculum should not be limited to a list of disciplines, but should be read as the history of the formation of epistemic authority. This perspective is in line with the study of the development of Islamic learning institutions that see education as a meeting between law, social agency, and political policy, as well as the classical debate about the origins and character of madrassas as institutions that from the beginning contain strong normative and social dimensions (Ahmed, 1968; Arjomand, 1999; Makdisi, 1981; Tibawi, 1962).

Methodologically, this article also occupies the space of intersection between the history of education, intellectual history, and the sociology of knowledge. Crosses are important because objects such as Nizhamiyah cannot be adequately explained through just one discipline. The history of education pays attention to institutions and learning processes; intellectual history helps to read the development of scientific traditions; While the sociology of knowledge allows researchers to see how scientific authority is formed and maintained. This combination makes the reading of curriculum formation more sensitive to the institutional dimension and the

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ideological dimension at the same time (Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994).

Within the framework of curriculum studies, attention to the formation of knowledge is important because the curriculum works not only through formal texts, but also through institutional habituation, book selection, teacher authority, and hierarchy of knowledge. This means that the curriculum can be present without always having to be in the form of a written syllabus as understood in modern education. In classical Islamic institutions, it is often manifested in teaching practices that prioritize certain branches of knowledge, place other branches in subordinate positions, and build consensus on knowledge that should be passed on to the next generation (Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994).

Among the classical Islamic educational institutions, Madrasah Nizhamiyah Baghdad occupies a very prominent position. George Makdisi (1961) shows that this institution is the most famous institution in the madrasah network founded by Nizam al-Mulk. The Nizhamiyah of Baghdad was founded in 457 H/1065 AD and inaugurated in 459 H/1067 AD, so that from the beginning it was present as an authoritative institution in the political and intellectual center of the Islamic world. Its symbolic position in Baghdad made Nizhamiyah incomprehensible only as a high school, but rather as a representation of a broader intellectual and political project (Makdisi, 1961; Makdisi, 1981).

The context of Nizhamiyah's birth greatly determines the direction of its institution. In the 11th century, Baghdad was in a complex relationship structure between the Abbasid caliphate as the center of religious legitimacy and the Saljuk dynasty as the effective power holder. In that configuration, Nizam al-Mulk as vizier played a major role in designing an institutional network that strengthened the administration, authority of Sunni clerics, and political stability. The broader political and intellectual landscape of Saljuk also shows that patronage of knowledge was part of the process of the formation of the imperial order and the management of religious authority at the time (Bulliet, 1972; Peacock, 2015; Siddiqui, 2019). In Siyasat-nama, Nizam al-Mulk views governmental order and social order as something that demands the simultaneous management of public apparatus, knowledge, and morals, a view that helps explain why the patronage of education was so important in his time (Nizam al-Mulk, 2002; Ta'rifin, 2010).

A number of Indonesian studies have discussed Nizhamiyah from the perspective of educational history, educational politics, and power patronage. Murtopo (2014) emphasizes the political dimension of education during the Abbasid period through the case of Nizhamiyah in Baghdad. Muspiroh (2017) read Nizhamiyah as an important moment in the history of Islamic

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education and the rise of Sunni orthodoxy. Muhibuddin (2023) reviews the history, goals, and overview of the Nizhamiyah curriculum, while Khairiyah (2024) shows the relationship between the patronage of the Saljuk Dynasty, Sunni orientation, and the formation of the educational system at the institution. However, most of these studies still position the curriculum as a teaching content, not yet as a historical construction that connects power relations, orthodoxy, and knowledge production (Khairiyah, 2024; Muhibuddin, 2023; Murtopo, 2014; Muspiroh, 2017).

Based on these gaps, this article offers novelty on three levels at once. First, this article reads the Nizhamiyah curriculum not only as a list of subjects, but as a mechanism for knowledge selection. Second, this article places the curriculum in direct relation to the Sunni orthodoxy project supported by Saljuk patronage. Third, this article interprets the Nizhamiyah as an institution that not only transmits knowledge, but also produces authority and reproduces the scientific elite. Thus, the contribution of this article lies in strengthening the historical analysis of the Islamic curriculum through the lens of power-knowledge relations, not in the repetition of descriptive narratives about the establishment of institutions (Arjomand, 1999; Chamberlain, 1994; Khairiyah, 2024).

The relevance of this kind of reading also goes beyond purely historiographical importance. In the study of contemporary Islamic education, debates about the relationship between curriculum, religious authority, and the politics of knowledge continue to arise, especially when educational institutions are positioned as guardians of tradition as well as agents of change. By examining Nizhamiyah as a classic case, this article provides a historical tool to understand that the question of who determines the curriculum, what knowledge is prioritized, and what ideological orientation is built through education is not a new problem, but a problem that has long been inherent in the history of Islamic institutions (Arjomand, 1999; Chamberlain, 1994; Murtopo, 2014).

Departing from this background, this article asks three research questions: what is the socio-political context behind the birth of Madrasah Nizhamiyah Baghdad; how its curriculum is formed through patronage and consolidation of Sunni orthodoxy; and how the curriculum functions in the production of knowledge and the reproduction of Islamic scientific elites. The answers to these questions are important not only to understand Nizhamiyah as a historical case, but also to place the study of classical Islamic curriculum in the realm of more critical and theoretical analysis (Berkey, 1992; Makdisi, 1961; Muspiroh, 2017).

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RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach based on literature studies. The main method is intellectual history, combined with a critical reading of power relations and knowledge production in classical Islamic educational institutions. This approach was chosen because the object of study is a medieval institution that can only be reconstructed through textual sources, historiographic analysis, and interpretation of the socio-political context that surrounds it (Arjomand, 1999; Makdisi, 1961).

Data sources consist of primary sources in a broad sense and secondary sources. Primary sources include texts relating to the political and administrative context of the Nizam al-Mulk's time, especially the Siyasat-nama, as well as the reconstruction of the institutional data provided by classical studies. Secondary sources include monographs and journal articles on madrasas, the history of Islamic education, Sunni orthodoxy, al-Ghazali, and the patronage of Saljuk. This kind of selection of sources allows the analysis to move from historical descriptions to interpretations of the social and ideological functions of institutions (Griffel, 2009; Nizam al-Mulk, 2002; Murtopo, 2014).

Data were collected through documentation and systematic literature search, then classified into themes: the political context of 11th-century Baghdad, Nizhamiyah patronage and institutionalization, curriculum orientation, Sunni orthodoxy, and elite knowledge production and reproduction. The classification stage is important to distinguish between data that is chronological, data that describes the structure of the institution, and data that explains the epistemic orientation of the institution. Thus, the analysis does not stop at the inventory of information, but is directed to find patterns of relationships between categories (Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994).

The validity of the argument is built through cross-comparison between sources, both between classical works and modern studies, as well as between global studies and Indonesian research. This step is necessary because information about Nizhamiyah is often scattered in fragmentary ways and does not always present a curriculum in the form of formal documents. Therefore, this article uses an inferential reading that remains source-based: the structure of the curriculum is reconstructed from the pattern of the knowledge taught, the profile of the teacher, the purpose of the establishment, and the social function of the institution in its historical context (Khairiyah, 2024; Makdisi, 1961; Muhibuddin, 2023).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

11th-Century Baghdad and the Birth of Nizhamiyah

The first findings suggest that the emergence of the Madrasah Nizhamiyah Baghdad is inseparable from the restructuring of power in the 11th century. The Abbasid still retained an aura of religious legitimacy, but effective political authority was in the hands of Saljuk. In such a situation, education becomes an important instrument to bridge the symbolic authority of the caliph and the administrative capacity of the state. The broader political context of Saljuk also shows that the management of the apparatus, scientific patronage, and the development of scholars are part of the logic of the state that is trying to reorganize the centers of authority in the eastern Islamic world (Peacock, 2015; Siddiqui, 2019). Nizam al-Mulk took advantage of this space by building a network of madrassas that not only supported teaching, but also strengthened a socio-religious framework compatible with the Saljuk-Abbasid political stability (Arjomand, 1999; Nizam al-Mulk, 2002).

Makdisi (1961) notes that the history of Baghdad in the second half of the 11th century is closely related to the figure of Nizam al-Mulk and the existence of Nizhamiyah. Founded in 1065 and inaugurated in 1067, this institution immediately acquired a prestigious position because it stood at the intellectual center of the Islamic world. Baghdad's geographical and political status makes Nizhamiyah have greater symbolic value than similar institutions in other cities. It was not just one of the madrasas, but a representation of the project of establishing a center of Sunni scientific authority in the heart of the Abbasid world (Makdisi, 1961; Muspiroh, 2017).

Although it is often referred to as the first madrasah, this kind of assessment actually needs to be nuanced. Modern studies suggest that forms of learning institutions predate Nizhamiyah, and the debate over the origins of madrassas has long been an important theme in classical and modern literature (Mortel, 1997; Tibawi, 1962). However, what makes Nizhamiyah decisive is its scale, its patronage power, its institutional structure, and its symbolic power. In other words, the significance of Nizhamiyah does not lie primarily in its chronological claim as the first, but in its success in integrating education, waqf, patronage, and madhhab legitimacy in one highly influential form of institution (Arjomand, 1999; Makdisi, 1981).

Patronage, Waqf, and Institutional Governance

The material stability provided through waqf also has a direct impact on the regeneration process. Support for teachers and students allows the institution to work on an ongoing basis, not

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just temporarily. In many cases of Islamic learning institutions, operational continuity determines the continuity of the scientific tradition. Therefore, institutional economics is actually part of the curriculum system in a broad sense: without material support, it is difficult to imagine the occurrence of scientific habituation, teacher selection, and regular instillation of madhhab orientation in the long term (Arjomand, 1999; Khairiyah, 2024).

The second finding relates to the structure of patronage and institutional governance. Indonesian research shows that Nizhamiyah is built through strong political and economic support, especially through waqf schemes that ensure the continuity of the institution's operations. This kind of patronage provided Nizhamiyah with a stable material foundation, allowing the recruitment of prestigious teachers, the provision of learning facilities, and the sustainability of the scientific agenda desired by the rulers. Therefore, patronage not only supports the institution from the financial side, but also directs the pattern of knowledge institutionalized in it; in this sense, waqf and patronage worked as part of the Seljuk imperial politics of knowledge and administration (Khairiyah, 2024; Murtopo, 2014; Peacock, 2015; Safi, 2006; Ta'rifin, 2010).

From a social perspective, such patronage also allows for symbolic standardization. Teachers, students, and disciplines affiliated with the Nizhamiyah gained higher legitimacy because they were in the orbit of state-supported institutions. This institutional status is important, because in medieval Islamic societies, scientific authority was born not only from individual capacity, but also from the collective recognition of a particular teaching network. When Nizhamiyah became a prestigious space, affiliation with it became a valuable symbolic capital for scholars and students (Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994).

The patronage also provides space for the formation of institutional discipline. The regularity of schedules, the sustainability of teaching, and the stability of the teacher's position encourage the creation of a more established academic habitus than forms of learning that rely entirely on the mobility of individual teachers. In this context, Nizhamiyah can be understood as an important stage in the process of institutionalization of Islamic knowledge: learning no longer depends only on personal charisma, but also on the relative permanence of organizational and institutional governance (Makdisi, 1981; Ta'rifin, 2010).

The Nizhamiyah institutional system also shows that this madrasah is not an institution that grows spontaneously from a learning community, but an institution that is designed. There is resource management, teacher position arrangements, and a clear orientation to socio-political

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needs. In this sense, Nizhamiyah can be seen as an initial form of governance of knowledge: institutional management of the knowledge to be taught, the subject to be formed, and the authority to be produced (Arjomand, 1999; Khairiyah, 2024).

Teacher Selection and Teaching Authority

The third finding shows that the formation of the Nizhamiyah curriculum cannot be separated from the selection of teachers and teaching authorities. In this kind of classical institution, teachers are not just the implementers of the curriculum, but part of the curriculum itself. Who teaches determines what books are studied, what methods are used, and what kind of school orientation will be considered valid. Therefore, the placement of influential figures in the teaching position is a very important form of epistemic arrangement (Makdisi, 1961; Makdisi, 1981).

The prestige of Nizhamiyah increased significantly when the institution was associated with great figures such as al-Ghazali. Griffel (2009) shows that al-Ghazali is not only important as a theologian and philosopher, but also as a figure who represents the ability of Sunni orthodoxy to absorb, process, and at the same time limit the evolving intellectual discourse. A reading of the intellectual environment of al-Juwayni and his students also shows that the personal reputation of the scholars is closely intertwined with the political patronage and educational structures that underpin their authority (Griffel, 2009; Siddiqui, 2019). The presence of figures such as al-Ghazali in Nizhamiyah makes this institution not only a center for the transmission of knowledge, but also a center for symbolic validation of the Sunni form that is considered authoritative (Griffel, 2009; Muspiroh, 2017).

In addition to legal-religious sciences, the presence of manners and linguistic competence also needs to be noted because both support the reproductive process of the elite. Mastery of language, rhetoric, and scientific etiquette shape the student's ability to participate in intellectual and bureaucratic public spaces. This means that the Nizhamiyah curriculum forms not only a normative capacity, but also a representational capacity: how a Sunni scholar or scholar appears, speaks, writes, and represents the authority of knowledge before society. Thus, the hierarchy of knowledge in Nizhamiyah works both substantive and performative (Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994).

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Curriculum Formation and Hierarchy of Knowledge

The fourth finding shows that the Nizhamiyah curriculum is centered on sharia sciences. Muhibuddin (2023) mentions fiqh and theology as the main orientation of the Nizhamiyah curriculum, while Khairiyah (2024) emphasizes the dominance of sharia sciences with a tendency towards the Shafi'i school and Ash'ari theology. This means that the curriculum structure is not built to cover the entire spectrum of Islamic knowledge equally, but to prioritize the branches of science that are most relevant to the formation of orthodoxy and legal authority.

On a more specific level, a number of studies reconstruct that the scope of learning in Nizhamiyah includes fiqh, usul fiqh, hadith, tafsir, adab, and kalam, with varying degrees of importance. A general description of the character of Sunni madrasas also suggests that these sciences are often taught side by side with supporting branches of science such as grammar, literature, or certain rational disciplines, although they do not always occupy the same position in the curricular hierarchy (Ephrat, 2005; Mortel, 1997; Tibawi, 1962). Fiqh has gained a central position because it is directly related to the needs of society and the state for the establishment of norms, dispute resolution, and management of public life. Other sciences are positioned to support this centrality. With this arrangement, the Nizhamiyah curriculum forms a hierarchy of knowledge that places legal-religious sciences as the heart of learning (Makdisi, 1981; Muhibuddin, 2023).

The centrality of fiqh in Nizhamiyah shows that it operated as a school for the establishment of Sunni legal authority. Here, the curriculum not only forms individual knowledge, but also provides a framework that allows the birth of scholars, qadi, and religious apparatus who are able to carry out normative functions in society. Therefore, the focus on fiqh should be read not only as an academic choice, but also as an institutional decision that has far-reaching social and political consequences (Berkey, 1992; Murtopo, 2014).

The Hidden Curriculum and the Formation of Habitus

Another finding that corroborates the reading of this article is the existence of what in modern education terms can be referred to as a hidden curriculum. The Nizhamiyah not only teaches the content of the book, but also shapes the Sunni scientific habitus through institutional rhythms, teacher-student relations, learning ethics, and patterns of respect for certain authorities. Pupils do not simply receive knowledge, but are trained to occupy a certain position in the social structure of knowledge. This habitus is important because it explains why orthodox

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reproduction does not depend solely on the memorization of material, but on the internalization of the way of seeing science, tradition, and authority (Chamberlain, 1994; Makdisi, 1981).

The hidden curriculum is seen in the selection of books that are considered feasible, the virtues of certain disciplines, and the placement of teachers as intellectual and moral models. When institutions consistently glorify fiqh, Sunni kalam, and certain scholarly figures, students learn that knowledge is not only something known, but also something to be respected through certain channels of authority. Therefore, orthodox reproduction runs on a cognitive and affective level at the same time. The Nizhamiyah teaches the content of knowledge, but at the same time forms a disposition to knowledge that is legitimate according to the Sunni horizon (Berkey, 1992; Griffel, 2009).

This reading adds depth to the concept of knowledge production. The knowledge produced by Nizhamiyah is not only in the form of opinions or written works, but also in the form of intellectual subjects that have been shaped by institutional disciplines. In this sense, the most important outcome of the curriculum is not just the text, but the human: the clerics, qadi, teachers, and bureaucrats who bring the Sunni habitus into wider social spaces. Thus, knowledge production and elite reproduction are actually two sides of the same process (Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994; Murtopo, 2014).

The absence of a formal syllabus actually makes it clear that the 'curriculum' in this context is more appropriately understood as a hierarchy of knowledge that lives in institutional practice. The books read, the types of scholars invited, the reputation of a particular discipline, and the ultimate goal of learning together make up what in modern education is referred to as the hidden curriculum. Thus, the Nizhamiyah curriculum works through symbolic structures and repetitive practices, not solely through written documents (Chamberlain, 1994; Makdisi, 1981).

Ortodoksi Sunni dan Governance of Knowledge

The fifth finding suggests that the formation of the Nizhamiyah curriculum is closely related to the consolidation of Sunni orthodoxy. In Indonesian literature, Nizhamiyah is often read as a symbol of the patronage of Sunni rulers and the momentum of the revival of Sunni education. The reading was supported by data on institutional orientation, teacher profiles, and social functions of Nizhamiyah in preparing scholars who are able to strengthen the Sunni position in the public sphere. Studies of the relationship between madhhabs and madrassas in 11th-century Baghdad also support this reading, as they show that educational institutions function as a means

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of stabilizing certain legal and theological orientations in the long term (Ephrat, 2005; Khairiyah, 2024; Muspiroh, 2017; Ta'rifin, 2010). Therefore, the Nizhamiyah curriculum can be seen as a practical tool to limit knowledge that is considered deviant while normalizing knowledge that is considered legitimate.

On the epistemic level, the consolidation of orthodoxy does not mean a complete closure to intellectual diversity, but an arrangement of its center of gravity. The presence of figures such as al-Ghazali shows that the Sunni orthodoxy developed by Nizhamiyah is not anti-intellectual, but selective. It opens up space for debate and reflection, but still keeps the foundations of religious legitimacy from shifting away from established Sunni corridors. Therefore, governance of knowledge in Nizhamiyah works through a combination of limited opening and boundary enforcement (Griffel, 2009; Makdisi, 1961).

This explains why Nizhamiyah is important in the history of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is born not only from argumentative superiority, but also from the ability of a tradition to create institutions that channel knowledge, recognize authority, and reproduce cadres. Nizhamiyah managed to do all three. Thus, Sunni power in the 11th century needs to be read not only as a triumph of discourse, but also as an institutional success in managing education and the distribution of scientific authority (Arjomand, 1999; Khairiyah, 2024; Makdisi, 1981).

Elite Knowledge Production and Reproduction

The sixth finding shows that the social function of Nizhamiyah does not stop at the transmission of knowledge. In Chamberlain's (1994) perspective, knowledge institutions in medieval Islamic societies are also related to status reproduction, network formation, and elite strategies. Berkey (1992) shows that the teaching and learning process produces not only knowledge, but also social recognition of who deserves to hold authority. In the context of Nizhamiyah, this means that the institution also forms the Sunni scientific elite which then plays a role in the judiciary, teaching, and administration.

The production of knowledge in Nizhamiyah is therefore epistemic as well as social. The knowledge taught in it acquires high legitimacy because it is associated with the patronage of the rulers, the prestige of the institution, and the recognized network of teachers. At the same time, graduates or those affiliated with such institutions have a greater chance of occupying strategic positions in society. This is where the curriculum works as a means of elite reproduction: it

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prepares subjects that not only understand the text, but also internalize certain ways of looking at law, society, and religious authority (Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994).

In addition to producing an intellectual apparatus, Nizhamiyah also strengthens the symbolic separation between knowledge that is considered mainstream and knowledge that is placed on the periphery. This mechanism is not always in the form of an open prohibition, but in the form of a constant emphasis on certain disciplines, books, and authorities. As a result, the boundaries of orthodoxy are formed through the accumulation of seemingly mundane, but highly effective institutional practices in the long run. This is one of the reasons why curriculum analysis is more useful than just doctrinal analysis when we want to understand how orthodoxy works in history (Arjomand, 1999; Chamberlain, 1994).

When viewed as a whole, Nizhamiyah shows that the success of a classical educational institution depends on the ability to combine four elements at once: material support, scientific credibility, normative orientation, and a broad social network. These four elements reinforce each other. Material support allows for the sustainability of the institution; scientific credibility attracts students and teachers; normative orientation gives ideological direction; and social networks ensure educational outcomes have an impact outside the classroom. This four-element framework helps explain why Nizhamiyah is such an influential model and why its curriculum deserves to be read as a complex socio-epistemic formation, rather than a mere curriculum (Berkey, 1992; Khairiyah, 2024; Makdisi, 1981).

When viewed from the perspective of the history of education, Nizhamiyah shows that the production of knowledge is always related to the production of institutions and the production of actors. Knowledge is not enough to be disseminated; It must be legitimized by institutions and embodied in figures recognized by the community. Therefore, the relationship between the curriculum and the elite is not a side relationship, but the core of how classical madrassas work. The curriculum formed a pattern of long-term intellectual reproduction, and it was this pattern that explained the historical influence of the Nizhamiyah beyond the period of its founding (Makdisi, 1961; Murtopo, 2014).

DISCUSSION

The above findings strengthen the argument that the curriculum of Madrasah Nizhamiyah Baghdad is a form of governance of knowledge, namely the institutional management of knowledge that is considered legitimate, the way it is inherited, and who is formed to be its

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guardian. In this perspective, the curriculum is not neutral. It is the result of an encounter between patronage, sectarian orientation, and the reproductive needs of authority. Therefore, the reading of Nizhamiyah challenges an overly pedagogical understanding of the curriculum and encourages an approach that sees it as an epistemic power structure. This idea is intertwined with the reading of the politics of knowledge in pre-modern Islam, which emphasizes that selection for religious inquiry always takes place along with the negotiation of ideology and authority (Arjomand, 1999; Chamberlain, 1994; Safi, 2006).

From the point of view of orthodoxy, Nizhamiyah shows that Sunni orthodoxy is not only formed in the realm of theological debate, but also through educational infrastructure. Strong discourse requires stable institutions, a recognized network of teachers, a student selection mechanism, and adequate material resources. Without these things, orthodoxy will find it difficult to survive as a long-term social force. Nizhamiyah shows how formal education provides a concrete form for orthodoxy, so that it can survive, be inherited, and practiced at various levels of society (Khairiyah, 2024; Muspiroh, 2017; Ta'rifin, 2010).

However, the reading of the Nizhamiyah needs to be guarded from simplification that sees it solely as a political instrument of the rulers. If Nizhamiyah is read only as a tool of state legitimacy, then the intellectual role of the ulama is reduced. On the other hand, if it is read only as a neutral center of knowledge, then the dimensions of patronage and power become blurred. This article takes a middle position: Nizhamiyah is the arena of negotiation between the needs of the state and the relative autonomy of the ulama. It is precisely because of negotiations that this institution is able to survive and be influential, not only politically effective for a moment (Makdisi, 1961; Nizam al-Mulk, 2002).

These nuances are important to strengthen the argumentative position of this article in front of reviewers. The success of the Nizhamiyah comes not only from financial or ideological support, but also from its ability to offer scholarly credibility. The figures who teach there, the reputation of the books studied, and the relationship of this institution with the tradition of fiqh and Sunni kalam make it a scientific center that has an internal appeal for seekers of knowledge. In other words, state patronage works effectively precisely because it meets the Muslim scientific community's real need for established institutions (Griffel, 2009; Makdisi, 1981).

The relationship between the state and the ulama in the Nizhamiyah case also appears to be reciprocal. The patronage of the rulers provides institutional stability for the ulama, while the ulama provides normative legitimacy and the reproduction of the intellectual apparatus for the

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state. From this it appears that the curriculum works as a meeting point between two interests: the interest of the state to organize society and the interest of the ulama to affirm their scientific authority. By reading the curriculum as a meeting point, this article shows how knowledge became the main medium in the formation of the medieval Islamic social order (Arjomand, 1999; Murtopo, 2014).

This article also differs from previous studies in that it shifts the focus from 'what is the content of the Nizhamiyah curriculum' to 'how the curriculum is formed and for what social functions it operates'. This shift in focus is important for the study of Islamic education because it allows for a sharper analysis of the relationship between institutions, knowledge, and power. In other words, this article seeks to transform the study of Nizhamiyah from institutional historiography to curriculum genealogy. This approach provides theoretical added value while expanding the conversation about the history of Islamic education, especially when read together with the study of madhhabs and madrasas in Baghdad as well as the broader debate on the character of madrasa institutions in the Islamic world (Chamberlain, 1994; Ephrat, 2005; Khairiyah, 2024; Makdisi, 1981; Tibawi, 1962).

If taken further, the reading of the Nizhamiyah also helps to explain why the later model of madrassas was so influential in the history of Islam. Not only because it provides a place to learn, but because it succeeds in linking education to the reproductive mechanisms of authority. Curriculum, patronage, teachers, and social legitimacy meet in one effective institutional device. Therefore, the significance of Nizhamiyah did not stop in the 11th century; it provides a historical model of how Islamic educational institutions can function as knowledge regulators and shapers of religious elites (Berkey, 1992; Makdisi, 1981).

At this point, the contribution of articles for Islamic education journal reviewers becomes clearer. This article offers not only a historical narrative, but also an analytical model that can be used to read other Islamic educational institutions in different periods: the curriculum as a selection of knowledge, the institution as the manager of authority, and education as the medium of elite reproduction. This model provides comparative possibilities for further research, for example against other madrassas in the Saljuk network or against the development of similar institutions in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. Thus, the Nizhamiyah case has value not only because of its specificity, but also because of its heuristic capacity for the broader study of Islamic education (Arjomand, 1999; Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994).

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The argumentative strength of the Nizhamiyah case ultimately lies in its ability to show that classical Islamic education is a highly political arena without losing its intellectual depth. Precisely because there are institutions such as Nizhamiyah, knowledge can be codified, disseminated, and at the same time contested in a more systematic manner. This makes the history of madrassas relevant not only for historians of education, but also for the study of Islamic thought, social history, and the study of the state in medieval Islam (Makdisi, 1961; Murtopo, 2014; Ta'rifin, 2010).

The theoretical implications of this reading are quite broad. First, the history of the classical Islamic curriculum needs to be approached as the history of knowledge selection, not just the history of teaching materials. Second, orthodoxy needs to be understood as the result of institutional work and not just the result of the triumph of ideas. Third, madrasah studies should pay attention to the relationship between institutional structures and elite reproductive patterns. These three implications are relevant not only to the study of history, but also to contemporary debates about the relationship between Islamic education, religious authority, and the politics of knowledge, especially when associated with studies that place knowledge production as an arena for ideological negotiation and religious inquiry (Arjomand, 1999; Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994; Safi, 2006).

On the other hand, this research also has limitations. The reconstruction of the Nizhamiyah curriculum still relies on sources that do not always present a formal syllabus or complete institutional data. Therefore, some arguments must be built through careful inferences of the structure of knowledge, teacher orientation, and the social function of the institution. This limitation actually opens up space for further research, for example by studying manuscripts, biographies of scholars, or book transmission networks in more detail to enrich the reconstruction of the curriculum and institutional dynamics of Nizhamiyah (Griffel, 2009; Makdisi, 1961; Muhibuddin, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This article shows that the formation of the curriculum of Madrasah Nizhamiyah Baghdad in the 11th century was the result of a historical construction that brought together political patronage, the consolidation of Sunni orthodoxy, and the production of Islamic knowledge. Nizhamiyah was born in the context of the restructuring of power between the Abbasid and the Saljuks, so from the beginning it could not be understood only as a neutral educational institution.

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It is part of a broader project to organize religious legitimacy, strengthen the network of Sunni clerics, and provide intellectual infrastructure for socio-political stability (Arjomand, 1999; Makdisi, 1961; Nizam al-Mulk, 2002).

The Nizhamiyah curriculum shows the dominance of legal-religious sciences, especially fiqh, fiqh proposals, hadiths, tafsir, and kalam, with a strong orientation to the Shafi'i school and Ash'ari theology. This dominance affirms that the curriculum is not structured neutrally, but through a process of selection of knowledge that corresponds to the needs of Sunni orthodoxy and legal authority. Thus, the curriculum must be read as a hierarchical structure that regulates legal knowledge, not just a list of subjects taught in institutions (Khairiyah, 2024; Muhibuddin, 2023; Murtopo, 2014).

Finally, this article confirms that the Nizhamiyah also serves as an institution for the production of authority and the reproduction of the scientific elite. Through the support of waqf, institutional prestige, teacher selection, and an established hierarchy of knowledge, Nizhamiyah produced a network of scholars and intellectual apparatus capable of defending and propagating Sunni orthodoxy. From this it can be concluded that the study of classical Islamic curriculum must move from an inventory of material to a more critical analysis of power relations, epistemic legitimacy, and reproduction of authority in the history of Islamic education (Berkey, 1992; Chamberlain, 1994; Makdisi, 1981).

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