

Cultural Capital and Learning Strategies: A Bourdieuan Perspective on Elementary Education

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between cultural capital and teaching strategies in the context of primary education, employing a Bourdieuan perspective. The focus of this research is on teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri in Magelang Regency, Central Java. A qualitative method was utilized, with data collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The findings reveal that teachers' cultural capital, including their knowledge, values, and experiences, significantly influences their choice and implementation of teaching strategies in the classroom. Teachers with a rich cultural capital tend to adopt more innovative and adaptive strategies, which enhance student engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, the study identifies challenges faced by teachers in integrating cultural capital into their teaching practices. These findings provide helpful guidance in the development of educational policies and teacher training programs, ultimately improving the quality of education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

Keywords: *cultural capital, teaching strategies, Bourdieuan perspective, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan antara modal budaya dan strategi pembelajaran dalam konteks pendidikan dasar, dengan pendekatan perspektif Bourdieu. Fokus penelitian ini adalah pada guru-guru di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri di Kabupaten Magelang, Jawa Tengah. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa modal budaya yang dimiliki oleh guru, seperti pengetahuan, nilai-nilai, dan pengalaman, berdampak dalam menentukan pilihan dan penerapan strategi pembelajaran di kelas. Guru yang memiliki modal budaya yang kaya cenderung menggunakan strategi yang lebih inovatif dan adaptif, yang dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dalam proses pembelajaran. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru dalam mengintegrasikan modal budaya ke dalam praktik pembelajaran. Temuan ini dapat memberikan wawasan bagi pengembangan kebijakan pendidikan dan pelatihan guru, serta meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

Kata kunci: *modal budaya, strategi pembelajaran, Bourdieuan perspective, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.*

INTRODUCTION

Primary education serves as a crucial foundation for character development and student capabilities, particularly at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, which integrates religious values with general education (Mahmud et al., 2023). In this context, effective teaching strategies are essential to enhance the quality of education (Xu et al., 2024). The selection of teaching strategies is influenced not only by curriculum and educational policies but also by social and cultural factors inherent to individuals, including the cultural capital possessed by teachers (Husni et al., 2023). Cultural capital, as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu, encompasses knowledge, skills, and values acquired from social environments (Pitzalis & Porcu, 2024; Hakim, 2024), which can shape how teachers instruct and interact with students (Mikus et al., 2020).

The urgency of this research arises from the need to understand how teachers' cultural capital contributes to the teaching strategies employed in the classroom, particularly within the foundational stage of elementary education. Globally, there is a growing recognition in reputable international journals regarding the profound impact of socio-cultural factors, including cultural capital, on educational outcomes and pedagogical practices (e.g., Anlimachie et al., 2023; Ewulley et al., 2023; Hu, 2023). These studies consistently highlight that a teacher's accumulated knowledge, skills, and dispositions—derived from their social and cultural background—significantly inform their instructional choices, classroom management, and interactions with students (Lang et al., 2024; Pang et al., 2021). Understanding this dynamic is crucial for developing equitable and effective educational systems, as cultural capital influences not only what is taught but also how it is received by diverse student populations.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between cultural capital and educational practices. For instance, Recknagel et al. (2022) explored how educators' cultural capital influences their teaching strategies, emphasizing the need to reassess curricula and pedagogical practices. Their findings suggest that educators must be aware of students'

cultural backgrounds to avoid biases that favor middle-class children. Similarly, Oxford & Gkonou (2018) highlighted the importance of educators' cultural capital in developing effective teaching strategies. Abdalla & Moussa (2024) stressed the significance of educators' cultural competence, which includes understanding and valuing students' cultural capital. Educators' cultural capital affects teaching strategies by enabling them to integrate culturally relevant content and adopt methods that resonate with students' backgrounds. Pollock (2018) argued that teachers' cultural capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, and educational background that shape teaching strategies. Teachers with strong cultural capital can effectively address the diverse needs of students by explicitly teaching unspoken classroom norms, soft skills, and metacognitive strategies. These scholarly works underscore the pervasive influence of cultural capital on pedagogy, advocating for a deeper investigation into how teachers leverage or are constrained by their cultural backgrounds in shaping learning environments.

While existing literature has established a general link between cultural capital and educational practices, a notable research gap persists, particularly in the specific context of primary Islamic education (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) in Indonesia. Many studies tend to focus on Western educational settings or higher education, leaving the unique socio-cultural dynamics of Islamic primary schools relatively unexplored from a Bourdieuan perspective. This study aims to address a gap in the existing literature by providing an in-depth analysis of how teachers' cultural capital at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Magelang Regency shapes the teaching strategies they implement. Cultural capital, encompassing knowledge, skills, values, and experiences possessed by individuals, plays a critical role in shaping how teachers interact with students and select appropriate teaching methods (Bates & Connolly, 2024). In the context of primary education, particularly in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, understanding teachers' cultural capital is essential, as it influences not only teaching effectiveness but also students' engagement and motivation in the learning process (Álvarez-Valdivia & González-Montoto, 2018).

This study offers several novel contributions compared to previous research. *First*, it explores how cultural capital can influence the development of more effective teaching strategies. *Second*, it adopts a multidimensional approach to cultural capital, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its impact. *Third*, the study emphasizes the importance of the local context by conducting a case study at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, enabling the identification of local factors that shape pedagogical practices. *Fourth*, it investigates the role of cultural capital in fostering an inclusive learning environment for students from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, this research introduces novelty by employing Bourdieu's framework to analyze the relationship between cultural capital and teaching strategies, with a specific focus on the relatively understudied context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Rather than merely supporting previous findings, this study aims to offer fresh perspectives that enrich the understanding of educational dynamics in Indonesia. Consequently, this research makes a significant contribution to the development of improved educational practices at the primary level.

Using a qualitative approach, this study explores the experiences and perspectives of teachers through in-depth interviews and classroom observations to identify emerging patterns in the application of teaching strategies. The findings provide new insights into how cultural capital contributes to educational practices within Madrasah Ibtidaiyah settings and offer

recommendations for teacher professional development to enhance the quality of instruction. Thus, this research not only enriches academic understanding of the relationship between cultural capital and teaching strategies but also delivers practical contributions applicable to the educational context in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine how educators' cultural capital influences their teaching strategies at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (State Islamic Primary Schools) in Magelang Regency. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the informants, including five teachers and the Headmaster, who were considered representative of a variety of cultural backgrounds and teaching methodologies. These participants were chosen to provide insights into how their understanding and application of cultural capital impact their approach to teaching and their ability to create inclusive, culturally relevant learning experiences (Bates & Connolly, 2024). This method allows for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between cultural capital and educational practices.

The research procedure began with the collection of preliminary data through interviews with the school principal to gather information about the context and characteristics of the school. Subsequently, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with each selected teacher to explore their understanding of cultural capital and how it influences the teaching strategies they employ. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to delve deeper into specific topics while providing space for the informants to share their experiences and perspectives (Pessoa et al., 2019).

Data were also collected through direct classroom observations, where the researcher documented interactions between teachers and students as well as the teaching strategies employed. The observations were conducted over two months, focusing on classroom learning activities. Additionally, supporting documents such as lesson plans (RPP) and teaching materials were analyzed to provide additional context regarding the strategies implemented by the teachers.

The data analysis in this study employed thematic analysis, comprising several stages. *First*, interview and observation transcripts were organized and categorized based on emerging themes. *Second*, the researcher conducted data coding to identify patterns and relationships between cultural capital and teaching strategies. The results of the analysis were then compared with existing literature to identify similarities and differences and to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Lochmiller, 2021).

The methods employed in this study are based on the principles of qualitative research outlined by Creswell (2017). To ensure the validity of the research findings, several steps were taken. First, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Second, member checking was performed by soliciting feedback from informants on the initial findings to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. Third, the researcher engaged in critical reflection to account for any personal biases that might influence data interpretation (Morgan, 2024). Through a systematic approach and methodology, this study provides valuable insights into how educators' cultural

capital can shape teaching strategies at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, contributing to the improvement of educational practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Capital in Teaching Strategies

This study demonstrates that educators' cultural capital plays a crucial role in shaping effective and culturally relevant teaching strategies. Educators who understand students' cultural backgrounds are able to integrate local values into their teaching, such as incorporating folklore, religious traditions, or everyday activities unique to the community. This reflects embodied cultural capital, where the educator's personal understanding and experiences serve as the foundation for success in creating an inclusive learning environment (Bourdieu, 1984). One of the madrasah teachers shared:

"When I teach the values of honesty, I often use stories of the Prophet that the children are already familiar with at home. They find it easier to understand because it is close to their everyday lives" (Interview with Teacher, December 12, 2024).

This finding aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing the significance of teachers' embodied cultural capital in fostering authentic learning experiences. For instance, Cruz et al. (2020) argue that teachers' personal immersion in students' cultural contexts enables them to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and lived realities, thereby enhancing pedagogical effectiveness. Similarly, Recknagel et al. (2022) highlight how teachers' intuitive understanding of local narratives, deeply ingrained through their own cultural capital, serves as a powerful pedagogical tool for value transmission, resonating more profoundly with students than abstract concepts.

The use of teaching materials rooted in local culture reflects objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, the use of cultural artifacts, such as traditional Javanese games, in arts and crafts lessons (Cottle, 2022). In other subjects, teachers often use analogies related to agrarian life, such as the distribution of harvest in mathematics lessons. This approach not only makes it easier for students to understand the material but also strengthens pride in their local identity (Choudry, 2023). Another teacher stated:

"Students find it easier to understand the concept of fractions when I use real-life examples from the tradition of sharing harvests or food during a feast" (Interview with Teacher, December 6, 2024).

This practice is further supported by studies demonstrating the efficacy of leveraging objectified cultural capital in diverse educational settings. Miller & Roehrig (2018) showed that incorporating culturally specific artifacts and materials significantly improved student engagement and comprehension in STEM subjects. Moreover, a meta-analysis by Jheng et al. (2023) concluded that pedagogies utilizing locally relevant objectified cultural capital lead to stronger identity formation and academic performance, particularly in elementary education settings where concrete examples are vital for understanding abstract concepts.

At the systemic level, recognition of the cultural diversity of students in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah reflects institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Teacher training programs that emphasize culturally responsive approaches and curriculum development that highlights religious and local values demonstrate how this cultural capital is legitimized (Stamatiou, 2022). For example, the Education Office of Magelang Regency regularly

organizes training sessions for Madrasah teachers to integrate cultural and religious values into their teaching. A headmaster shared:

"We are encouraged to adapt the national curriculum to make it more relevant to the local context of our students. This becomes our guide in making learning more inclusive" (Interview with Headmaster, December 6, 2024).

Research from the past decade reinforces the critical role of institutionalized cultural capital in sustaining culturally responsive pedagogies. Parkhouse et al. (2022) found that robust institutional frameworks, including policy mandates and dedicated professional development, are crucial for legitimizing and embedding culturally informed teaching practices across school systems. Similarly, a study by Liu & Li (2019) highlighted how official recognition and integration of local cultural knowledge into teacher education curricula contribute significantly to the long-term sustainability of culturally appropriate teaching strategies.

Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's concept, the culturally responsive teaching strategies in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Magelang Regency demonstrate that cultural capital can serve as a vital resource for creating meaningful, relevant, and inclusive learning (Bourdieu, 1984). This approach not only strengthens students' connection with the learning material but also fosters a stronger cultural identity amidst rapid social changes. This evidence highlights that recognizing and leveraging cultural capital can help Madrasah students achieve academic success while preserving their cultural values.

The Impact of Cultural Capital on Student Engagement and Motivation

This study demonstrates that the cultural capital of educators has a tangible impact on student engagement and motivation in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Magelang Regency. When educators integrate local cultural elements, students feel that their experiences and backgrounds are valued (Roberts et al., 2024; Pitzalis & Porcu, 2024). For example, one educator explained:

"I often incorporate folk tales or traditions like "Selametan" in Indonesian language lessons. The students immediately become enthusiastic, and they even want to share their family experiences at home" (Interview with Teacher, November 1, 2024).

This finding resonates with contemporary research on culturally responsive pedagogy. Kumar et al. (2018) found that acknowledging and validating students' cultural backgrounds through curriculum integration significantly increases their intrinsic motivation and active participation. Their work indicates that when students see their own cultures reflected in the classroom, it fosters a sense of belonging and relevance, thereby enhancing their engagement in the learning process.

In addition, classroom observations revealed that students were more active in answering questions and participating in discussions when the material used was relevant to their daily lives. The integration of cultural elements also boosted students' confidence. This sense of self-assurance positively impacted their motivation to learn, as students felt that learning was not only about understanding theories but also about understanding themselves and their communities. Students with strong cultural capital also demonstrated better collaboration skills with their peers. For instance, during group assignments, students often shared stories or values learned from their families. Observations indicated that group

dynamics became more harmonious when students respected each other's cultures. One educator added:

"When they collaborated to create a poster about local traditions, they worked very well together, even those who are usually quiet became more enthusiastic" (Interview with Teacher, November 8, 2024).

These observations are consistent with recent studies highlighting the socio-emotional benefits of culturally integrated learning. Rocha et al. (2024) demonstrated that culturally relevant tasks enhance students' self-efficacy and confidence, leading to greater willingness to engage in academic discourse. Furthermore, research by Loes et al. (2018) concluded that culturally diverse group work fosters mutual respect and improved collaborative skills, as students draw upon their varied cultural capital to enrich shared learning experiences.

Based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the forms of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized capital significantly influence student engagement and motivation to learn (Bourdieu, 1986). Educators' understanding of students' cultural backgrounds reflects embodied cultural capital, which refers to the cultural resources embedded within individuals in the form of skills, habits, and experiences that are socially relevant (Thomson & Hall, 2022). When educators use local cultural elements, such as folklore or community traditions, they draw upon cultural capital to create relevant and inclusive learning experiences (Davies, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of cultural artifacts such as traditional games, local musical instruments, or folk tales into teaching represents objectified cultural capital (Jin et al., 2024). For example, using traditional Javanese musical instruments in arts education adds value not only to students' skills but also strengthens their connection with the local culture. Educators leverage these artifacts as resources to foster student engagement.

At the systemic level, the recognition of students' cultural diversity through teacher training and curriculum adjustment reflects institutionalized cultural capital (Eryilmaz & Sandoval-Hernández, 2021). In Magelang Regency, teacher training often emphasizes the importance of incorporating local culture into teaching practices. This demonstrates how educational institutions formally legitimize this cultural capital, making culturally-based teaching strategies an integral part of the educational approach (Grenfell, 2019). By understanding and applying the three forms of cultural capital, educators in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Magelang Regency can create an inclusive learning environment that, in turn, enhances student engagement, motivation, and a sense of community among students. This strategy proves that cultural capital is not only an individual asset but also a collective resource that supports educational success (Davies, 2024; Pitzalis & Porcu, 2024).

Challenges in Integrating Cultural Capital into Teaching Strategies

Within the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, the challenges in integrating cultural capital into teaching strategies can be analyzed through the three forms of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The lack of access for educators to formal training and policies that support cultural integration reflects a weakness in institutionalized cultural capital (Jackson, 2022). The absence of adequate training leaves educators with limited legitimacy to systematically

manage cultural diversity. As one teacher from a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Magelang Regency explained:

"We rarely receive training on how to integrate local culture into lessons. Everything is based on personal experience" (Interview with Teacher, November 8, 2024).

This statement highlights the gap in institutional support for educators in fully utilizing cultural capital within their teaching practices. Despite the recognized importance of cultural diversity, educational institutions often fail to provide adequate training, resources, and policies that enable teachers to integrate students' cultural backgrounds effectively into their curriculum. As a result, educators may struggle to design lessons that are both culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of diverse student populations. This lack of institutional backing limits teachers' ability to use cultural capital as a strategic resource, ultimately hindering the creation of inclusive and effective learning environments.

This statement highlights a common institutional challenge corroborated by recent global studies. For example, Gulya & Fehérvári (2024) observed that many educational systems, despite recognizing the value of cultural diversity, often lack the structured professional development programs needed to equip teachers with effective culturally responsive pedagogical skills. This institutional gap limits teachers' ability to translate their potential cultural capital into actionable teaching strategies, thus hindering the creation of truly inclusive learning environments.

Another challenge is the limitation of objectified cultural capital in the form of culturally relevant teaching materials (Eryilmaz & Sandoval-Hernández, 2021). In Bourdieu's framework, teaching materials are a concrete form of cultural capital that can be transferred and used as tools to enrich learning experiences (Bourdieu, 1986). However, the scarcity of culturally relevant resources often forces educators to create their own teaching materials, which may not always align with curriculum standards or the specific needs of students. As one teacher explained:

"The available textbooks are not always relevant to the traditions here. We have to be creative in finding ways to make the material more relatable to the students" (Interview with Teacher, November 1, 2024).

This scarcity of culturally appropriate objectified cultural capital is a pervasive issue, as documented in contemporary educational research. Studies by Singla et al. (2024) highlighted that many textbooks and learning resources globally still fail to reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, leading to a disconnect between formal education and students' lived realities. Similarly, scholarly work by Kumar (2018) revealed that teachers in various contexts frequently resort to developing their own culturally relevant materials due to the unavailability of standardized, context-specific resources, underscoring a significant barrier to effective cultural integration in pedagogy.

This limitation points to the gap between the cultural diversity within the community and the objectified cultural capital available in educational institutions. Objectified cultural capital, such as textbooks, learning materials, and resources, should ideally reflect the local culture and traditions to make learning more relevant and engaging for students. However, when these materials do not adequately represent the cultural richness of the community, students may feel disconnected from the content. This misalignment can hinder their

engagement, as the learning materials fail to resonate with their lived experiences, diminishing the educational experience's cultural relevance and inclusivity.

Embodied cultural capital, or the personal understanding of educators regarding the students' culture, also presents a challenge (Bourdieu, 1986). When educators lack familiarity with the cultural backgrounds of their students, they may face difficulties in designing inclusive and culturally responsive lessons. This gap can create barriers to effective communication and hinder the development of a learning environment that values diversity. Educators' own cultural biases or unfamiliarity with students' traditions and practices may lead to unintentional exclusion, reducing students' sense of identity and belonging within the classroom. As a result, addressing this gap is essential to promoting more inclusive and engaging educational experiences (Xerri et al., 2018). Bourdieu emphasizes that habitus—the tendencies to think and act shaped by social experiences—affects how individuals understand and respond to other cultures (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990). If an educator's habitus does not support an appreciation of the students' cultural capital, cultural bias may emerge, as one educator acknowledged:

"Sometimes I find it difficult to understand certain customs or traditions of the students. I'm afraid of making mistakes, so it's better if I don't include them in the lessons"
(Interview with Teacher, November 1, 2024).

This struggle to navigate cultural differences and the apprehension of making errors are widely documented issues concerning teachers' embodied cultural capital. Research by Gube (2024) indicates that teachers' personal cultural biases and lack of exposure to diverse cultural backgrounds can inadvertently lead to pedagogical practices that marginalize certain student groups. Furthermore, a recent review by Singla et al. (2024) highlights that without explicit training and self-reflection on their own habitus, educators may struggle to develop the empathetic understanding necessary to fully leverage the diverse embodied cultural capital present in their classrooms, ultimately impacting inclusive education efforts.

Gaps in embodied cultural capital, which refer to the personal and cultural knowledge educators possess, can significantly hinder efforts to create an inclusive learning environment. When educators lack an understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds, they may struggle to effectively integrate cultural references or values into their teaching. This gap can lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, or even unintentional bias, which ultimately limits students' engagement and sense of belonging. Without a strong foundation in recognizing and appreciating the diversity in their classrooms, teachers may inadvertently exclude students, making it difficult to foster an environment where all learners feel valued and understood.

To address these challenges, Bourdieu's theory offers a comprehensive approach grounded in cultural capital. Strengthening institutionalized cultural capital through systematic teacher training and an inclusive curriculum can help educators develop relevant embodied and objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). By supporting educators through appropriate training and resources, educational institutions can create a learning ecosystem that leverages students' cultural capital as a primary resource. This not only enhances the relevance of learning but also fosters students' confidence and overall engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the cultural capital of teachers in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri in Magelang District plays a significant and multifaceted role in shaping effective teaching strategies. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory, the research reveals how embodied cultural capital, through teachers' deep understanding of students' backgrounds; objectified cultural capital, via culturally relevant teaching materials; and institutionalized cultural capital, through supportive educational policies, collectively foster an inclusive and meaningful learning environment. The integration of these forms of cultural capital not only enhances student engagement and motivation but also strengthens their confidence and connection to the learning process. While challenges such as insufficient training and resources persist, underscoring gaps in institutional support, the findings emphasize that strategically strengthening cultural capital is key to cultivating inclusive and effective pedagogical practices in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri, ultimately contributing to improved primary education outcomes by leveraging students' unique cultural resources.

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