



Robert Stanton's Structuralist Analysis of Mustafa Mahmud's *Az-Za'īm*: Implications for Arabic Pedagogy and Character Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study investigates the intrinsic structural components of Mustafa Mahmud's drama *Az-Za'īm* and evaluates its pedagogical utility within the framework of Arabic language instruction. Utilizing Robert Stanton's structuralist theory, the research aims to examine how characters, plot, setting, theme, and moral values are integrated to construct a narrative focused on social justice and resistance against Ottoman hegemony.

Design/methods/approach – The study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method, utilizing content analysis to interpret primary textual data and secondary scholarly sources.

Findings – The findings reveal a sophisticated interplay between elements, where the linear-chronological plot and symbolic spatio-temporal settings elevate the protagonist into an emblem of dignity and resistance. The thematic core centers on the pursuit of socio-political equality, articulated through narrative dialogues that serve as a vehicle for ethical instruction. While limited by its singular focus on a specific work and framework, the study recommends future comparative research and empirical investigations into classroom implementation to quantify the impact of literary analysis on students' moral and linguistic development.

Research Implications – The analysis highlights significant implications for Arabic Applied Linguistics, suggesting that the text serves as an authentic resource for developing Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and communicative competence. By bridging the gap between linguistic proficiency and cultural literacy, the drama facilitates character education through the internalization of values such as loyalty and justice.

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Introduction

Literature is the art of language that embodies aesthetic values and reflects social, religious, and economic conditions of its time. Literature serves to entertain, educate, and convey criticism (Utami et al., 2024). Drama, as a literary form that constructs meaning principally through dialogical spoken language, presents plot and conflict via staged dialogue and thus allows audiences to apprehend social dynamics concretely (Dzul'iman & Hania, 2025). One Arab drama that exemplifies socio-political struggle is *Az-Za'īm* by Musthofa Mahmud, which dramatizes resistance against injustice and authoritarian power in North Africa following the collapse of the Mali Caliphate under the dominance of the Ottoman Empire. Given drama's dialogic mode and its pedagogical potential for language classrooms, a structuralist reading of *Az-Za'īm* is both timely and necessary to link textual form with instructional practice.

Recent structuralist applications across narrative genres have demonstrated the model's capacity to surface thematic clusters and aesthetic devices within texts. For example, analyses of traditional narratives have identified major themes—such as brotherhood, social feeling, conflict, justice-seeking, and repentance—that function as



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vehicles of communal wisdom (Amali, 2022). Comparative studies of audiovisual and filmic texts report that plot architecture and character disposition often reflect socio-economic positioning and thus reinforce narrative plausibility (Sari, 2024). Investigations into short fiction have likewise shown how integrated story facts (plot, character, setting) and literary means (point of view, style, symbol, irony) yield interpretive frames relevant to feminist and socio-cultural readings (Rizalman et al., 2024). Together, these works suggest that Stanton's categories can reliably expose the internal relations that produce meaning across diverse narrative forms.

Additional studies emphasize how structural organization contributes to emotional depth and moral messaging within narratives (Miftahul Khasanah & Rohanda, 2025). Research on children's animation demonstrates that simple but coherent plots and morally salient character arcs effectively communicate ethical lessons and support character education aims (Islami & Rohanda, 2025). Structural examinations of drama texts have documented the role of setting and character ensemble in shaping the work's didactic thrust while also revealing linguistic features particular to *fushā* registers (Maisaroh & Hidayah, 2019). Analyses of socially grounded dramas further show that linear plot development and everyday dialogue can enhance audience identification with marginalized communities and foreground themes of resistance (Nurhasanah et al., 2024). These findings collectively indicate that systematic attention to intrinsic elements can inform both literary interpretation and pedagogical selection of texts.

Comparative and cross-genre research adds nuance by demonstrating that cultural background and authorial context mediate choices in characterization, pacing, and setting (Syarifah et al., 2022). Studies of contemporary novels reveal that coherent structuring of story facts and literary devices contributes to a work's aesthetic unity and didactic potential (Muhammad & Mulyawati, 2023). Folklore studies show that local stylistic features—such as regional point of view and language style—shape thematic emphasis and the transmission of communal knowledge (Aduh & Masruddin, 2023). Investigations into modern narrative fiction further highlight the pedagogical affordances of texts that employ mixed temporal structures (flashbacks and forwards) to deepen character psychology (Hidayati, 2024). Altogether, these studies underscore the importance of contextualized structural analysis when selecting texts for language instruction and moral-literacy development.

Research into narrative technique and gendered readings demonstrates that complete systems of literary means—including title, point of view, tone, symbolism, and irony—shape readers' perception of social justice and gender relations (Mulawarman et al., 2021). Structuralist readings of canonical and religiously inflected novels further reveal how thematic and moral content are embedded within narrative architectures (Fathurohman et al., 2023). Studies of temporally complex novels confirm that plot mixing and omniscient narration can be leveraged to teach temporal cohesion and inferential reading strategies to learners (Adhiya & Rohanda, 2025). Close analyses of short story collections illustrate that clear narrative sequencing, simple language style, and explicit moral messaging facilitate classroom adaptation for developing interpretive competence (Aisah et al., 2024). These bodies of work thus provide methodological and pedagogical precedents for applying Stanton's framework to drama texts intended for instructional use.

Despite this productive scholarship, notable gaps persist that constrain the direct application of structuralist findings to Arabic-language pedagogy in Indonesia (Maisaroh & Hidayah, 2019). First, there is relatively little targeted analysis of scripted drama as a genre distinct from prose and film, and thus the dialogic mechanisms that

mediate moral meaning remain under-theorized. Second, although many studies catalog intrinsic elements descriptively, few operationalize those elements into concrete classroom tasks, syllabus materials, or assessment instruments for second-language learners. Third, cross-cultural variations in register and performative conventions have not been systematically linked to didactic strategies for Indonesian learners of Arabic, leaving practitioners without evidence-based guidance (Maghfurin et al., 2023). Addressing these lacunae requires a focused structuralist interrogation of a representative Arabic drama that bridges close textual analysis and explicit pedagogical translation (Yahya, 2021).

This study therefore applies Robert Stanton's structuralist model to reveal the intrinsic elements of the drama *Az-Za'im* and to examine how characters, plot, setting, theme, and moral message operate integratively to produce life values for readers and learners. The research employs descriptive qualitative methods—close reading, documentation, and structural mapping—to identify how dialogic exchanges shape moral meaning and narrative coherence. In addition to contributing to theoretical discussions of Stantonian structuralism in drama, the study aims to translate analytic insights into pedagogical recommendations for Arabic language classrooms in Indonesia, including text-based tasks and moral-literacy activities. By coupling fine-grained structural description with explicit classroom exemplars, the paper intends to demonstrate the didactic affordances of scripted drama for developing text-analysis skills, narrative comprehension, and value integration among learners. Ultimately, the study seeks to refine Stanton's applicability to script-based genres and to provide educators with empirically grounded strategies for using Arabic drama as a resource for language and value education.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical method. With a qualitative approach, this study focuses on deepening the meaning of the intrinsic elements of literary works, thus requiring an in-depth reading of the drama text (Cresswell, 2018). Meanwhile, the descriptive analytical method is used to explain the intrinsic elements in the drama *Az-Za'im* while analyzing them through Robert Stanton's structuralism theoretical framework.

The data sources in this study consist of two categories, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data is in the form of the text of the play *Az-Za'im* by Musthafa Mahmud, which contains dialogues and scenes that show the elements that make up the literary work. Meanwhile, the secondary data includes books, scientific articles, journals, and previous studies discussing Robert Stanton's structuralism theory and modern Arabic drama studies. These two types of data complement each other to provide a strong and contextual basis for analysis.

Data collection in this study was conducted through literature study using the reading and note-taking technique. The main data was the text of the play *Az-Za'im* by Musthofa Mahmud. The data collection process began with a thorough reading of the text to understand the general structure of the story. Next, the researcher conducted an intensive reading to identify intrinsic elements, including theme, plot, characters and characterization, setting, and moral values. The reading and note-taking technique was used to mark relevant parts of the text, such as dialogue, conflict, and setting descriptions, which were then classified according to the categories of intrinsic elements based on structural theory.

The data analysis stage uses content analysis. This method is used to systematically analyze the structure of the text by examining the relationship between

intrinsic elements in constructing the overall meaning of the story. The analysis process begins with the identification of each intrinsic element, followed by the categorization of data based on theme, plot, characterization, setting, and message. Next, the data is analyzed using Robert Stanton's structural perspective to understand how these elements are interrelated and form a coherent structural unity. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of a narrative description that explains the function and contribution of each element in constructing the meaning of the drama. The final stage of the research is drawing conclusions based on the findings of the analysis that has been carried out.

Results

The structural analysis of Mustafa Mahmud's drama *Az-Za'im* reveals a sophisticated interplay between intrinsic elements that construct a narrative of resistance and justice. By employing Robert Stanton's structural framework, this study synthesizes the thematic core, character dynamics, and plot trajectory to uncover the socio-political critique embedded within the text.

3.1. Thematic Core: Justice and Socio-Political Equality

The primary theme of *Az-Za'im* is the pursuit of social justice against the backdrop of Ottoman hegemony in North Africa. The narrative serves as a critique of systemic inequality, where the distinction between the "ruling elite" and the "oppressed Arab subjects" creates a fertile ground for revolution. This thematic tension is articulated by the protagonist, Ghoma, on page 8:

غوما: الكبراج وراءنا لأننا رضينا العبودية، لأن العربي يدفع البارات والقروش والعثمالي يبني الأساطيل العربي يزرع النخل والعثمالي يأكل البلح الوظائف للترك وقيادات الجيش للترك والبحرية للترك، والعربي يكتفى تصنع النعال والأوتاد والخيام والجرود.

The dialogue underscores a deep-seated economic and social disparity. Justice, in this context, is not merely a moral abstraction but a demand for equal rights in state employment and fiscal responsibility. The drama posits that when Islamic principles of equality are neglected by a ruling power, resistance becomes an inevitable moral imperative.

3.2. Character Dynamics and Characterization

Characterization in *Az-Za'im* aligns with Stanton's intrinsic element of "character" as a vehicle to express moral and political tension. The primary characters and their distinct traits are summarized below:

Table 1. Characterization and Narrative Roles in the Drama *Az-Za'im*

Character	Key Attributes	Narrative Role
Ghoma	Wise, strategic, tenacious, and morally steadfast.	The embodiment of the revolutionary spirit.
Ma'ruf	Loyal, high-spirited, and uncompromising.	The emotional and moral support of the resistance.
Qasim	Opportunistic, pragmatic, and eventually treacherous.	The catalyst for the tragic climax (the internal threat).
Pasha	Manipulative and condescending.	The face of institutionalized oppression.
Askar & Bakr Bey	Cunning, strategic, and exploitative.	The architects of political division and <i>divide et impera</i> .

Each character functions as a symbolic representation of moral, social, and political roles in the struggle against injustice. For instance, Ghoma embodies ethical leadership, blending military prowess with compassion and strategic acumen.

3.2.1. The Protagonist: Ghoma

Ghoma is portrayed as a multifaceted leader. His wisdom transcends military strategy, incorporating a profound humanitarian ethics. Even in the heat of battle, he prioritizes human dignity:

غوما: فليذهب بعض الفرسان لإغاثة المحتضرين ونجدة الجرحى (يمضى بعض الفرسان إلى الخلفية) فكوا وثاق الأسرى وقدموا لهم الطعام. أين معروف؟

His refusal to retreat into Tunisia—a move he labels as a "desperate migration" (*hijrah al-ya's*)—demonstrates a stoic commitment to his cause, choosing an honorable struggle over a passive death.

3.2.2 The Antagonist and Internal Conflict: Pasha and Qasim

While the Pasha represents the external systemic enemy, Qasim represents the internal decay of the revolution. Qasim's shift from an alert commander to a traitor illustrates the fragility of revolutionary movements when faced with the allure of bureaucracy and rank:

قاسم : ... أرخص طريقة للقضاء على الثوار تحويلهم إلى موظفين

3.3. Narrative Progression (Plot)

The narrative progression of *Az-Za'im* follows a linear-chronological trajectory, meticulously constructed to escalate tension from social unrest to a tragic, heroic resolution. The exposition introduces the audience to the bustling Tripoli market, a microcosm of the socio-political hierarchy where the visible disparity between the ruling Ottoman class and the Arab subjects establishes the primary conflict. As the plot progresses into the rising action, the introduction of discriminatory taxation policies and the Pasha's strategic attempts to co-opt tribal leaders through symbolic honors—*al-makarim al-sunniyyah*—deepen the socio-political divide.

The climax of the drama is reached not merely through external combat, but via the internal erosion of the resistance, specifically embodied by Qasim's calculated betrayal which leads to Ghoma's repeated imprisonment. The subsequent anticlimax and resolution depict a twelve-year struggle culminating in Ghoma's final stand in the desert. Rather than a mere military defeat, his death functions as a moral victory and a literary apotheosis, transforming the protagonist from a historical figure into an enduring symbol of dignity and unyielding resistance against systemic tyranny.

3.4 Setting and Spatio-Temporal Context

The setting and spatio-temporal context in Mustafa Mahmud's work serve as critical instruments for reinforcing the narrative's ideological themes. The spatial movement between the public domain of the Tripoli market and the sacred space of the mosque highlights the intersection of commerce, religion, and political control under the Ottoman administration.

Conversely, the transition to the Pasha's palace and the stark, nocturnal prison scenes emphasizes the "darkness" of institutionalized oppression and the claustrophobic nature of betrayal. These private spaces of power contrast sharply with the open, expansive desert and mountain settings where the resistance gathers, suggesting a dichotomy between artificial colonial authority and the natural, indigenous landscape of the people. Temporally, the shift between day and night mirrors the psychological journey of the characters; the clarity of daylight often

accompanies the initial revolutionary fervor, while the darkness of night becomes the recurring backdrop for deception, imprisonment, and the tragic loss of liberty.

3.5 Pedagogical Implications for Arabic Applied Linguistics

From the perspective of Arabic Applied Linguistics, the structural complexity and linguistic richness of *Az-Za'im* offer profound pedagogical implications for advanced language learners. As an authentic literary resource, the drama provides a sophisticated platform for developing communicative competence through the exploration of dialogue-based social interactions. Integrating this text into the curriculum allows for role-playing exercises and simulations where students can internalize formal Arabic (*Fusha*) while navigating nuanced emotional registers and high-stakes social contexts.

Furthermore, the application of a structural approach encourages the development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) through analytical reading—*qirā'ah taḥlīliyyah*—enabling learners to move beyond surface-level translation toward a deeper synthesis of thematic, cultural, and ideological motifs (Mu'izzuddin & Rustiana, 2025). The drama also serves as an effective vehicle for character education, as the moral dilemmas regarding loyalty, justice, and the ethical consequences of betrayal provide fertile ground for discussing values within an Arabic cultural and literary framework. Ultimately, the pedagogical use of *Az-Za'im* facilitates a holistic learning experience that bridges linguistic proficiency with critical cultural and moral literacy.

Discussion

The structural analysis of drama serves as a vital instrument for decoding the intricate layers of meaning embedded within literary narratives. Utilizing Robert Stanton's framework, this study investigates how intrinsic elements function in a cohesive manner to convey philosophical and social messages. Mustafa Mahmud's *Az-Za'im* provides an ideal site for this exploration, as it intertwines historical resistance with universal ethical dilemmas. The primary research question addresses how the integration of theme, character, and plot facilitates the transmission of meaningful life values to the audience. This inquiry is situated within a broader academic context that seeks to bridge the gap between literary theory and its practical application in language education.

The findings demonstrate a sophisticated synthesis of structural elements that construct a compelling narrative of resistance and social justice. A central discovery is the thematic preoccupation with justice against a backdrop of Ottoman hegemony, framed as a moral necessity rather than a mere political goal. Interestingly, the research highlights a profound psychological duality between the protagonist Ghoma's humanitarian ethics and the antagonist Qasim's bureaucratic pragmatism. The plot follows a linear-chronological trajectory that culminates in a literary apotheosis, where the protagonist's death signifies an enduring moral victory. These results emphasize the unexpected depth of spatio-temporal symbolism, where setting shifts mirror the internal psychological shifts of the oppressed subjects.

These results align with previous structuralist inquiries that identify literary facts as the primary vehicles for moral and social commentary. The focus on justice as a central theme echoes findings in the study of *Hikayat Qodil Gobah*, where literature is used to seek life lessons (Amali, 2022). Furthermore, the role of characters as carriers of moral conflict in *Az-Za'im* is consistent with the analysis of the animation *Hasan al-Mu'amalah* (Islami & Rohanda, 2025). However, the linear progression of this drama contrasts with the complex flashback structures observed in contemporary works like

Dream Launch Project (Hidayati, 2024). The socio-political critique of systemic inequality found here also mirrors the portrayal of marginalized lives in Indonesian drama scripts like *RT Nol RW Nol* (Nurhasanah et al., 2024).

The thematic emphasis on justice is deeply rooted in the Islamic principles of equality and human dignity. By shifting the setting from the public marketplace to the confined darkness of the prison, the author illustrates the suffocating nature of institutionalized oppression. This spatial duality signifies the ongoing tension between colonial authority and the indigenous identity of the Arab population. Such structural choices allow the socio-political critique to flow naturally from the narrative facts rather than being imposed as external propaganda. We interpret these findings as a deliberate strategy by Mustafa Mahmud to engage the audience's conscience through symbolic representation.

Characterization in the play functions as a microcosm of revolutionary struggle and internal decay. Ghoma represents the ideal synthesis of military acumen and compassion, providing a model for ethical leadership during times of crisis. In contrast, Qasim's eventual betrayal illustrates the fragility of revolutionary movements when confronted with the allure of institutional power. The plot's movement toward a moral victory suggests that spiritual integrity is more significant than physical survival in the face of tyranny. Readers should cautiously interpret the antagonist's motives, as they may represent a pragmatic desire for stability rather than pure malice.

The significance of these findings lies in the demonstration of how moral values are seamlessly integrated into the structural fabric of drama. This study confirms that Stanton's framework remains a robust methodology for analyzing both classical and modern Arabic literary texts. It uncovers the vital role of narrative dialogue as the primary vehicle for both advancing the plot and delivering ethical instruction. The research provides a nuanced understanding of the intersection between literary form and the socio-political history of North Africa. Ultimately, the analysis reveals the enduring relevance of Mustafa Mahmud's work in contemporary discussions regarding freedom and dignity.

The structural analysis of *Az-Za'im* yields substantial implications for the field of Arabic Applied Linguistics. Integrating this text into the curriculum offers a rich, authentic resource for developing higher-order thinking skills through analytical reading exercises. Students can enhance their communicative competence by engaging with the sophisticated emotional registers found in the characters' dialogues. Furthermore, the play serves as a medium for character education, allowing learners to internalize values like loyalty and justice while acquiring linguistic proficiency. In the context of Indonesian education, this drama acts as a critical bridge between advanced language learning and cultural literacy.

Conclusion

This study aimed to delineate the intrinsic structural components of Mustafa Mahmud's drama *Az-Za'im* while evaluating its pedagogical utility within the framework of Arabic language instruction. Through the application of Robert Stanton's structuralist theory, the research successfully demonstrated how the integration of theme, character, and plot constructs a coherent narrative centered on the pursuit of social justice against Ottoman hegemony. The findings reveal that the protagonist's struggle is not merely a historical conflict but a moral imperative articulated through a sophisticated interplay of symbolic settings and multifaceted character dynamics. Specifically, the linear-chronological plot progression serves to elevate the protagonist from a historical figure to an enduring emblem of dignity, while the spatio-temporal settings reinforce the

ideological dichotomy between institutional oppression and indigenous resistance. Consequently, the analysis confirms that the narrative dialogue functions as a natural vehicle for the transmission of ethical values, flowing seamlessly from the story's structural facts. The significance of these results lies in the validation of structuralist methodology as a robust tool for analyzing modern Arabic literary texts to uncover latent socio-political critiques. By identifying narrative dialogue as a primary medium for ethical instruction, this study contributes to the field of Arabic Applied Linguistics by proposing *Az-Za'im* as an authentic resource for developing higher-order thinking skills. These findings suggest that the internalisation of moral values—such as loyalty, justice, and resilience—can be integrated into linguistic training, thereby bridging the gap between grammatical proficiency and cultural literacy. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that the drama provides a sophisticated platform for role-playing and simulations, enabling students to navigate complex emotional registers in formal Arabic. Ultimately, the study establishes that the pedagogical use of such literature facilitates a holistic learning experience that addresses both linguistic competence and character development in the Indonesian educational landscape. Despite these insights, the research is limited by its singular focus on a specific dramatic work and its adherence to a purely structuralist perspective, which may overlook broader sociolinguistic nuances or contemporary audience reception. Future scholarly efforts should therefore pursue comparative analyses involving other works by Mustafa Mahmud or contemporaneous playwrights to determine the consistency of these structural and ethical motifs across the genre. Additionally, empirical investigations into the classroom implementation of this drama are recommended to quantify its actual impact on students' analytical reading abilities and moral development. Subsequent studies might also employ alternative theoretical frameworks, such as post-colonialism or semiotics, to further elucidate the complex relationship between language, power, and identity in revolutionary literature. Such expanded research will continue to reinforce the relevance of Arabic literature as a vital instrument for understanding the universal quest for freedom and human dignity.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Sayyidah Khoizuroonah conceived and designed the study, performed the experiments, and wrote the original draft. Anisa Dwi Nurchayati collected the data, performed the analysis, and contributed to the interpretation of the results. Mukhammad Kamil Pribadi provided supervision, resources, and critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

Data availability statements provide a statement about where data supporting the results reported in a published article can be found; the datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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