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Reflective Discourse in Ibn 'Ata' Allah's Al-Hikam: Integrating Linguistics, Psychology, and Language Education

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Abstract
This article examines *Al-Hikam*, the celebrated aphoristic work of Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Iskandari, as a body of reflective discourse that can enrich contemporary conversations in linguistics, psychology, and language education. The study is motivated by a practical problem in language classrooms: learners often encounter language primarily as technique, grammar, or assessment, while the human work of interpretation, self-understanding, ethical imagination, and emotional regulation remains marginal. This study aims to analyze how selected aphorisms of *Al-Hikam* function as reflective discourse and how they may be pedagogically adapted for humanistic language education. Through qualitative document analysis and reflexive thematic interpretation, selected Arabic aphorisms from *Al-Hikam* are read as compact pedagogical events. The analysis identifies four discourse features: aphoristic compression, dialogic address, metaphorical reframing, and evaluative self-positioning. These features are connected to psychological themes such as hope after failure, self-regulation, humility, presence, and relational growth. The article argues that *Al-Hikam* may be approached not merely as devotional literature but also as an authentic text for humanistic language education. Its reflective language can support close reading, translation awareness, discourse analysis, reflective journaling, and dialogic classroom practice. As an analytical contribution, the article proposes the Reflective Linguistic Pedagogy model, a four-stage classroom sequence consisting of encounter, linguistic noticing, psychological reflection, and communicative transformation. The article concludes that a careful, non-reductive use of *Al-Hikam* can help language education recover its deeper human purpose: to cultivate articulate, attentive, ethically aware, and emotionally resilient learners.

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INTRODUCTION

Language education has increasingly become a field of measurement, mobility, and performance. Learners are expected to demonstrate proficiency, produce measurable outcomes, and adapt to global communicative demands. These aims are important, yet they do not exhaust the human purpose of language learning. Human beings do not learn language only to pass examinations or participate in markets; they learn language to name experience, negotiate identity, repair relationships, carry memory, ask questions, and reinterpret the self. Contemporary applied linguistics has already moved toward this wider vision through research on multilingualism, learner

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identity, translanguaging, engagement, teacher well-being, and Global Englishes (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021; Darvin & Norton, 2021; Gao & Yang, 2023; Hiver et al., 2021; Rose et al., 2021; Selvi & Yazan, 2021). This broader view also resonates with transdisciplinary and multilingual approaches to second language acquisition, which understand language learning as socially situated, identity-forming, and mediated across multiple linguistic and cultural resources (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Li Wei, 2018; Putjata et al., 2022). At the same time, positive psychology, social-emotional learning, and studies on teacher well-being have reminded educators that cognition, emotion, values, motivation, and belonging cannot be separated in sustainable learning (Azari Noughabi et al., 2022; Budzińska & Majchrzak, 2021; CASEL, 2020; Hossain, 2025; Li, 2021a, 2021b; OECD, 2021; Talbot & Mercer, 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Yang, 2022).

The term reflective discourse is used here to describe language that not only represents ideas but also invites a reader or listener to examine the self. Reflective discourse is therefore different from ordinary informative discourse. It does not merely say what is true; it asks the addressee to see differently, feel differently, and respond differently. In Al-Hikam, reflection is produced through direct address, compressed contrast, metaphor, and ethical evaluation. The aphorism "أَرِحْ نَفْسَكَ مِنَ التَّدْبِيرِ" — "Give your self rest from anxious self-management" — does not present a theological proposition in abstract form. It addresses the reader's interior tension and attempts to reposition the reader in relation to agency, trust, and effort. Such reflective language is pedagogically significant because it shows that language can become a medium of self-awareness, ethical attention, and emotional regulation.

Discourse studies help explain how such language works. From a discourse perspective, meaning is not isolated in words but produced through patterned relations among text, context, participant roles, and social values (Fairclough, 1992; Jones, 2023). Al-Hikam constructs a particular reader: one who is morally addressed, spiritually vulnerable, and capable of transformation. This reader is not a passive receiver of doctrine. The repeated use of second-person address creates a dialogic relation between voice and addressee. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism is useful here because every utterance anticipates response and enters a field of other voices (Bakhtin, 1981). The aphorisms speak in a voice of guidance, but they also leave space for inward reply. From a systemic-functional perspective, grammar may also be understood not merely as formal structure but as a resource for making meaning in social contexts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Thus, the grammar of Al-Hikam is not only grammatical; it is relational, ethical, and pedagogical.

Cognitive linguistics is also relevant to the present study. Metaphor is not merely ornament; it structures perception and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Al-Hikam repeatedly uses spatial, visual, bodily, and journey metaphors: the heart as mirror, life as travel, companionship as elevation, language as nourishment, and the self as something requiring discipline. These metaphors allow learners to notice how abstract psychological states are made intelligible through embodied language. For language education, this is significant. Metaphor analysis can deepen vocabulary learning, semantic awareness, translation practice, and critical interpretation (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2025; Fattahi & Nushi, 2021; Wei, 2021). It also helps learners understand that the ways people speak about learning, the self, failure, and hope shape how they experience them.

Psychological theory contributes another layer. Reflection is not simply thinking about oneself; it involves regulating attention, emotion, desire, and interpretation. Self-determination theory emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic psychological needs for healthy

motivation and learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Social-cognitive theory also highlights the role of self-efficacy in shaping learners' confidence, persistence, and response to difficulty (Bandura, 1997). Positive psychology in second and foreign language education has similarly foregrounded flourishing, engagement, resilience, teacher well-being, and learner emotion (Budzińska & Majchrzak, 2021; Hiver et al., 2021; Li, 2021a; Wang et al., 2021). Al-Hikam does not speak the language of modern psychology, but it often works on the same human terrain: discouragement, pride, anxiety, envy, hope, attention, humility, companionship, and meaningful relation.

A humanistic language education perspective connects these linguistic and psychological dimensions. Humanistic pedagogy begins from the dignity of learners as persons, not only as performers of language tasks. It values voice, choice, affect, community, care, and the ethical uses of language. This orientation resonates with wider educational traditions that understand learning as meaning-making, reflective inquiry, relational care, and democratic formation (Bruner, 1990; Dewey, 1933; Freire, 1970; Noddings, 2013; Nussbaum, 2010; Palmer, 1998). It also resonates with contemporary calls for a new social contract in education grounded in cooperation, dialogue, justice, and care (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021), as well as with global guidance on multilingual education that stresses the importance of learners' linguistic repertoires, inclusion, and cultural dignity (UNESCO, 2025). In this sense, Al-Hikam can be situated within a broader pedagogical aim: not to turn language classes into religious sermons, but to allow meaningful texts to humanize language learning.

This article brings that conversation into dialogue with Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Iskandari's Al-Hikam, a classical Sufi text composed of short aphorisms that invite the reader into disciplined self-reflection. Al-Hikam is often studied within Islamic spirituality, Sufi ethics, or religious instruction. It has also been explored in relation to spiritually oriented psychology and counseling (Kardas, 2018). More recent discussions of Islamic psychology and Islamically integrated psychotherapy further show that concepts of self, spiritual practice, and psychological distress can be studied through frameworks that are both psychologically attentive and religiously grounded (Cucchi, 2022; Khan et al., 2023; Rassool, 2021; Rothman, 2021; Rothman & Coyle, 2023; Zahir & Qoronfleh, 2025). Less attention, however, has been given to the potential of Al-Hikam as reflective discourse for language education. This article proposes that Al-Hikam can be read through a threefold lens: linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical. Linguistically, its aphorisms condense meaning through imperatives, antithesis, metaphor, rhythm, deixis, and dialogic address. Psychologically, they guide the reader toward hope, self-awareness, emotional regulation, humility, and resilience. Pedagogically, they offer authentic material for close reading, translation, discussion, reflective writing, and intercultural language learning.

The study asks three questions. First, what discourse features make selected aphorisms in Al-Hikam reflective rather than merely didactic? Second, what psychological orientations are constructed through these discourse features? Third, how can such reflective discourse be adapted ethically for language education without reducing a sacred or spiritual text into a classroom instrument? The word ethically is important. A humanistic approach to religious or spiritual texts should avoid both romanticization and extraction. Al-Hikam should not be treated as a decorative source of quotations, nor should it be forced into modern categories as if its only value depends on contemporary theory. Rather, it can be read as a historically situated text whose language opens possibilities for learners to practice interpretation, humility, and dialogic reflection.

The article is conceptual and qualitative. It does not claim to measure the effects of Al-Hikam on learners. Instead, it develops an interpretive framework that can later be tested in classrooms, teacher education, or curriculum design. The argument is simple: Al-Hikam is linguistically rich because its aphorisms are small but dense; psychologically meaningful because they speak to the learner's inner positioning; and pedagogically valuable because they can help language classrooms become spaces of attentive reading and humane formation.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative document analysis combined with reflexive thematic interpretation. Document analysis is appropriate because the primary data are textual aphorisms rather than interviews, surveys, or classroom observations. A document-based approach allows the researcher to examine language choices, recurring themes, and interpretive patterns within a stable textual corpus (Morgan, 2022). Since Al-Hikam is a compact aphoristic text, document analysis is especially suitable for identifying how meaning is produced through grammar, metaphor, address, contrast, and evaluative language. In addition, qualitative content analysis provides a useful orientation for examining textual materials systematically while still allowing interpretation to remain sensitive to context and meaning (Seddighi Khavidak et al., 2021).

Reflexive thematic analysis is used not as a mechanical coding procedure but as an interpretive practice in which the researcher's theoretical positioning is acknowledged. Following Braun and Clarke's approach, thematic analysis in this article is understood as a flexible method for identifying, interpreting, and organizing patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022). The analysis also draws on hermeneutic principles: meaning emerges through a movement between the part and the whole, between individual aphorisms and the broader spiritual, linguistic, and pedagogical orientation of the text (Ricoeur, 1976; van Manen, 2016). This hermeneutic movement is important because an aphorism cannot be responsibly interpreted only as an isolated sentence. Its brevity requires careful attention to wording, genre, tradition, and possible pedagogical reception.

The primary Arabic text used for quotation is the online Arabic matn of Al-Hikam, while an available English reference translation was used only for comparison and orientation (Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Iskandari, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The selected aphorisms include statements on reliance, self-management, contemplative solitude, companionship, self-satisfaction, praise, expression, and the value of language. The Arabic is retained because form and meaning are inseparable in the analysis. English translations in this article are the author's own working translations, produced for the purpose of linguistic discussion rather than devotional, theological, or legal authority. This decision is consistent with the article's pedagogical aim: to show how translation can become an interpretive activity that requires attention to grammar, discourse, register, and audience.

The analytic process followed four stages. First, selected aphorisms were read for discourse features, including pronouns, imperatives, negation, contrast, metaphor, parallelism, rhythm, and evaluative vocabulary. This stage was informed by discourse analysis, systemic-functional grammar, pragmatics, cognitive metaphor theory, and appraisal theory (Fairclough, 1992; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Ishihara & Cohen, 2021; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Martin & White, 2005). Second, these features were interpreted in relation to psychological orientations such as hope, humility, self-awareness, emotional regulation, attentional discipline, agency, and ethical relation. This stage drew

on positive psychology, self-determination theory, self-efficacy theory, Islamic psychology, and language teacher well-being studies (Bandura, 1997; Budzińska & Majchrzak, 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Rassool, 2021; Rothman, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Third, the aphorisms were considered pedagogically by asking how they might support reading, translation, writing, discussion, reflection, and dialogic interaction in a language classroom. This stage was informed by humanistic pedagogy, reflective practice, transformative learning, translanguaging, social-emotional learning, and multilingual education (CASEL, 2020; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2022; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983; UNESCO, 2025; Vygotsky, 1978). Fourth, a classroom model was synthesized from the analysis. The goal was not to present a final curriculum, but to propose an adaptable framework for future empirical work.

There are three limitations. First, Al-Hikam has a long commentary tradition, including theological and Sufi interpretations that cannot be fully represented here. Second, the article reads selected aphorisms rather than the entire corpus. Third, pedagogical recommendations remain conceptual until implemented and studied in actual classrooms. These limitations are acknowledged to preserve interpretive humility. The study does not claim that Al-Hikam should be used in all language classrooms or that its meanings can be reduced to modern educational theory. Rather, it argues that selected aphorisms can be ethically and carefully adapted as reflective discourse for language education when teachers provide adequate context, respect learners' diversity, and assess observable language practices rather than private belief.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aphoristic compression as reflective pedagogy

Al-Hikam works through compression. An aphorism says little, but asks much from the reader. This brevity is pedagogically important because it slows reading down. A long explanation may allow the reader to remain passive, while a compressed aphorism requires completion through contemplation. Consider the opening wisdom: "مِنْ عَلاَمَةِ الاعْتِمادِ عَلى العَمَلِ، نُقْصانُ الرَّجاءِ عِنْدَ وُجودِ الزَّلَلِ" — "One sign of relying on one's work is the decrease of hope when a slip occurs." The sentence is grammatically simple, yet psychologically complex. It links a visible emotional response, the decrease of hope, with a hidden orientation, reliance on one's own deeds. Linguistically, the phrase "من علامة" establishes diagnostic discourse: the aphorism teaches the reader to read the self as a sign.

This diagnostic function is valuable for language education because it models inference. Learners are asked to connect surface expression with underlying meaning. In discourse analysis, this is the movement from text to social and psychological positioning (Fairclough, 1992; Jones, 2023). In a classroom, students could identify the semantic field of reliance, hope, and error; examine the conditional logic of the aphorism; compare translations; and write reflective responses about how language names failure. Such work integrates vocabulary, syntax, pragmatics, and affect.

The aphorism is also psychologically humane. It does not deny failure. It assumes that a "slip" may occur and then asks what the emotional response reveals. In many educational contexts, failure is framed as deficit. Al-Hikam reframes failure as diagnostic knowledge. This resonates with contemporary approaches that connect resilience, motivation, self-efficacy, emotion, and learning engagement (Bandura, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hiver et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). A language learner who loses hope after making mistakes may not simply need more correction; the learner may

need a new relation to effort, error, and self-worth. The aphorism therefore opens a humanistic conversation about mistakes in language learning.

Direct address and the grammar of interior dialogue

A striking feature of Al-Hikam is its repeated second-person address. The text speaks to "you" not as an abstract reader but as an inwardly addressed self. "أَرِحْ نَفْسَكَ مِنَ التَّدْبِيرِ" — "Give your self rest from anxious self-management" — uses the imperative "أرح". Grammatically, the imperative can be forceful, but here it has a therapeutic tone. It is not an order to perform more; it is an invitation to release an excessive burden. The object "نفسك" is also important. The addressee is instructed to act upon the self, but in the direction of rest rather than domination.

This pattern creates what may be called interior dialogue. The reader hears a voice that interrupts habitual self-talk. Many learners live inside anxious language: "I must not fail," "I am not good at languages," or "I have to control everything." A reflective text can introduce alternative language. In psychological terms, this resembles cognitive reframing, although Al-Hikam is not reducible to cognitive therapy. It changes the grammar of attention. The reader moves from anxious planning to trustful effort. This kind of inward dialogue is consistent with dialogic views of language and learning, in which meaning develops through interaction among voices, perspectives, and responses (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978).

For language education, direct address can be used to teach pragmatics and stance. Students can compare imperatives that command, advise, comfort, warn, or invite. They can ask how tone changes across translation: "Rest yourself," "Relieve yourself," "Let your soul rest," and "Free yourself from anxious management" each carries a different register. This task develops pragmatic sensitivity, translation awareness, and emotional literacy. It also helps learners see that grammar is never merely formal; it carries relational force (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Ishihara & Cohen, 2021).

Metaphor, journey, and cognitive reframing

Al-Hikam often uses metaphor to reframe perception. The aphorism "لا تَرْحَلْ مِنْ كَوْنٍ إلى كَوْنٍ فَتَكونَ كَحِمارِ الرَّحى" — "Do not travel from one created thing to another, lest you become like the mill donkey" — constructs spiritual misdirection as circular movement. The image is memorable because it is concrete. The donkey moves continuously, but its movement is not progress. Linguistically, this is not only metaphor but critique: activity without transformed orientation can become circular.

In language education, this aphorism can prompt discussion about learning routines. Students may complete many tasks yet remain trapped in shallow learning if they do not change how they attend to meaning. The metaphor invites learners to ask whether repetition is leading to growth or merely motion. This is not an argument against practice. Rather, it asks that practice be reflective and purposeful. Such a view aligns with reflective practice in teacher education and with learner-centered approaches that value metacognition (Erdemir & Yesilcinar, 2021; Farrell, 2022; Schön, 1983).

Metaphor also bridges linguistic and psychological learning. Because metaphors structure how learners understand experience, examining them can reveal hidden beliefs about learning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A student who sees language as a wall may feel blocked; a student who sees it as a path may expect gradual movement; a student who sees it as a garden may value cultivation. Al-Hikam's metaphors offer an opportunity for learners to compare conceptual frames across Arabic,

English, Indonesian, or other languages. This can support multilingual pedagogy and translanguaging, where students' full linguistic repertoires become resources for meaning-making rather than problems to be suppressed (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Gao & Yang, 2023; Li Wei, 2018). Recent work on metaphor and teacher education also shows that educational language shapes how teachers and learners imagine change, agency, and pedagogical possibility (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2025).

Reflective psychology: hope, humility, and self-awareness

The psychological depth of Al-Hikam becomes especially clear in aphorisms concerning the self. Ibn 'Ata' Allah writes: " أَصْلُ كُلِّ مَعْصِيَةٍ وَغَفْلَةٍ وَشَهْوَةٍ الرِّضا عَنِ النَّفْسِ، وَأَصْلُ كُلِّ طَاعَةٍ وَيَقَظَةٍ وَعِفَّةٍ عَدَمُ الرِّضا مِنْكَ عَنْهَا" — "The root of every disobedience, heedlessness, and desire is satisfaction with the self; and the root of every obedience, wakefulness, and restraint is your dissatisfaction with it." The language is built on parallelism and antithesis. Two chains of nouns are contrasted: disobedience, heedlessness, desire; obedience, wakefulness, restraint. The repeated term "root" suggests that outward acts have inward sources.

For modern readers, this aphorism requires careful interpretation. It should not be used to produce self-hatred or shame. In a humanistic reading, "not being satisfied with the self" can be understood as ethical vigilance rather than rejection of one's dignity. The self is not despised; it is examined. This distinction matters in educational psychology. Learners need self-compassion and hope, but they also need the capacity to question impulses, excuses, and pride. Islamic psychology offers a vocabulary for this interior complexity through concepts such as nafs, qalb, ruh, muhasabah, and tazkiyah (Cucchi, 2022; Rassool, 2021; Rothman, 2021). Contemporary psychology similarly recognizes that growth involves self-awareness, regulation, motivation, and values-based action (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Wang et al., 2021).

Another aphorism, "النّاسُ يَمْدَحونَكَ لِما يَظُنُّونَهُ فيكَ، فَكُنْ أَنْتَ ذامّاً لنَفسِكَ لِما تَعْلَمُهُ مِنها" — "People praise you for what they suppose is in you; so be one who critiques the self for what you know of it" — addresses social evaluation. In modern classrooms, learners are often shaped by grades, praise, ranking, and external validation. The aphorism questions whether public praise should define self-knowledge. It invites learners to distinguish reputation from reflective honesty. This is psychologically relevant to self-regulation and socially relevant to identity formation.

Language classrooms can use this aphorism to examine evaluative language. What is praise? What is criticism? When does feedback encourage growth, and when does it trap learners in performance anxiety? Such questions link discourse analysis with classroom well-being. The analysis of praise, criticism, and evaluative positioning can also be strengthened through appraisal theory, which examines how language encodes attitude, judgment, and valuation (Martin & White, 2005). These issues are also relevant to teacher feedback, teacher identity, and language teacher well-being, because classrooms become healthier when evaluation is clear, compassionate, and growth-oriented (Azari Noughabi et al., 2022; Fathi et al., 2023; Hossain, 2025; Li, 2021a; Penton Herrera et al., 2022; Talbot & Mercer, 2021; Yang, 2022).

Companionship, relational language, and dialogic learning

Al-Hikam is not only about individual interiority. It also attends to companionship and relational formation. The aphorism "لا تَصْحَبْ مَنْ لا يُنْهِضُكَ حالُهُ وَلا يَدُلُّكَ عَلَى اللهِ مَقالُهُ" — "Do not accompany one whose state does not lift you and whose speech does not point you toward God" — links being and speaking. The phrase "حاله" refers to a person's state or condition; "مقاله" refers to speech. The aphorism suggests that language education cannot be separated from the character of the speaker. Words teach, but so do presence, conduct, and relational atmosphere.

In classroom terms, this insight supports a relational understanding of language learning. Learners do not acquire language in a vacuum. They learn through peers, teachers, texts, institutions, and imagined communities. The discourse of a classroom can either lift learners or reduce them. It can point them toward meaning, or it can point them only toward competition. Social-emotional learning and transformative pedagogy similarly emphasize belonging, agency, relational safety, dialogue, and human dignity (CASEL, 2020; Freire, 1970; Jagers et al., 2021; Mezirow, 1991; Noddings, 2013). The aphorism can therefore be read as a classical articulation of what contemporary educators call a supportive learning environment.

The phrase also invites pragmatic and critical discourse analysis. Speech is not judged only by grammatical accuracy but by its direction: what does speech point toward? In language education, this question can be adapted ethically: What do classroom utterances point toward? Do teacher questions point toward curiosity or fear? Do peer comments point toward support or humiliation? Do textbook dialogues point toward human complexity or stereotypes? Critical discourse analysis of materials and classroom talk can help answer such questions (Guerrettaz et al., 2021; Khan & Zaki, 2022; Qin & Wang, 2021; Widodo et al., 2018).

Language as nourishment: expression, reception, and learner readiness

Two aphorisms speak directly about expression. The first says: "عِبَارَاتُهُمْ إِمَّا لِفَيَضَانِ وَجْدٍ، أَوْ لِقَصْدِ هِدَايَةِ مُرِيدٍ" — "Their expressions are either from an overflow of spiritual finding or for the purpose of guiding a seeker." The second says: "العِبَارَاتُ قُوتٌ لِعَائِلَةِ المُسْتَمِعِينَ، وَلَيْسَ لَكَ إِلَّا مَا أَنْتَ لَهُ آكِلٌ" — "Expressions are nourishment for the family of listeners, and you have only what you are able to eat." These statements are highly relevant to linguistics and pedagogy. They present language as purposeful, relational, and receivable.

The nourishment metaphor is especially rich. It suggests that meaning is not merely delivered; it must be digested. A teacher may explain beautifully, but learners receive according to readiness, hunger, prior knowledge, proficiency, and need. This has implications for material design. Authentic texts such as Al-Hikam should not be given to learners without scaffolding. Students need vocabulary support, cultural framing, theological sensitivity, translation comparison, and space for personal reflection. Otherwise, the text may become either obscure or oversimplified.

This metaphor also challenges a transmission model of education. If expressions are nourishment, then learning requires appetite, preparation, pace, and care. Language teachers become not only transmitters of content but designers of meaningful encounters. This aligns with contemporary materials research that views classroom materials as shaping discourse and interaction, not merely supplying input (Guerrettaz et al., 2021). It also supports an ethic of pedagogical moderation: not every powerful text should be used in the same way for every learner.

Pedagogical application: Reflective Linguistic Pedagogy

Based on the analysis, this article proposes a four-stage model called Reflective Linguistic Pedagogy. The model is designed for language classes that wish to use Al-Hikam or similar reflective texts in a linguistically rigorous and psychologically humane way. It can be adapted for Arabic, English, Indonesian, translation studies, discourse analysis, Islamic education, or teacher education contexts.

The first stage is encounter. Students meet a short aphorism in Arabic and in one or more translations. The teacher provides minimal historical context: Ibn 'Ata' Allah, the aphoristic genre, the spiritual nature of the text, and the need for respectful interpretation. The purpose is not immediate explanation but attentive contact. Students read aloud, listen to rhythm, identify unfamiliar words, and note first impressions. This stage honors the text before analyzing it.

The second stage is linguistic noticing. Students examine grammar, lexis, metaphor, pronouns, negation, parallelism, rhythm, and pragmatic force. For example, with "أرح نفسك من التدبير," they identify the imperative verb, the object "your self," and the semantic field of rest and management. They compare possible translations and discuss how each translation changes tone. This stage connects with applied linguistics, discourse analysis, functional grammar, pragmatics, metaphor theory, and translation awareness (Fattahi & Nushi, 2021; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Ishihara & Cohen, 2021; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Wei, 2021).

The third stage is psychological reflection. Students ask what kind of inner movement the aphorism invites. Does it address fear, pride, despair, haste, envy, distraction, hope, or humility? What emotional vocabulary appears? What kind of learner or self is constructed? Reflection may be written privately before discussion. This is important because spiritual and psychological topics can be intimate. Teachers should not force disclosure. The aim is not confession but thoughtful relation.

The fourth stage is communicative transformation. Students produce language from reflection: a paragraph, dialogue, translation note, response letter, classroom discussion, multimodal poster, or reflective journal. They may relate the aphorism to language learning experiences such as fear of mistakes, dependence on praise, comparison with peers, or anxiety about outcomes. The final product remains linguistic, but it is enriched by human meaning. This model supports integrated skills: reading through close textual analysis, speaking through dialogic discussion, writing through reflective composition, listening through recitation and peer response, vocabulary through semantic fields, grammar through meaningful structures, and intercultural competence through respectful engagement with Islamic intellectual heritage.

The model also supports multilingual practice. Students may compare Arabic, English, and Indonesian renderings, thereby noticing how languages distribute meaning differently. Such practice aligns with pedagogical translanguaging and Global Englishes perspectives, which challenge monolingual norms and value learners' full repertoires (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Gao & Yang, 2023; Rose et al., 2021; Selvi & Yazan, 2021). It also resonates with current multilingual education guidance, which emphasizes inclusion, linguistic diversity, and the educational value of learners' home and community languages (UNESCO, 2025).

Classroom sequence and sample tasks

A practical classroom sequence may begin with an aphorism that is short enough for close attention but rich enough for layered interpretation. For example, a teacher may use " أَرِحْ نَفْسَكَ مِنَ

التَّدْبير" because the sentence is brief, imperative, and psychologically suggestive. In the encounter stage, students first listen to the Arabic recitation, observe the rhythm of the phrase, and identify what they notice without translating immediately. This prevents the lesson from becoming a quick search for equivalent vocabulary. It teaches students that understanding begins with attention.

In the noticing stage, students examine the imperative verb, the direct object, and the phrase min al-tadbir. They compare possible translations such as "rest yourself from anxious management," "relieve yourself of self-directed planning," or "free your soul from controlling calculation." Each option carries a different psychological and theological nuance. A linguistic task can ask students to justify which translation is most suitable for a specific audience: academic readers, beginning Arabic learners, or Indonesian Muslim students. Such comparison turns translation into an argument supported by grammar, discourse context, and reader awareness.

The reflective stage can use guided prompts rather than open-ended emotional confession. Students may respond to questions such as: What kind of agency is assumed by the imperative? What kind of burden is named by tadbir? How does the aphorism distinguish responsible effort from anxious control? These prompts protect learners because they invite interpretation before personal disclosure. Learners who wish to connect the text with experience may do so, but those who prefer analytical distance can still complete the task meaningfully.

A second sample task may use the aphorism on public praise: " النّاسُ يَمْدَحونَكَ لِما يَظُنُّونَهُ فيكَ، فَكُنْ أنْتَ ذاماً لنَفسِكَ لِما تَعْلَمُهُ مِنها." Students can analyze contrastive structure: people praise according to assumption, while the addressed self evaluates according to knowledge. The teacher can then connect the text to appraisal analysis by asking students to identify positive evaluation, negative evaluation, evidential basis, and the implied tension between social image and self-knowledge. The psychological dimension emerges not as moral accusation but as critical awareness of external validation.

For speaking practice, students may conduct a structured dialogue in pairs or small groups. One student represents a literal translator, another a discourse analyst, and another a classroom teacher who wants to adapt the aphorism for learners. Each role requires different language functions: defining, questioning, agreeing, disagreeing, clarifying, and reformulating. The activity develops academic speaking while modeling interpretive humility. Students learn that disagreement over a translation is not failure; it is part of responsible meaning-making.

For writing practice, students may produce a 300-word reflective commentary with three required moves. First, they quote or paraphrase the aphorism. Second, they analyze one linguistic feature, such as imperative mood, metaphor, deixis, parallelism, or evaluation. Third, they explain one pedagogical implication for language learning. This structure keeps the writing disciplined. It avoids purely devotional summary and purely technical grammar explanation. The student must move from form to meaning and from meaning to educational use.

For vocabulary development, teachers can build semantic fields around key terms such as nafs, amal, raja, khawf, suhbah, hal, maqalah, and ibarah. Students may create lexical maps that include Arabic roots, English approximations, Indonesian equivalents, collocations, and conceptual associations. Such maps help learners see that vocabulary is not a list of isolated items. It is a network of relations shaped by culture, discourse, and use. This is especially useful in multilingual classrooms because students can compare how Arabic, English, and Indonesian organize moral and psychological meanings differently.

For assessment, a simple analytic rubric can evaluate four dimensions: linguistic accuracy, interpretive depth, pedagogical relevance, and reflective tone. Linguistic accuracy assesses whether the student refers carefully to words and structures. Interpretive depth assesses whether the analysis recognizes ambiguity and avoids simplistic claims. Pedagogical relevance assesses whether the student can translate analysis into teachable activities. Reflective tone assesses whether the writing is thoughtful, respectful, and dialogic. This rubric makes the humanistic aim visible without turning interior spirituality into a graded object.

Implications for research and curriculum

Several research directions follow from this framework. Classroom-based studies could examine how learners respond to Al-Hikam as authentic material in Arabic or English language classes. Researchers might investigate whether reflective aphorism tasks influence learner engagement, vocabulary retention, translation awareness, reflective writing, or willingness to communicate. Teacher education studies could explore how teachers use reflective texts to develop classroom empathy, feedback awareness, and professional identity (Fathi et al., 2023; Farrell, 2022; Penton Herrera et al., 2022). Discourse analysts could compare Al-Hikam with other aphoristic traditions, such as the wisdom literature of different religious or philosophical communities, to examine how reflective authority is constructed across cultures.

Curriculum designers can also benefit from the framework. A language curriculum that includes reflective texts should not merely add moral quotations at the beginning of a unit. Instead, reflective discourse should be integrated into learning outcomes. A unit might ask students to analyze imperatives as advice, compare metaphors of the self across languages, write a reflective paragraph using evaluative vocabulary, or conduct a small discourse analysis of feedback language in their classroom. In this way, values are not appended to language learning; they become part of how language is studied.

The framework is especially relevant for Islamic higher education, pesantren-based universities, Arabic education programs, English departments in Muslim contexts, and teacher education institutions that seek to integrate linguistic competence with character formation. Yet its relevance is not limited to Muslim classrooms. When handled respectfully, Al-Hikam can participate in broader humanistic education by showing how language can cultivate attention, humility, and ethical imagination. The point is not to universalize the text by erasing its Islamic identity; rather, it is to let its particularity become a site of careful intercultural learning.

Ethical and assessment considerations

The integration of Al-Hikam into language education requires ethical caution. A reflective text can be liberating when it helps learners name their experience, but it can become coercive when teachers treat one spiritual interpretation as the only acceptable psychological response. A humanistic pedagogy therefore distinguishes between textual analysis and personal confession. Learners may analyze pronouns, metaphors, modality, evaluation, or translation choices without being forced to disclose private religious or emotional experiences. This distinction matters because Al-Hikam often addresses the inner life directly. Direct address can produce powerful reflection, but it also requires a classroom climate of trust, consent, and interpretive plurality. In culturally mixed

classrooms, the text should be introduced as a historical, literary, ethical, and spiritual discourse rather than as an instrument for measuring a learner's piety.

Assessment should likewise protect the learner's dignity. The most appropriate assessment objects are observable language practices: the accuracy of translation justification, the clarity of discourse analysis, the ability to compare semantic alternatives, the quality of reflective writing as writing, and the capacity to participate respectfully in dialogue. Students should not be assessed for the depth of their spirituality, the correctness of their private emotions, or the degree to which they agree with a teacher's moral interpretation. A rubric for an Al-Hikam-based language task may include four domains: linguistic evidence, interpretive reasoning, dialogic respect, and reflective coherence. Linguistic evidence asks whether students can point to words, grammatical choices, metaphors, or discourse features in the aphorism. Interpretive reasoning asks whether students can explain why a translation or reading is plausible. Dialogic respect asks whether they can listen to alternative interpretations. Reflective coherence asks whether their written response develops a thoughtful relation between text and experience without being reduced to sentimentality.

This ethical frame also prevents the misuse of psychology. Terms such as self-regulation, hope, humility, and well-being should not be applied as diagnostic labels. The aim is not to classify learners but to expand their interpretive and expressive resources. Al-Hikam may help learners discuss anxiety, dependence on outcomes, fear of error, or the need for companionship, yet the classroom remains an educational setting rather than a therapeutic clinic. Teachers can invite reflective journaling, but they should provide options: analytical commentary, dialogic response, translation note, metaphor map, or personal reflection. Optionality is especially important for learners who may not wish to connect public language tasks with intimate spiritual meanings.

The same principle applies to multilingual work. Because Al-Hikam belongs to an Arabic-Islamic intellectual tradition, Arabic should be respected as more than a source code to be replaced by English or Indonesian. At the same time, translation can become a democratic space where learners examine how meaning moves across languages. For instance, al-nafs may be discussed as self, ego, soul, lower self, or psyche depending on context. None of these terms is neutral. Each opens and closes interpretive possibilities. A language education approach that foregrounds such lexical negotiations can teach learners that translation is an ethical act as much as a technical act.

Finally, classroom use should avoid romanticizing spiritual texts as automatically peaceful or universally transparent. Aphorisms are dense, sometimes paradoxical, and culturally situated. They require commentary, historical humility, and dialogic patience. Used carefully, however, this difficulty is pedagogically valuable. It invites learners to slow down, test assumptions, listen to others, and see language as a medium through which persons interpret themselves and the world. In this sense, assessment is not merely the measurement of output; it is the design of conditions in which language, reflection, and human dignity can meet.

CONCLUSION

Al-Hikam is a small text with large pedagogical possibilities. Its aphorisms are brief, but they create dense encounters among language, self, and meaning. This article has argued that selected aphorisms can be read as reflective discourse through four main features: aphoristic compression, dialogic address, metaphorical reframing, and evaluative self-positioning. These discourse features

do psychological work. They invite hope after failure, rest from anxious control, vigilance toward the self, freedom from public praise, wise companionship, and careful reception of language.

For language education, the value of Al-Hikam lies not in using it as a decorative moral supplement, but in approaching it as an authentic, linguistically rich, psychologically meaningful text. It can help students notice grammar as relation, metaphor as cognition, translation as interpretation, and discourse as formation. It can also help teachers design classrooms where learners are not reduced to scores but addressed as whole persons. In such a classroom, linguistic achievement and human formation are not treated as rival aims. Grammar, vocabulary, discourse, and pronunciation remain important, but they are taught through questions that also cultivate attention, patience, and ethical imagination. This is the humanistic promise of the text: it allows the study of language to remain rigorous while also becoming hospitable to the learner's inner life, especially when teachers combine textual accuracy, dialogic restraint, and compassionate assessment in multilingual and ethically diverse classrooms.

The proposed Reflective Linguistic Pedagogy model offers one way forward: encounter the text, notice its language, reflect on its psychological orientation, and transform reflection into communication. Future empirical work should test this model in real classrooms and adapt it to learner age, proficiency, institutional context, and religious diversity. If used with care, Al-Hikam can help language education recover a humane center: the formation of learners who read deeply, speak responsibly, translate humbly, and understand that language is not only a tool of expression but a path of self-knowledge.

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