

Transformative Islamic Religious Education and Developing Students' Character: An Analysis of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

This study explores the transformative application of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy within the framework of Islamic Religious Education. The issue addressed in this research arises from the need to reform Islamic education from a traditional, teacher-centred model toward one that cultivates critical thinking, social awareness, and moral character. The purpose of this study is to analyze how Freire's principles, particularly critical consciousness, dialogical learning, and empowerment can be implemented to strengthen students' reflective, moral, and participatory character development in alignment with Islamic values. Using a library research method, data were collected through a review of relevant literature, including books, journal articles, and previous studies discussing Freire's pedagogy and its adaptation in Islamic contexts. The findings indicate that integrating Freire's critical pedagogy into Islamic education strengthens students' reflective and moral reasoning while maintaining spiritual authenticity. This approach also fosters a democratic and participatory learning environment that encourages students to question, analyze, and transform their social realities in accordance with Qur'anic principles. However, challenges such as resistance to pedagogical change and the dominance of rote learning traditions remain significant. The study highlights the potential of critical pedagogy as a bridge between faith-based learning and contemporary educational reform, encouraging Islamic educators to cultivate learners who are both devout and critically conscious. The impact of this research lies in offering a critical-integrative framework that merges Islamic epistemology with Freirean pedagogy to promote transformative character education.

Keywords: Character Development, Critical Pedagogy, Islamic Education, Paulo Freire, Transformative Learning

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penerapan transformatif dari Pedagogi Kritis Paulo Freire dalam kerangka Pendidikan Agama Islam. Didasarkan kepada kebutuhan untuk mereformasi pendidikan Islam dengan pendekatan yang menumbuhkan kemampuan berpikir kritis, kesadaran sosial, dan pembentukan karakter moral. Tujuan penelitian ini menganalisis prinsip-prinsip Freire; kesadaran kritis, pembelajaran dialogis, dan pemberdayaan dapat diterapkan untuk memperkuat pengembangan karakter reflektif, moral, dan partisipatif peserta didik yang sejalan dengan nilai-nilai Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan mengumpulkan data dari berbagai literatur yang membahas pedagogi Freire dan adaptasinya dalam konteks pendidikan Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi pedagogi kritis Freire dalam pendidikan Islam dapat memperkuat kemampuan reflektif dan moral dan spiritual peserta didik. Pendekatan ini juga mendorong terciptanya lingkungan belajar yang demokratis dan partisipatif untuk bertanya, menganalisis, serta mentransformasikan realitas sosial sesuai dengan prinsip-prinsip Al-Qur'an. Namun, tantangan seperti resistensi terhadap perubahan pedagogis dan dominasi metode hafalan masih menjadi kendala utama. Pedagogi kritis memiliki potensi sebagai jembatan antara pembelajaran berbasis iman dan reformasi pendidikan kontemporer, guna membentuk peserta didik yang religius sekaligus kritis. Implikasi penelitian ini terletak pada tawaran kerangka kerja kritis-integratif yang menggabungkan epistemologi Islam dengan pedagogi Freire untuk mendorong pendidikan karakter yang transformatif, religius sekaligus kritis.

Kata Kunci: Pengembangan Karakter, Pedagogi Kritis, Pendidikan Islam, Paulo Freire, Pembelajaran Transformatif

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping individuals' moral character, intellectual capacity, and social awareness. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this function becomes even more significant because education is not merely a process of knowledge acquisition but also a means of moral and spiritual formation (Marlina & Nadirah, 2024). However, the contemporary practice of Islamic Religious Education often faces challenges in balancing cognitive learning with ethical and transformative outcomes (Zainuri et al., 2022). Many Islamic educational institutions continue to emphasize memorization and doctrinal transmission, resulting in limited engagement with critical thinking, social reflection, and contextual moral application (Karwadi, 2025). This study responds to these challenges by proposing a transformative model of IRE grounded in Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, aiming to enhance students' character development through dialogic and participatory learning processes.

The central issue addressed in this study concerns the limited transformative capacity of Islamic Religious Education in nurturing students' moral and intellectual character. In many contexts, Islamic Religious Education remains dominated by traditional approaches emphasizing rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction (Yusoff, 2025). Such models prioritize obedience and conformity rather than active engagement and moral reasoning. While this approach successfully preserves religious knowledge, it often fails to cultivate conscientious and reflective learners capable of responding critically to contemporary moral and social challenges (Macedo, 2022). This problem is particularly urgent in the modern educational landscape, where students are expected to navigate complex moral dilemmas, social inequalities, and global ethical issues. Without a transformative framework, Islamic education risks producing passive learners who may lack the ability to link their faith-based values with real-world action (Nelson & Chen, 2023). Therefore, a paradigm shift toward critical and reflective pedagogy is essential to ensure that Islamic Religious Education fulfils its holistic mission which cultivating students who are spiritually devout, intellectually open, and socially responsible (Cheney, 2020).

This study draws on Paulo Freire's theory of critical pedagogy, which conceptualizes education as a practice of freedom rather than domination. Freire rejected the "banking model" of education, wherein teachers deposit information into passive students, and instead proposed a model based on dialogue, reflection, and praxis. Through conscientization, the development of critical awareness learners become capable of understanding and transforming their social realities (Macedo, 2022). Freire's pedagogical model has influenced educational reform globally, emphasizing empowerment, participation, and democratic learning. Chen et al., (2025) demonstrated how Freire's dialogic pedagogy helped democratize higher education in Taiwan by promoting critical inquiry and participatory engagement. Similarly, Ninčević (2025) highlighted the effectiveness of Freirean pedagogy in empowering marginalized groups and fostering inclusive education. In Islamic educational contexts, Karwadi et al. (2025) found that integrating critical pedagogy in pre-service Islamic teacher training significantly improved students' critical thinking and engagement while preserving theological authenticity.

Despite these insights, limited research has examined the integration of Freire's pedagogy within Islamic Religious Education specifically. Sholeh et al., (2023) Traditional Islamic Religious Education tends to emphasize doctrinal mastery rather than dialogic engagement. Consequently, there remains a scholarly gap regarding how Freirean concepts; such as dialogue, reflection, and praxis can be contextualized to support the moral and intellectual growth of Muslim students (Mohammed, 2024). This study seeks to address this gap by developing a transformative framework that adapts Freire's critical pedagogy principles to the spiritual and ethical objectives of Islamic Religious Education.

The study lies in its systematic adaptation of Freire's critical pedagogy to Islamic Religious Education as a means of character formation. By integrating Freire's principles with Islamic educational values such as *Tarbiyah* (holistic nurturing) and *Ta'dib* (ethical formation), this study proposes a transformative Islamic Religious Education framework that redefines teaching as a

dialogic, reflective, and participatory process. The framework encourages learners to connect religious understanding with critical inquiry, fostering both moral integrity and intellectual autonomy.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how Freire's pedagogical concepts can be implemented within Islamic Religious Education classrooms to promote students' character development. It seeks to design educational practices that transform the classroom into a space for reflection, dialogue, and social consciousness aligning faith with ethical action. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute to the renewal of Islamic pedagogy, positioning it as a transformative force for personal and societal development. This study holds significant theoretical and practical implications for the advancement of Islamic education. Theoretically, it challenges the perceived incompatibility between Western critical pedagogy and Islamic pedagogical traditions by demonstrating their potential complementarity. Freire's emphasis on reflection, dialogue, and social justice resonates with Islamic concepts such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *shura* (consultation), and *adl* (justice), all of which advocate for education that is liberating, equitable, and morally grounded (Mohammed, 2024).

Practically, the research provides educators with concrete strategies to implement transformative teaching methods in Islamic Religious Education classrooms. It identifies pedagogical approaches that promote critical thinking and ethical reasoning while maintaining fidelity to Islamic values. Furthermore, it offers guidance for curriculum reform that aligns religious knowledge with social relevance, encouraging learners to apply their understanding of Islam toward constructive community engagement.

By addressing these dimensions, the study contributes to the global discourse on educational transformation and moral pedagogy. It underscores that Islamic education, when informed by Freire's principles of critical pedagogy, can become a powerful medium for spiritual, intellectual, and social growth. Ultimately, this study proposes a new paradigm for character education one that harmonizes the spiritual depth of Islamic teachings with the emancipatory potential of critical pedagogy.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative library research design that focused on analyzing theoretical and textual sources related to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and its relevance to Transformative Islamic Religious Education. The library research approach was selected to enable a comprehensive and critical examination of previous works, allowing the researcher to synthesize existing theories, concepts, and empirical findings into a coherent understanding of how Freirean pedagogy can be applied to character development within Islamic education.

The data in this study were entirely secondary, obtained from a variety of scholarly materials including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, conference papers, and official educational documents. These sources were selected for their strong relevance to three interconnected areas: Freire's critical pedagogy, transformative learning theory, and Islamic character education. To ensure academic rigor and credibility, data were collected from reputable databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect, covering publications between 2000 and 2025.

The data collection process was carried out through a systematic literature review, which involved identifying, selecting, and analyzing scholarly works that discuss the intersection between Freire's ideas and Islamic Religious Education. The researcher used specific keywords such as critical pedagogy, transformative Islamic education, Paulo Freire, and character development to locate relevant sources. Each selected text was carefully examined to extract significant theoretical arguments, conceptual insights, and findings that could contribute to the development of a transformative educational model grounded in Islamic values.

The data consisted of qualitative textual information, including conceptual discussions, theoretical explanations, and empirical observations presented by earlier researchers. These

materials were interpreted contextually to reveal the relationships between Freire's principles such as dialogue, reflection, and critical awareness and the aims of Islamic Religious Education in cultivating moral character and ethical consciousness.

The data analysis followed a content analysis approach, involving several stages: data reduction, data organization, and interpretation. During data reduction, the researcher identified the most relevant concepts and theories aligned with the research objectives. The organization phase involved categorizing themes related to Freire's pedagogy and transformative Islamic character education. Finally, in the interpretation stage, the researcher synthesized these themes to formulate a conceptual framework demonstrating how Freire's critical pedagogy can be integrated into Islamic education to foster reflective, independent, and morally grounded learners.

Results

The findings of this study reveal that Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy holds significant transformative potential for Islamic Religious Education, particularly in reshaping how teachers and students engage in the learning process. The analysis, derived from extensive literature and theoretical synthesis, identifies two major aspects: (1) the key principles of Freire's critical pedagogy, (2) Its implications for educational reform in Islamic contexts. Each of these dimensions provides valuable insights into how critical pedagogy can be adapted within Islamic educational frameworks to foster character development, intellectual empowerment, and moral consciousness among students.

Key Principles of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Education

At the heart of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy lies the concept of *conscientização* or critical consciousness, a process through which individuals become aware of the socio-political and moral realities shaping their lives and develop the capacity to act upon them. Freire opposed the traditional banking model of education, where teachers "deposit" knowledge into passive students, likening the process to an oppressive mechanism that suppresses creativity, agency, and dialogue. In contrast, his problem-posing model envisions education as a mutual process of inquiry in which both teachers and students learn from one another through dialogue and reflection (Cowden et al., 2020).

Freire's pedagogy positions education as an act of liberation rather than domination. He believed that learners should not merely absorb knowledge but interrogate it, relate it to their lived experiences, and apply it toward social transformation (Knijnik, 2021). This dialogical relationship between teacher and learner redefines the classroom as a participatory space where questioning, collaboration, and social awareness coexist (Misiaszek, 2022). Freire emphasized that "to speak a true word is to transform the world," underscoring the transformative power of language, communication, and reflection in education (Siqueira & Gimenez, 2021).

Moreover, Freire's pedagogy integrates curriculum design, instructional methods, and moral purpose into a unified system of praxis a continuous cycle of reflection and action. Through praxis, students are encouraged to examine issues of justice, inequality, and ethics within their local contexts. In this way, critical pedagogy becomes not only an academic endeavor but a moral and social mission (Pietersen, 2022). Freire's model thus aligns closely with the Islamic concept of *'ilm* (knowledge) that is inseparable from *'amal* (action). Both traditions view learning as a process aimed at achieving moral integrity, social justice, and the betterment of humanity.

Scholars such as Giroux (2024) and Altinyelken (2021) expanded Freire's framework to include democratic participation and empowerment, emphasizing education's role in cultivating socially responsible citizens. The Freirean approach also calls for the integration of voice especially the voices of the marginalized into classroom discourse, encouraging learners to challenge power structures that perpetuate inequality. This democratization of education resonates with the Islamic ideal of *shūrā* (consultation) and the principle of justice (*'adl*), both of which advocate for participatory engagement and the equitable treatment of all individuals. In summary, the key

principles of Freire's critical pedagogy; dialogue, reflection, praxis, and empowerment provide a foundation for reimagining Islamic Religious Education as a transformative process. By merging critical consciousness with moral awareness, educators can nurture students who are intellectually reflective, socially engaged, and spiritually grounded.

Critical Pedagogy on Teaching and Learning in Islamic Education

A growing body of research conducted in Indonesia, Malaysia, and other Muslim-majority countries demonstrates that Paulo Freire's emancipatory framework can be harmoniously integrated with Islamic pedagogical and epistemological values (Karwadi, 2025). Within these contexts, educators have adapted Freirean principles to strengthen students' Islamic identity while simultaneously cultivating their critical reasoning skills, social consciousness, and moral responsibility.

A notable innovation emerging from this synthesis is the Critical-Integrative Pedagogy Model, which was developed through field research conducted in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions. It provides a comprehensive framework that bridges the principles of Freirean critical pedagogy with Islamic educational philosophy (Karwadi, 2025). It encompasses four interrelated components: epistemological integration, pedagogical transformation, cultural contextualization, and social transformation. Each of these elements aligns Freire's ideas of humanization, critical awareness, and liberation with the ethical foundations of Islam.

Epistemological integration

Epistemological integration merges critical reflection with the Islamic epistemology of *tafaqquh fi al-din* (deep understanding of religion), emphasizing both faith and intellect. Epistemological integration combines Freire's concept of critical reflection with the Islamic epistemology of *tafaqquh fi al-din*, or deep understanding of religion. This integration underscores the unity between faith (iman) and intellect ('aql), encouraging learners to pursue knowledge not merely as an intellectual endeavor but as a spiritual act of understanding God's creation. Through this synthesis, learning is redefined as a reflective and transformative process that strengthens both spiritual and rational faculties (Karwadi, 2025).

Epistemological integration represents the merging of Freire's concept of critical reflection with the Islamic epistemology of *tafaqquh fi al-din* (deep understanding of religion), emphasizing a balanced relationship between faith (iman) and intellect ('aql). This approach views the pursuit of knowledge as both an intellectual and spiritual endeavor, where understanding is not confined to cognitive processes but extends to recognizing divine wisdom in all aspects of creation. In this framework, critical reflection encourages learners to question, analyze, and internalize knowledge through a lens of faith, transforming education into an act of worship and self-awareness. Consequently, learning becomes a reflective and transformative process that nurtures rational and spiritual faculties simultaneously, aligning human intellect with the ultimate purpose of understanding and serving God.

Pedagogical transformation

Pedagogical transformation shifts the classroom from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, encouraging dialogue and collaborative inquiry. Pedagogical transformation, marks a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches (Razzak, 2020). Drawing on Freire's notion of problem-posing education, teachers function as facilitators who guide learners through dialogue, reflection, and collaborative inquiry. This mirrors the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) dialogical teaching method, which emphasized questioning, discussion, and moral reasoning rather than rote memorization or coercive authority (Santos, 2024).

Pedagogical transformation signifies a fundamental shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, where the classroom becomes a space for dialogue, reflection, and collaborative inquiry. Drawing on Paulo Freire's concept of problem-posing education, this approach rejects the traditional "banking model" in which teachers simply deposit information into passive learners. Instead, teachers act as facilitators who guide students to think critically, question assumptions,

and construct knowledge through meaningful interaction. This paradigm closely mirrors the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) dialogical teaching method, which emphasized questioning, discussion, and moral reasoning over rote memorization or authoritarian instruction. Both Freire's framework and the Prophet's pedagogical model highlight education as a process of mutual engagement and moral development, where learning transcends mere knowledge acquisition to nurture intellectual autonomy and ethical awareness.

Cultural contextualization

Cultural contextualization ensures that the adoption of Freirean pedagogy respects local religious and cultural norms. The third component, cultural contextualization, ensures that the application of Freirean pedagogy respects local religious and cultural norms (Assumpção & Castral, 2024). By embedding critical pedagogy within the moral and social framework of Islamic culture, educators prevent potential conflicts between Western critical theories and indigenous educational traditions. This localized adaptation reinforces the idea that critical pedagogy must be both context-sensitive and value-based (Ramdhani et al., 2023). As Assumpção and Castral (2024) note, contextualized pedagogy fosters harmony between critical thought and cultural integrity, while Ramdhani et al. (2023) emphasize that education grounded in moral values sustains its transformative power without compromising local traditions.

Cultural contextualization refers to the adaptation of Freirean pedagogy to align with local religious and cultural values, ensuring that educational transformation remains respectful and relevant to its context. This approach recognizes that while Freire's critical pedagogy promotes reflection and social empowerment, its direct application in Islamic educational settings requires alignment with the moral and spiritual dimensions of Islam. By embedding critical pedagogy within the ethical and social framework of Islamic culture, educators prevent potential conflicts between Western critical theories and indigenous pedagogical traditions. Such localization reinforces the notion that critical pedagogy must be both context-sensitive and value-oriented, allowing learners to engage in critical inquiry while remaining grounded in their faith and cultural identity.

Social transformation

Social transformation emphasizes that learning must lead to moral action and community engagement, an idea closely tied to the Islamic concept of *khairu ummah* (the best community, promoting virtue and preventing vice). Social transformation emphasizes that education should inspire learners to contribute to moral and social reform. This principle resonates strongly with the Islamic concept of *khairu ummah*, the best community that promotes virtue (*ma'ruf*) and prevents vice (*munkar*). Within this paradigm, learning is not confined to the acquisition of theoretical knowledge but extends to the practical embodiment of justice (*'adl*), compassion, and community service (Weiss, 2024).

Empirical evidence from the implementation of the CIPM reveals that the integration of critical pedagogy into Islamic education enhances not only students' cognitive and analytical skills but also their spiritual, ethical, and emotional intelligence. Learners exposed to dialogical and reflective instruction display higher motivation, empathy, and moral reasoning (Karwadi et al., 2025). Rather than undermining religious faith, Freire's pedagogical principles provide students with tools to interpret, critique, and actualize Islamic values in diverse sociocultural contexts. This approach transforms traditional Islamic learning often characterized by memorization into a dynamic process of critical inquiry and moral reflection (Wilcock, 2020).

Furthermore, research suggests that perceived tensions between Freire's critical pedagogy and Islamic education often arise from conceptual misunderstandings rather than fundamental contradictions (Torres, 2021). Freire's call for liberation from oppression parallels Islam's enduring commitment to justice (*al-'adl*) and resistance to tyranny (*zulm*). Similarly, the dialogical process central to Freire's theory reflects the Prophet's educational method, which emphasized consultation (*shura*), empathy, and ethical dialogue.

The intersection of Freirean and Islamic pedagogical traditions reveals a powerful synergy between critical reflection and spiritual formation. The integration of these two paradigms

contributes to the development of holistic education that nurtures faith, intellect, and character. Through such an approach, Islamic education in the 21st century can produce believers who are not only devout and morally grounded but also critically aware, socially responsible, and intellectually engaged in transforming society in accordance with Islamic ethical principles.

The findings of this study suggest that the integration of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy into Islamic Religious Education represents a paradigm shift from a transmissive to a transformative model of learning. Interpretatively, this synthesis reveals that education within Islamic contexts can no longer be confined to the mere transmission of doctrinal knowledge; rather, it must evolve into a dialogical process that nurtures *tafaqquh fi al-din* (deep understanding of religion) through reflection, reasoning, and moral engagement. The reinterpretation of Freire's concept of *conscientização* (critical consciousness) within an Islamic epistemological framework highlights that genuine knowledge (*'ilm*) must lead to moral action (*'amal*), thereby aligning intellectual inquiry with spiritual purpose. This convergence demonstrates that critical pedagogy does not contradict Islamic education but rather enriches it by reintroducing its ethical and emancipatory dimensions.

From an implication standpoint, the study underscores that adopting Freire's pedagogy in Islamic educational institutions has both philosophical and practical consequences. Philosophically, it redefines the purpose of education; from indoctrination to humanization and reaffirms Islam's long-standing commitment to justice (*'adl*), reflection (*tafakkur*), and consultation (*shūrā*). Practically, it calls for reforms in curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom interaction. Teachers must transition from being authoritarian transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of dialogue who encourage critical reflection while safeguarding theological authenticity. This pedagogical transformation requires institutional commitment to professional development programs that emphasize reflective teaching, moral reasoning, and contextualized dialogue. Furthermore, such integration can strengthen students' cognitive, emotional, and ethical intelligence, producing graduates who are both spiritually grounded and socially responsive.

The research findings, the transformative process of integrating Freirean and Islamic pedagogical paradigms can be depicted as a four-dimensional model of Critical-Integrative Pedagogy (CIPM); 1) Epistemological Integration: aligning critical reflection with *tafaqquh fi al-din* to unite faith (*iman*) and intellect (*'aql*). 2) Pedagogical Transformation: shifting from teacher-centered to student-centered learning that mirrors prophetic dialogical methods. 3) Cultural Contextualization: embedding critical pedagogy within Islamic moral and cultural frameworks to preserve identity and authenticity. 4) Social Transformation: linking learning outcomes with community engagement, justice, and ethical responsibility. In practical visualization, this relationship can be represented as follows:

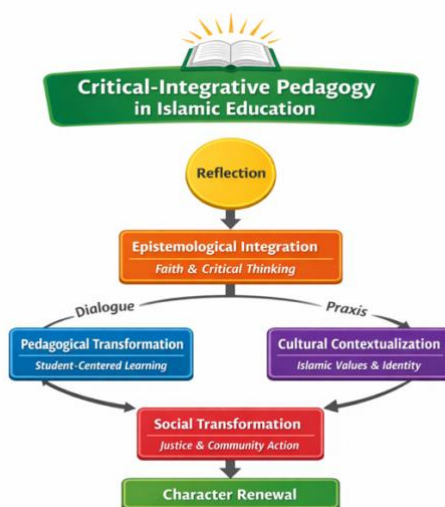


Figure 1. four-dimensional model of Critical-Integrative Pedagogy (CIPM)

This conceptual model illustrates that the adoption of Freire's principles within Islamic Religious Education generates a transformative learning cycle—beginning with reflective awareness, proceeding through dialogical inquiry and contextual adaptation, and culminating in moral and social transformation. Overall, the study implies that integrating Freire's critical pedagogy within Islamic education has the potential to cultivate *muta'allimūn* (learners) who are not only intellectually critical and morally conscious but also spiritually steadfast and socially engaged. By merging the emancipatory spirit of Freire with the ethical foundation of Islam, Islamic education can emerge as a powerful agent of *tajdid* (renewal) and *iṣlāḥ* (reform) in shaping a just and reflective Muslim society.

Discussion

The final dimension of the study concerns the implications of Freire's critical pedagogy for educational reform in Islamic contexts. The integration of Freirean thought into Islamic education challenges educators to rethink not only classroom practices but also the philosophical foundations of education itself. Freire's critique of the "banking model" of education is relevant to Islamic educational institutions that still depend heavily on one-way instruction, memorization, and unquestioned obedience. It invites reflection on how Islamic education can move beyond dogmatic instruction to become a catalyst for social and moral transformation (Razzak, 2020). Islamic education should not form passive recipients of doctrine. It should form reflective, morally responsible, and socially engaged learners who can connect Islamic values with the realities of contemporary life (Altinyelken, 2021).

Freire's vision of education as a liberating act parallels Islam's conception of knowledge as a path to enlightenment and service. Both emphasize the empowerment of learners as active agents of change who are responsible for improving their communities (Foley, 2021). In this sense, the adoption of critical pedagogy in Islamic settings can support the creation of democratic learning spaces where students are encouraged to discuss, question, and reflect on real-world issues considering Islamic teachings. This approach aligns with the Qur'anic principle of *tafakkur* (deep contemplation), which calls believers to engage intellectually with divine revelation and worldly phenomena (Mohammed, 2024). Freire views education as a liberating process that enables learners to read both the word and the world. In Islamic education, this idea can be connected to knowledge as a means of spiritual enlightenment, moral refinement, and social service. Knowledge in Islam does not only aim at cognitive mastery. It also develops ethical awareness, justice, and responsibility before God and society. Therefore, Freire's concept of conscientization can enrich Islamic education by helping students understand the social, economic, political, and cultural forces that shape their lives. This position is supported by Fauzi and Usman, who argue that Freire's praxis, democracy, and critical consciousness can help students connect Islamic knowledge with concrete action and social reality (Fauzi & Usman, 2024).

At a structural level, applying Freire's principles requires educational reform that values humanization and dialogue over rigid conformity. Islamic schools and universities can adopt participatory curricula that promote cross-disciplinary inquiry, linking religious studies with social sciences, ethics, and environmental education (Aslan, 2022). This interdisciplinary approach would equip students with the cognitive and moral tools necessary to address complex global challenges. Furthermore, Freire's emphasis on the culture of silence the tendency of oppressed groups to internalize their marginalization can be applied to reform Islamic educational discourse, encouraging open dialogue on issues such as gender equality, pluralism, and interfaith understanding. From a Freirean perspective, this condition reflects educational hegemony because it shapes how society understands the value and position of religious education. Therefore, Islamic educational reform should not only improve classroom practice. It should also challenge the structural separation between religious knowledge and modern disciplines (Baedowi, 2023).

At the classroom level, Freire's pedagogy encourages democratic learning spaces where students can ask questions, discuss social problems, and reflect on real-world issues through

Islamic ethical reasoning. This approach aligns with the Qur'anic principle of tafakkur, which encourages deep reflection on revelation, nature, and human experience. In this model, the teacher does not function only as a transmitter of fixed answers. The teacher acts as a facilitator, moral guide, and dialogical partner who helps students develop critical understanding. Students are not treated as empty containers. They are recognized as active subjects who bring experience, questions, and moral agency into the learning process (Freire, 1970; Radino & Mubarok, 2025).

A relevant example of such reform can be found in Northern Nigeria, where educators applied Freire's pedagogy to Al-Majiri and Qur'anic schools (Mohammed, 2024). The integration of critical pedagogy encouraged marginalized learners to question oppressive social structures while remaining faithful to Islamic moral principles. The initiative resulted in increased community participation, social awareness, and civic responsibility among students (Khalil, 2024). These outcomes illustrate the transformative capacity of Freirean pedagogy when adapted to culturally and theologically grounded contexts.

The implications of Freire's pedagogy also extend to teacher education and professional development. Training Islamic educators in critical pedagogy can foster reflective teaching practices that emphasize empathy, dialogue, and moral reasoning. Teachers must be equipped to handle controversial discussions sensitively, maintaining theological integrity while encouraging open inquiry. In this way, critical pedagogy can become a tool for *tajdid* (renewal) within Islamic education; revitalizing its intellectual traditions and ensuring its relevance in the modern era. In this sense, Freirean critical pedagogy can become a tool for *tajdid*, or renewal, within Islamic education. *Tajdid* does not mean abandoning Islamic tradition. It means revitalizing Islamic intellectual resources so they can respond to changing historical and social conditions. Critical pedagogy can support this renewal by encouraging teachers and students to engage critically, ethically, and constructively with modern challenges. It helps Islamic education move beyond passive religiosity toward active ethical engagement. It also shifts learning from memorization to understanding, from obedience to responsible reflection, and from isolated religious instruction to social transformation (Fauzi & Usman, 2024).

Ultimately, Freire's critical pedagogy offers an important pathway for developing an Islamic education system that is transformative, dialogical, and faithful to its spiritual mission. It encourages a shift from passive religiosity to active ethical engagement, from memorization to understanding, and from obedience to critical reflection. This approach does not dilute Islamic values but reinforces them by fostering awareness, justice, and compassion the core attributes of an educated believer. These qualities are central to the formation of an educated believer who can serve God, society, and humanity with knowledge and moral integrity. When adapted carefully to Islamic contexts, critical pedagogy can help Islamic education become both spiritually grounded and socially transformative.

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, when contextualized within Islamic principles, provides a powerful framework for educational transformation. Its core ideas; dialogue, critical reflection, praxis, and empowerment resonate deeply with Islamic educational values centered on knowledge, justice, and community service. While challenges persist due to traditional pedagogical structures and institutional constraints, the opportunities for renewal and innovation are substantial. Freire's critical pedagogy can help Islamic education evolve into a dynamic system that not only imparts religious knowledge but also cultivates character, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Through this integration, Islamic education can better prepare students to become morally conscious, critically aware, and socially engaged individuals' true agents of transformation in their societies.

The synthesis of Freire's pedagogy and Islamic educational philosophy results in a paradigm shift from a teacher-centered, memorization-based approach toward a student-centered, dialogical, and transformative model of learning. This integration not only enhances students'

intellectual engagement but also reinforces spiritual integrity and moral reasoning. The study's findings have significant implications for policy, pedagogy, and curriculum reform. Islamic educational institutions are encouraged to adopt the Critical-Integrative Pedagogy Model (CIPM), which bridges Freirean principles with Islamic values. This model conceptualizes education as a dynamic interplay of reflection, dialogue, praxis, and transformation, aligning the pursuit of knowledge ('ilm) with ethical action ('amal). By positioning Islamic education within this critical-reflective paradigm, the study offers a novel lens for understanding how faith-based education can remain relevant and transformative in the 21st century.

Further empirical research is recommended to test and refine the Critical-Integrative Pedagogy Model (CIPM) in diverse Islamic educational contexts. Longitudinal studies could explore how Freirean-inspired pedagogies influence students' moral reasoning, civic participation, and critical thinking skills over time. Comparative analyses between regions or educational levels may also illuminate how cultural and institutional factors mediate the application of critical pedagogy in Islamic settings.

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