



## Transformation Through Non-Formal Education: Implementing Paulo Freire's Critical Values

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to evaluate Paulo Freire's theory of education for liberation within the context of non-formal education in Indonesia. Freire's theory, emphasizing the importance of critical consciousness, dialogue, and the active role of learners in the educational process, serves as a conceptual foundation for designing emancipatory educational practices, particularly for marginalized groups. Employing a literature review method, this research examines studies relevant to Freire's ideas and their implementation in non-formal education, especially community-based approaches oriented towards community empowerment. The analysis reveals that applying Freire's critical education principles can strengthen learners' positions as subjects in the learning process and promote social transformation through contextual and participatory education. These findings recommend the development of non-formal education models that are more reflective, dialogical, and rooted in the learners' social realities, as efforts toward transformative and inclusive education.

**Keywords:** *Social Transformation, Inclusive Education, Paulo Freire, Non-formal Education.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The "Golden Indonesia 2045" vision represents the nation's aspiration to become sovereign, advanced, just, and prosperous by its centennial independence in 2045. Achieving this vision necessitates comprehensive transformation across various sectors, notably through the development of human resources. To cultivate competent and competitive human resources, an adaptive and innovative educational transformation is imperative (Lase, D., Waruwu, E., Zebua, H. P., & Ndraha, 2024). However, Indonesia faces significant challenges in human resources development, including rapid societal changes and uneven development, leading to pronounced social disparities. These disparities profoundly impact the education sector, which is pivotal in realizing the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision.

Indonesia's education system confronts serious implementation challenges, such as poverty, discrimination, ethnic backgrounds, and geographical issues. Additionally, rigid curricula in compulsory education from elementary to high school levels pose challenges, rendering educational content often misaligned with societal needs. This aligns with Pratama et al. (2022), who assert that Indonesia's

education system has yet to fully adapt to societal developments and needs, as evidenced by the misalignment between educational curricula and labor market demands and technological advancements. Therefore, Indonesia requires an education system capable of delivering curricula that align with societal needs.

One pertinent approach is inclusive, community-based education. Inclusive education ensures that every individual has the opportunity to exercise their rights according to their needs, fostering social tolerance. Its core principle is that all children have equal rights to education, prohibiting any form of discrimination due to differences or deficiencies. Inclusive education not only promises to meet needs but also ensures active participation from all learners. Concurrently, community-based education employs a community empowerment approach, enabling local communities to actively participate in delivering education relevant to their needs and contexts (Robinson, K., & Aronica, 2016). This indicates that inclusive, community-based education holds potential in creating equitable, responsive, and transformative learning environments, reaching all societal groups, including those underserved by formal education.

In this context, Paulo Freire's grand theory offers relevant insights into education. Freire's concept of education as a practice of liberation (praxis), his critique of the "banking model" of education—which views educators as depositors and learners as recipients—his emphasis on dialogue as the foundation of the learning process, and his concept of critical consciousness (conscientization) and the role of the oppressed as agents of change provide a robust conceptual framework for understanding how education can drive social transformation (Freire, 2019). Freire's teaching method, known as critical pedagogy, involves instructional strategies based on students' knowledge, backgrounds, experiences, surrounding situations, and learning objectives determined collaboratively by learners and educators.

This scholarly article aims to explore the contribution of Paulo Freire's grand theory in understanding and promoting social transformation through inclusive, community-based education within the context of non-formal education. Specifically, this literature study seeks to identify how key concepts in Freire's theory can provide philosophical and practical foundations for designing and implementing non-formal education programs that are not only inclusive in embracing diversity but also transformative in empowering learners and communities to address social injustices.

This research is expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the understanding of Freire's theory application in inclusive and non-formal education contexts. Practically, the findings aim to offer valuable insights for non-formal education practitioners, policymakers, civil society organizations, and communities in developing and implementing more effective and impactful inclusive, community-based education programs to achieve sustainable social transformation. The study's limitation lies in its focus on analyzing literature relevant to Paulo Freire's theory, inclusive education, and community-based education, particularly within the non-formal education context, without conducting empirical data collection.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a literature review method. Data were obtained from various library-based sources, including documents, books, notes, research reports,

and other relevant materials. According to Arikunto (2019), a literature review is a data collection technique that involves gathering information from books, newspapers, and other forms of literature to construct theoretical frameworks. In this context, the literature review was conducted by tracing and analyzing previous studies to be further developed. The review encompasses a number of interrelated theories, supported by credible data sourced from textbooks, scientific journals, and official documents issued by government and institutional bodies. The findings were derived by compiling and processing data from multiple references, which were then organized to generate new insights.

As stated by Arikunto (2019), data collection in literature review studies is carried out through documentation of secondary data obtained from survey institutions, media reports on actual events, and prior research findings. Data analysis procedures refer to the steps outlined by Bungin (2022), namely: (1) collecting data through documentation studies; (2) conducting data reduction, which involves selecting, simplifying, and transforming raw data from field notes. This step includes summarizing information, identifying key themes, and filtering out irrelevant data; and (3) presenting the data in descriptive form to facilitate interpretation and conclusion drawing. The results were then described and interpreted to present factual insights, address the research questions, and draw the main conclusions of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Paulo Freire's Thought

Paulo Freire's educational philosophy is rooted in the assumption that education is a process of liberation from oppressive systems. Consequently, education is never free from the political interests of those in power within a regime. Based on this assumption, Freire proposed that education should serve as a means of emancipation, fostering the development of critical consciousness in learners. Education, therefore, is a vehicle for producing awareness aimed at restoring humanity following processes of dehumanization. For education to be liberatory, it must be responsive to issues of social injustice and must position learners as subjects—rather than objects—of the educational process. Thus, the emergence of critical consciousness is essential within the learner's personality.

In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire critiques conventional educational practices, which he refers to as the "banking model of education," where students are treated as passive recipients of information. As an alternative, he advocates for a dialogical model of education that treats learners as active subjects capable of understanding their social realities and engaging in social transformation. According to Thompson and Bebbington (as cited in (Widianingsih, 2021)), Freire's concept of education encompasses three primary roles within any societal context. First, education serves as a vital component in the process of acquiring knowledge. Second, education can function as a tool of oppression when it is used to maintain disparities in knowledge ownership or merely to keep individuals in their "place," thus hindering progress. Third, education holds transformative potential, as it enables learners to shape their worldview, which in turn motivates them to pursue social change.

In the context of Indonesia's education system, Gultom (2024) highlights that signs of oppressive education—as criticized by Freire—are still evident. This study emphasizes the need for emancipatory education and the integration of critical

consciousness into the national curriculum. Freire's approach is particularly relevant for addressing the dominance of top-down educational systems that limit empowerment. Further research by Salim Hani & Ilham (2021) indicates that integrating emancipatory values into the curriculum can enhance student participation and social awareness regarding real-life issues. This aligns with the national educational mission to develop learners into individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, independent, and socially responsible.

The application of Freire's critical pedagogy principles within the national education system can contribute to strengthening civil society. Abidin (2022) asserts that liberatory-oriented education has the potential to enhance the public's capacity to actively participate in democratic and social life. Thus, education becomes not merely a means of knowledge transmission but also a transformative tool for empowering communities against structural injustices. However, implementing liberatory education in Indonesia faces several challenges, including resistance to curriculum changes, limited educational resources, and the lack of educator competencies in applying dialogical methods. Therefore, collaboration among government, educational institutions, and communities is necessary to cultivate a learning climate that promotes critical consciousness and active student engagement in social life.

Freire conceptualized emancipatory education based on his view of human nature. He believed that human reality is not static but a continuous process of becoming. This process, known as "becoming," entails human beings shaping themselves through their relationship with the world. In Freire's view, humans are inherently directed toward transforming the world; their existence is not passive but involves active engagement, or praxis. Human beings are on an unfinished historical journey and are called to become subjects capable of understanding and giving meaning to the world. The relationship between humans and the world involves challenges and limitations; thus, to fully "become human," one must actively engage in the process of humanization through liberatory political action.

In his philosophy of education, Freire emphasizes the importance of dialogue as the embodiment of an education that addresses real-life problems through codification and decodification, discussions, and cultural actions. Consequently, the banking model of education is gradually replaced by liberatory, problem-posing education.

Liberatory education transforms rigid learning activities into humanistic learning experiences. Freire views education as a form of social transformation that replaces anti-dialogue with the freedom to engage in argumentation. Thus, the resulting educational system fosters openness and responsiveness within society toward emerging problems.

Education must be directed toward sustainable action that incorporates reflection and praxis. Freire (2019) posits that human nature is not merely about "being-in-the-world" but also "being-with-the-world." This perspective renders Freire's theory highly relevant to the current state of education in 21st-century Indonesia, which faces increasingly complex challenges in the era of rapid technological advancement. Many members of future generations are still deprived of educational opportunities due to social and economic barriers. Freire's focus—both intellectually and in direct action—on marginalized groups, such as residents of urban slums in Chile and Brazil, peasant farmers, and other structurally disadvantaged communities, underscores their status as primary subjects of

education who deserve appropriate attention and resources (Freire, 2019).

The awareness that many societal groups still lack access to education should motivate the government to implement policies that address these gaps and encourage private entities to participate in educating marginalized populations. Equal access to education is critical, as increasing inequality in access to knowledge perpetuates a “culture of silence,” allowing the more educated to exploit the weak and moving the nation further away from its ideals of social justice. Additionally, today’s competitive technological landscape has bred pragmatism, including corrupt practices, environmental degradation, and consumerism.

To address 21st-century challenges, education in Indonesia must cultivate creative individuals capable of producing high-value innovations in managing natural resources (not merely exploiting them), critically and positively responding to technological development, identifying social and environmental injustices, articulating their arguments, and eliminating discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, race, or social group. The ideal characteristics of Indonesian citizens—supported by the demographic strengths of today’s millennial learners—can be cultivated through consistent educational practices. According to Freire, this involves dialogical and dialectical processes in which learners become critically aware of their humanity, express themselves freely, continue to create, and understand and resist social and economic injustices (Fauzi, 2021).

### **Non-Formal Education**

Non-formal education refers to a type of education designed to equip learners with knowledge, skills, and experiences relevant to their life needs. It extends educational access to the broader society, particularly vulnerable groups who often face barriers to formal education. Non-formal education enables marginalized populations to fully realize their right to education in a manner tailored to their needs, empowering them to live independently. Fundamentally, schools are temporary educational institutions, whereas education itself should encompass all aspects of human life.

The broad concept of non-formal education—unbounded by age limits or rigid curricula—necessitates sensitivity to societal issues and community needs. With such sensitivity, non-formal education can develop curricula, methods, and strategies that are both feasible and relevant in addressing community demands. This aligns with the perspective of Philip H. Coombs, who asserted that non-formal education encompasses all organized educational activities conducted outside the formal system—whether standalone or part of a broader program—aimed at delivering educational services to specific target groups to achieve particular learning objectives (in Af et al., 2022).

As a community-based educational approach, non-formal education contrasts significantly with formal schooling. It is characterized by greater flexibility, learner-centered instruction, participatory methods, and culturally, geographically, and resource-sensitive content. These features position non-formal education as a vehicle for delivering life skills education applicable to everyday living.

In responding to various societal issues, non-formal education must implement appropriate methodologies, including community-based approaches. Community-based non-formal education enables responsiveness to the inclusive and specific needs of diverse groups. This approach involves communities in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes, thereby embodying the

principle of “from the community, by the community, for the community” (Toni, Karim & Bahari, 2024).

Community education plays a crucial role in realizing inclusive education. This is consistent with the view of Thomas Hehir (in Toni, Karim & Bahari, 2024), who defines inclusive education as a systematic and collaborative process for creating effective learning environments for all learners by accommodating differences in learning styles, interests, and developmental stages, while maintaining high standards for everyone. Through active community participation in the learning process, community-based approaches offer effective means for creating inclusive, equitable, and accessible education across all social strata.

### **Paulo Freire’s Theory in Non-Formal Education**

Non-formal education holds strong relevance to Paulo Freire’s educational theory. Freire’s concept of liberatory education, which includes all social groups—especially vulnerable populations—aligns with the core principles of non-formal education. His critique of the “banking model” of formal education reveals its detrimental effects, whereby knowledge is deposited into passive learners, perpetuating dynamics of power and oppression. Freire’s slogan, “Education for the oppressed as a whole, struggling relentlessly to reclaim their humanity,” conveys a deep message when applied to education. Vulnerable groups often face social stigma, which restricts their access to education. Discriminatory practices in education, such as preferential treatment toward certain groups and neglect of marginalized populations, further decrease their motivation to learn.

As a learner-centered system, non-formal education is tasked with developing individuals who are not only autonomous and skilled but also critical thinkers. Freire’s theory provides a framework for designing educational programs that are flexible yet purposeful, helping communities advance and assume responsibility for societal transformation and personal development. The strategies of non-formal education—emphasizing learner participation and integrating learners’ own knowledge and experiences—form the basis for constructing liberatory curricula that are applicable and relevant to marginalized groups.

Implementing Freire’s theory in non-formal education strengthens the role of learners—not merely as recipients of knowledge, but as educators of themselves, shaped through personal experience and insight. With its broad scope, high flexibility, and curricula designed based on observed needs and community challenges, non-formal education promotes a participatory and socially responsive learning system.

In the 21st century, Freire’s ideas and concepts remain highly relevant to addressing educational challenges, particularly those arising from rapid technological change. Guiding the use of technology toward positive outcomes can help individuals think critically and respond effectively to the widespread dissemination of social issues. Furthermore, education must become more responsive in preparing communities to be innovative and creative in managing resources. In this regard, the government plays a vital role in expanding access to education. Ensuring equal access is essential to prevent educational inequality, where only certain groups benefit from learning opportunities while others are denied their rights—effectively facing educational oppression.

Non-formal education, which aims to prepare learners with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary for life, employs a community-oriented approach.

This vision aligns with Freire's belief that education should not merely transmit knowledge from teacher to learner, but rather serve as a catalyst for critical awareness—liberating people from ignorance and powerlessness. Freire conceptualizes education as a means of empowering individuals to better understand social realities, critique them, and take humane and just actions. This form of education positions learners not as passive objects but as active, reflective subjects who possess the agency to shape their own futures.

In the context of non-formal education, Freire's theory provides a strong conceptual foundation for understanding how education can serve as a driver of social transformation. He emphasizes the importance of community-based educational approaches in fostering participatory learning and nurturing critical consciousness, enabling learners to become active subjects in the learning process. Relevant education in non-formal settings allows communities to collectively identify their problems and seek solutions through active engagement and concrete action. Thus, non-formal education goes beyond knowledge transmission—it cultivates social awareness, empowers individuals and marginalized groups, and fosters more just and inclusive social change.

## CONCLUSION

Community-based inclusive education holds significant potential for driving social transformation, particularly through approaches that position learners as active subjects in the educational process. Paulo Freire's concept of education as a practice of liberation offers a relevant conceptual framework within the context of non-formal education, especially for marginalized groups. Freire's critical approach—which emphasizes dialogue, critical consciousness, and action-reflection—provides both a philosophical foundation and practical strategies for implementing contextual, participatory, and transformative education.

In addressing the educational challenges of 21st-century Indonesia—such as unequal access, discrimination, and the pragmatic consequences of technological advancement—the application of Freirean principles becomes increasingly urgent. Therefore, it is essential for the government, education practitioners, and communities to develop non-formal education models that are dialogical, reflective, and grounded in the social realities of society, in order to establish an educational system that is just, inclusive, and sustainable.

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