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## Transformative Critical Education: Reinterpreting Education

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**Abstract:** *Learning is understood as the process of interpreting an experience or action based on the renewal or revision of previously owned understanding. Transformation in learning occurs in the perspective of values, frame of reference, and mindset. This paper aims to explore the concept of transformative critical education as a reinterpretation of education. This paper uses a literature study approach. The results of the study show three basic principles in transformative critical education; first, the principle of Liberalization. Second, the principle of Humanization. Third, the principle of Transcendence. The most basic thing to be used as a starting point in the design and development of transformative learning models to identify of process. The most significant process in transformative learning occurs in the communicative domain, starting from the identification of problems, values, or initial perspectives, testing assumptions, dialogue with critical discourses, to drawing conclusions based on the results of the discourse.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The history of human civilization, in the academic world, has always played a central role, whether as a conservator of prevailing dominant values or as a source of values for the dynamics of society (Schnitzler, 2020). When the world of academic education is made a conservator of certain values of a power system or is used by a power system, of course this kind of education will give birth to a generation that is not able to think critically, because education is deliberately silenced and suppressed for freedom of thought (Fatihatussa'adah et al., 2024). However, if education is a source of new values for the dynamics of society, it means that the academic world plays its original role, namely as a source of ideas for improving life and the meaning of human life (Chisolm et al., 2020).

The realization of a smart and critical generation is certainly inseparable from critical education. However, critical education in the world of education in Indonesia is still classified as something new. This is because educators who were born from the conservative paradigm will certainly have difficulty in implementing critical education, but they are more likely to position students as objects that need to be filled in or better known by Freire bank-style learning. This kind of educational concept will certainly not give birth to generations who are critical and

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sensitive to what is happening in their environment (Fauzi & Sastra Khusuma, 2020).

Throughout the ages, there will continue to be urgency or importance of placing humans in a central position in education. Education can make a whole person. Education that humanizes humans is education that not only develops in terms of affective, psychomotor and cognitive, but in line with that education also leads humans to adulthood (Rusiana et al., 2024). Adults in this case are meant to be how education empowers, helps humans understand and solve problems in the environment (Mohamad Abdel-Haq et al., 2019).

Education must be dynamic, it is a conscious effort to make changes in individuals and overhaul the deviant social order (Astutik et al., 2024). Therefore, the idea of changing the conventional education pattern towards a new transformative form must be carried out seriously by building critical minds in students through transformative critical education by applying the learning methods used by educators to students in providing subject matter so that students do not freely accept what is given by educators without thinking about it (Murphy, 2021). Transformative theory is learning that is able to update problematic frames of reference to be more inclusive, tolerant, reflective, open, and emotionally renewed (Nwagu, 2020).

Transformative learning begins when a person engages in an activity that puts them in a "disorienting dilemma", which is when there is a disparity between the incident experienced and the belief that has been called right, resulting in a kind of personal crisis (Biasin, 2018). This condition will trigger a change in a person's frame of reference. The instability of the impact of the self-crisis in the next term will encourage the person to make critical reflection independently on the frame of reference that forms the conception of the self and his life, and the reflective discourse of using others to confirm the change in the frame of reference (Daramola, 2018).

Some studies Previously, such as Educational Philosophy and Theory – Special Issue (2024) revealed how to Develop a Critical Thinking Transformational curriculum in today's complex era. Ben Johnson et al.'s research reveals an analysis of critical pedagogy in higher education to counter the current of neoliberalism. A combination of phenomenology and student expectations. While this study puts forward a three-principle approach, namely liberalization, humanization and transcendence in critical thinking.

Previous research on critical transformative education has extensively examined how learning can drive profound changes in the way learners think and act (Wijaya, 2024). One of the studies emphasizes the importance of transformative learning as a process of critical reflection on assumptions and perspectives that have been held, resulting in a paradigm shift (Fatihatussa'adah et al., 2024). Other studies have focused more on the humanization dimension in education as an effort to liberate students from oppressive social structures (Hidayat et al., 2025). Meanwhile, recent research develops a practical approach to designing transformative learning through the integration of critical dialogue and the exploration of values. However, much of the research has not holistically incorporated the three fundamental principles—liberalization, humanization, and transcendence—as a complete conceptual framework in critical transformative education (Utomo et al., 2025). This article seeks to fill this gap by offering a reinterpretation of education through the synthesis of the three principles, while strengthening its theoretical foundation by emphasizing the communicative domain as the core of the transformation process. Thus, this research not only expands on previous academic discourse, but also provides a more comprehensive operational framework for the development of transformative learning models in various educational contexts.

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The Prophet Rasulullah SAW once warned of several factors that can cause mistakes in thinking. He taught his companions to think correctly so that there were no gaps that hindered the process of thinking correctly. Among several factors that can cause mistakes in thinking is the attitude of taklid towards the thoughts or opinions of others without trying to examine the truth. So what is needed in this transformative critical paradigm is a critical attitude that can empower all the potentials that we have. Based on the description above, this study aims to find out the concept of transformative critical education as a reinterpretation of education.

## METHOD

Research is a type of literature research. Data collection through literature review is related to the focus of research, in the form of literature review, theory and government regulatory documents. The source of primary material in this study is various literature that directly discusses the transformation of Education. The analysis is carried out through, first, data collection in the form of a literature review that is the object of the research; Second, reducing data through categorization or initial identification to determine the topics to be used, namely indicators of alignment of the Independent Learning Curriculum and the Social Reconstruction Curriculum; third, presenting data presented in writing or verbal words in a systematic manner, in the form of research results that answer the formulation of the problem; and fourth, draw conclusions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Individuals who transform into learners are individuals who are able to direct themselves, be critical and are able to think autonomously (McRae, 2015). The history of the transformative critical paradigm departs from the two theories that form this concept, namely the critical madhhab and the spirit of postmodernism. In this transformative critical paradigm, people no longer think that science is inherently good because the postmodern world, which is the spirit of transformative criticality, offers a pessimistic ethos that is different from the ethos of the modern world, namely optimism (Kaowiwattanakul, 2020).

The transformative critical realm also no longer believes that humanism will be one of the ways to solve problems in the world. Likewise, they reject the assumption that the truth is certain (Baumgartner, 2019). This rejection gave rise to skepticism towards rationalism. Transformative critics also disagree with the restriction of truth, because according to them, if the truth is restricted, it also limits the dimension of rationality and lowers the authority of human intellectuals as a determinant of truth. However, the main thing for transformative critical education is the validity of knowledge not only by using reason, but also the truth of emotions and intuition (Spooner & John, 2020).

In the world of education, a paradigm shift occurs as a result of the acceleration of the flow of knowledge which will challenge the conventional education system, where sources of knowledge will be easily spread everywhere and everyone can easily obtain knowledge (Jones, 2016). Paulo Freire in his thesis compiled a typology of consciousness as a framework for explaining dehumanization based on the philosophical framework that humans are active subjects of life. The typology of consciousness is: magical consciousness, naïve consciousness, critical awareness, and transformative consciousness (Pandey, 2019).

Critical is an attitude of not trusting; an attitude that always tries to find mistakes or mistakes; sharp in analysis. However, there are several things that must be considered regarding this critical thinking, because there are characteristics of critical attitudes that are allowed and some that are prohibited by religion (Wijaya, 2024). The critical attitude allowed by religion is a critical attitude that is intended to provide alternative and better solutions based on the results of the analysis, such as giving input during deliberation or dialogue, or analyzing something that the resulting answer will give a different opinion from the existing opinion (Ndemanu & Coronel-Molina, 2022).

The basis for the implementation of transformative critical attitudes is as follows: first, the Principle of Liberalization. Liberalization is a principle that gives freedom to individuals or students to develop their potential to the fullest extent and will give birth to rapid cultural development (Dix, 2016). But the meaning of freedom here must be bound by certain rules in a positive sense. This is because basically freedom is limited to three categories, namely: "There is the freedom to do only what you want to do (anarchy); there is freedom to do only what you must do (totalitarianism); there is freedom to do what you ought to do (democracy)". So the meaning of freedom here is the same as the third category, which in principle contains three aspects, namely: self direction, self discipline, and self control (Ziegler, 2019). With this freedom, humans have dynamics, adaptability to the environment and creativity in life, so that human life and its environment become varied, diverse, and more meaningful (Hello, 2017).

In the school of education liberalization like the modern school of philosophy, students are placed as subjects in education and not mere objects, because they are considered people who already know something even though they are not perfect. Education should make them more active and help students to find knowledge. And teachers cannot impose their knowledge without a mutual agreement among class members (Wiley et al., 2021). Therefore, students are "free" only in the context of social and psychological determination. They should be held accountable for their own actions in an instantaneous sense. This liberalization principle will prioritize critical intelligence formulated in the realm of effective problem solving experimentally, either at the personal or social level (Sari & Setiawan, 2018).

Second, the Principle of Humanization. Humanization is a principle that fosters a sense of humanity and humanity towards maturity that must be instilled since children are still in primary education (Setyo et al., 2018). According to Paulo Freire, man is the ruler over himself, therefore human nature is to be free, to be free from oppressive situations against his will. Furthermore, for Freire, true human nature is to be an actor or subject, not a sufferer or an object (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012).

Islamic humanism is fundamentally different from Western humanism which is secular, humanism or anthropocentrism basically emerged with the arrival of rationalism that no longer believes that natural laws are absolute (Jaili et al., 2024). This rationalism gave birth to the renaissance, which is a movement to rebuild humanity from the confines of mythology and dogmas. So humanism here means restoring the sovereignty of man which for centuries has been usurped by the gods and by mythology, to control his fate. This life is centered on man not on God, and man must rule the universe (Iafrate, 2018). Islamic humanism is theocentric humanism. That is, it is a religion that centers itself on faith in God, but which directs its struggle for the glory of human civilization. So the principle of humanism here is based on the concept of fitrah in Islam which views humans as the noblest creatures with human potentials that can be developed (Ristina, 2014).

Third, the principle of transcendence. Transcendence is a principle that highlights things that are spiritual. The principle of transcendence here is to give the meaning of *ubudiyah* in the process of liberalization and humanization. This means that this principle provides an understanding that the concept of transformative critical Islamic education is carried out in accordance with religious signs and does not contradict what has been stipulated in religion (Fajriah, 2017). The face of education that has been running so far indicates that there has been oppression in students, where the exploitation and imposition of the will of educators in the teaching and learning process still dominates. So that students like it or not, like it or not, must accept and undergo the education provided by the educator or the educational institution they follow (Fatkhurrohman et al., 2018).

This is where it is actually important for every human being involved in the educational process to be able to realize and understand that education must indeed lead to the formation of a whole human being. It is not true that education will make educated people actually shackle or oppress other humans with the power they have. It is also not true that education only produces educated human beings who cannot respect the rights of other human freedoms (Albeta et al., 2021).

Education must return to its original face, which is the process of transforming values that (humanists) can humanize humans. In the history of mankind, there is hardly a human group that does not use education as a tool for cultivating and improving its quality. In this concept of critical learning, the learning process that has been considered more indoctrinization/authoritarianism, less emphasis on student involvement and education which is considered to be like a saving activity can be abolished (Cochrane, 2016).

The transformation process is a (humanist) value, in which it humanizes human beings can walk by placing teachers and students as active subjects in the learning process, one of which is by applying critical learning in teaching and learning activities (Meerts-Brandsma et al., 2020). In transformative critical education, archaeology/geneology is considered the core material of lessons because with archaeology, students are required to have a more grounded perspective. They are given knowledge about the history of the past, that is, the history of their ancestors (Purbonuswanto et al., 2024). This knowledge concerns how to care for and maintain the earth as a complex ecosystem. If there is then a system discontinuity, it will be fatal. This has actually happened in modern times, that is, when modern teaching provides an opportunity to exploit the earth to the maximum without considering the continuity of the earth's future. This is natural because modern achievements have led man to the whole of materialism (Hardika et al., 2020).

In learning, it is hoped that students will be interested in learning history and then be able to actualize in the present or future life. But in reality, the provision of history subject matter from educators to students is just like a fairy tale which is then considered unimportant and boring. That is why students become less sensitive to the problems in the development of the times which will increasingly produce instant humans which in the end will only make humans lazy and freeze their brains. In fact, human history should be able to learn to develop this modern life into a better life with the increasing number of facilities that exist today (Sharpe, 2016). However, the educational practice that occurred was the opposite. Education is used as a way to perpetuate certain doctrines and as a tool of power hegemony. Students are only used as objects and trained to be obedient with the goal of national uniformity (Arbeiter & Bucar, 2020).

A good education is an education that emphasizes the investigation of all objects. The



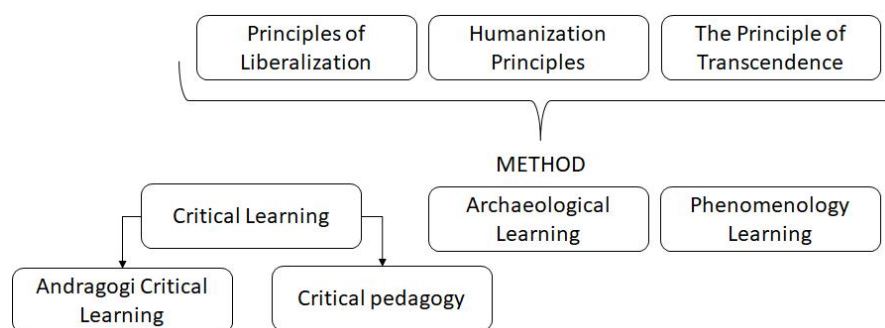
investigation is of course carried out inferentially and logically. Logic here is not only based on the systematics of certain logic, for example, it must be in accordance with Aristotelian logic. However, it is logical here to correspond to the nature of the subject's personal self. This method is used as a way to make students critical in seeing all phenomena by using these phenomena as a reference for the truth (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021). In the world of education, the idea of phenomenology is not much different from the idea of existentialism which says that existence precedes essence. The first condition is the individual first and then the individual's ideas and creativity. The idea of heaven, hell and God are some of the things made by humans. Therefore, both phenomenologists and existentialists agree that education must be focused on individual reality, that is, a reality that sees human beings not only cognitive, but also conscious and emotional (Fasli & Fasli, 2019). From this point of view, education should be directed to: "who am I really?", "where should I go?", and "why am I here?". The intriguing question will lead students to understand the actual condition of their individuality today (Sims & CUNLIFF, 2022).

The educational process can be translated as a method/way of reading texts. The main characteristic of this method is to look for philosophical elements that have a strategic role in determining the meaning of the text. Technically, this systematic method consists of: first, identifying the hierarchy of opposition in the text. In it, usually, it is seen which terminology is systematically specialized; The two oppositions are reversed, for example by showing the interdependence between the opposites; and third, by introducing new categories or ideas that cannot be included in the opposition category (Taylor, 2017). Practically, deconstruction in learning can be done by exposing and dismantling moments that cannot be ascertained with positive marker tools. Deconstruction can also be done by reversing the existing hierarchy so that it can be replaced and dismantled in order to rebuild new concepts, new alternatives more creatively (Sakinofsky et al., 2018).

Deconstruction is a radical way of thinking critically, not a critical-practical method. But the reality is that the praxis of deconstruction can ultimately be referred to as a method, because deconstruction ultimately constructs a new discourse as a consequence of systematic deconstruction (Deveci, 2014). The critical learning method combines andragogy and pedagogy education, both critical pedagogy and transformative pedagogy, namely by placing teachers and students as active subjects in education. Learners can explore what they know and what they think (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021).

Transformative Critical Education is a perspective that is able to position itself as an actor who is able to make changes in the social field as a foundation for building its social structure to make better changes for society. Transformative critical education is able to foster the validity of knowledge not only by using reason, but also the truth of emotions and the truth of intuition.

The implementation of transformative critical education as an effort in educational reinterpretation is as follows:



Picture 1. Implementation of Transformative Critical Education

The basis for the implementation of transformative critical attitudes is based on several principles, as follows: first, the Principle of Liberalization. Liberalization is a principle that gives freedom to individuals or students to develop their potential as widely as possible and will give birth to rapid cultural development. But the meaning of freedom here must be bound by certain rules in a positive sense. In the school of education liberalization like the modern school of philosophy, students are placed as subjects in education and not mere objects, because they are considered people who already know something even though they are not perfect. Education should make them more active and help students to find knowledge. And teachers cannot impose their knowledge without a mutual agreement among class members.

Second, the Principle of Humanization. Humanization is a principle that fosters a sense of humanity and humanity towards maturity that must be instilled since children are still in primary education. The individual or human being in this case is the ruler over himself, therefore the nature of man is to be free, to be free from oppressive situations against his will. Third, the principle of transcendence. Transcendence is a principle that highlights things that are spiritual. The principle of transcendence here is to give the meaning in the process of liberalization and humanization. This means that this principle provides an understanding that the concept of transformative critical education is carried out in accordance with religious signs and does not contradict what has been stipulated in religious values.

The learning methods that can be used in the concept of transformative critical education are through: first, Critical Learning with Andragogy and Critical Pedagogy. Andragogi places learning participants as subjects who are considered mature even though biologically there is no indication of a certain level of maturity. Andragogi places the subject more as a participant who has a certain activity to plan and have useful materials and materials and places the role of the educator only limited as a facilitator. Critical pedagogy assumes that educators in providing learning to students must be based on the experiences experienced by students. It is not demanding and forcing them to learn something that has nothing to do with their lives, let alone forcing them to accept something they do not know the benefits of.

Second, Archaeological Learning. In transformative critical education, archaeology/geneology is considered the core material of lessons because with archaeology, students are required to have a more grounded perspective. They are given knowledge about the history of the past, that is, the history of their ancestors. This knowledge concerns how to care for and maintain the earth as a complex ecosystem. Third, Phenomenological Learning or Logical investigation. A good education is an education that emphasizes the investigation of all objects. The investigation is of course carried out inferentially and logically. The real educational process

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is not only the transfer of knowledge from educators to students which contains the continuous provision of material but also how students can apply the material in the field and can criticize existing problems.

Critical awareness refers to the process where learning is an effort to improve analytical skills, face problems, and take action in social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that affect and produce their lives. This sensitivity is needed to understand the social structure that applies in their environment so that they are able to be free from risks and acts of oppression and arbitrariness (SIVAGNANAM, 2016). To produce effective learning, external situations need to be taken into account and designed in such a way as to activate, support, and maintain internal processes in learning itself. Therefore, learning has a close relationship with teaching which can be interpreted as a conscious effort by educators to make students learn.

## CONCLUSION

The real educational process is not only the transfer of knowledge from educators to students which contains the continuous provision of material but also how students can apply the material in the field and can criticize existing problems. Transformation in learning occurs in the perspective of values, frame of reference, and mindset. Transformative learning is oriented towards critical reflection, where students need to be conditioned to build critical reflection on their initial assumptions by using other substantially different estimates or using phenomena that "shake" their initial assumptions. Through the critical-reflective process, a new perspective can be formed and then serve as the basis for students' actions. The concept of Transformative theory refers to a philosophy that departs from the paradigm of constructivism, humanism and critical social theory. The basic assumption of constructivism is that every human being is able to interpret himself based on the results of interactions with others compared to outside influences. For this reason, transformative learning is the process of forming, evaluating, and revising learners' assumptions and perceptions of what they experience and learn.

This research focuses on the conceptual analysis of critical transformative education through a literature review approach, so it does not involve direct empirical testing in the field. The scope of the study is limited to three main principles—liberalization, humanization, and transcendence—as the theoretical foundations in the reinterpretation of education. Discussions about the communicative domain as the core of the learning transformation process are also limited to the conceptual level, without exploring specific implementation in the context of a specific curriculum or educational policy. In addition, the study did not in-depth discuss external factors such as socio-cultural, political, or infrastructural barriers that might influence the application of transformative learning models in real-world practice. These limitations were chosen to ensure the depth of the theoretical analysis while maintaining a focus on the conceptual contribution of the article.

Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse of critical education by integrating three principles that have often been discussed separately into a complete framework. This synthesis opens up opportunities for the development of more holistic transformative learning models, especially in designing learning stages that emphasize critical reflection, dialogue, and paradigm shift. Practically, this article can be a reference for educators, curriculum designers, or policymakers interested in implementing transformative approaches in formal and non-formal contexts. The social implications lie in the potential of humanization and liberalization principles to empower learners as agents of change in society. However, further empirically-based research



is needed to test the effectiveness of this conceptual framework in a variety of educational settings, including an evaluation of structural challenges that may arise during implementation. Thus, although it is theoretical, this research provides a foundation for pedagogical innovation oriented towards social justice and human liberation.

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