

Analysis of Humanistic Education: Unraveling Paulo Freire in Islamic Perspectives

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Abstract

This study delves into the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire, emphasizing its humanistic roots and exploring its intersections with Christian, Marxist, existentialist, phenomenological, and personalist philosophies. Influenced by liberation theology figures like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Freire envisioned education as a tool for conscientization, aiming to cultivate critical awareness among the oppressed. Freire's humanistic approach faces criticism, particularly concerning the ambiguity of its goals and potential psychological disturbances. The research methodology is rooted in an extensive literature review, incorporating both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data stems from direct references relevant to the research topic, such as scholarly journals and articles, while secondary data is derived from existing literature to construct a solid conceptual framework. Appropriate data analysis tools aligning with research objectives are employed to systematically evaluate the collected information. This methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theories and concepts essential to the research. The outcomes and discussions underscore the fundamental disparities between Freire's humanistic education and Islamic perspectives. While Freire advocates for critical consciousness and social liberation, Islam centers its education on the Quran and Hadith, emphasizing moral and spiritual responsibilities as Khalifah. Islam interprets freedom as the pursuit of goodness guided by divine revelations, rejecting liberal interpretations. The study concludes by accentuating the stark differences in worldview and values between Freirean humanism and Islamic education, shedding light on the diverse philosophical foundations underpinning these approaches.

Keywords: *Humanistic Education, Paulo Freire, Islamic Perspectives, Pedagogy*

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, the progress of science and modern civilization, fueled by the spirit of capitalism, has faced sharp criticism from the perspective of humanistic philosophy. According to humanistic views, education is considered a means to sustain and develop the capitalist system. Knowledge is regarded merely as a commodity, directed solely towards the pursuit of material wealth, leading to a primary focus on technical and material aspects, ultimately causing individuals to lose their connection with themselves. Consequently, although the advancements in science and technology are acknowledged as human achievements, they are simultaneously seen as a threat to human existence, resulting in the alienation of individuals from themselves. (Emilda Sulasmi, 2020)

One prominent figure who condemns this dehumanization is Paulo Freire. Recognizing the pervasive inequality in his society, Freire believes that raising awareness among the populace about the root causes of this inequality is key to addressing it. Embracing a humanistic approach, Freire proposes education as a solution to liberate individuals from various forms of oppression hindering their freedom. The philosophy of humanism serves as the primary foundation for Freire, with the ultimate goal of education being the liberation of individuals from all forms of oppression. (Paulo Freire, 2007) This includes criticism of religion, perceived as a suppressing factor, which Freire refers to as The Church of the Oppressors. (John Milton, 1994)

On the other hand, Islamic education, while aiming for human welfare, is not grounded in humanistic philosophy that focuses solely on solving internal human issues. Islamic education's main foundation lies in religious aspects, powered by the Quran and Hadiths considered absolute, transcendental, and eternal truths. (Rahmat Hidayat, 2016) The concept of freedom in Islamic education differs, emphasizing not absolute liberal freedom but freedom within the boundaries of universal laws (sunnatullah) that cannot be violated. (Abuddin Nata, 2009) Islamic education also encompasses goals related to happiness not only in this world but also in the hereafter. (Nur Uhbiyati, 2013)

Based on the above exposition, Paulo Freire's humanistic educational ideas, although acknowledged as a solution by some, pose several issues when analyzed from

an Islamic perspective. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze Paulo Freire's humanistic educational philosophy from an Islamic standpoint and provide critiques of certain concepts deemed less appropriate.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Humanistic Education

To comprehend the concept of humanistic education comprehensively, it is essential to introduce fundamental definitions of education and humanism. Etymologically, the term "education" originates from the Greek word *paedagogiek*, comprising *pais*, meaning child, *gogos*, signifying guide or lead, and *iek*, representing knowledge. Consequently, education can be defined as the science that discusses ways of providing guidance to children. (Abd Aziz, 2010) The English translation, "education," refers to development or guidance. In the Islamic context, education is commonly known as *tarbiyyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*, which are translated into education, teaching, and etiquette education, respectively. (Muhammad Muntahibun Nafis, 2011)

In terms of terminology, various figures have provided definitions related to education. John Dewey views education as an ongoing process of exploring experiences. Carter V. Goodman describes education as the development process of an individual's capabilities, encompassing attitudes and behaviors applicable in society, influenced by a guided environment. Al-Abrasy, from the Islamic perspective, defines education as an effort to prepare individuals to live perfectly and happily, fostering love for the homeland, physical integrity, perfect moral character, organized thinking, refined feelings, proficiency in one's work, and eloquence in both spoken and written language. (Ramayulis, 2015) From the formulations of these educational scholars, it can be concluded that education is an intentional guidance process implemented by educators towards learners, with the aim of achieving desired outcomes. (Chairul Anwar, 2014)

Moving forward, the term humanism, literally derived from the root word "humus" meaning earth or soil, gives rise to "homo" denoting human, "humanus" signifying humane, and "humilis" conveying humility or modesty. In the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, humanism is defined as a belief system that focuses on the common needs of humans, seeking solutions to human problems more inclined towards reason than belief in God. From this definition, humanism can be interpreted as

a perspective that rejects supernatural elements, values human freedom and dignity, making humans the standard for all things. (Tony Davies, 1997)

As a philosophical movement, humanism emerged during the Renaissance, introduced by humanists who revisited the cultural heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome, offering new interpretations. Through these efforts, humanists sought to revive classical values such as appreciation for the world, human dignity, and acknowledgment of rational capabilities. Although initially confined to Italy, this movement gradually spread to Germany, France, and other European countries. Eventually, humanism instilled complete confidence in human abilities as a substitute for naturally endowed abilities. Reason was considered capable of achieving everything, even deemed more crucial than faith. (Bernard Russel, 2012)

The relationship between education and humanism, as explained above, is encapsulated in a typology of education known as humanistic education. Emilda Sulasmi asserts that humanistic education is an educational process that adopts humanism, placing humans as one of the most significant subjects in education. Meanwhile, according to Baharudin and Moh. Makin, humanistic education is an education that views humans as humans, living beings created by God with specific potentials to be maximally and optimally developed. (Baharudin, 2007)

This statement aligns with the explanation of Feida Noorlaila Isti'adah, depicting humanistic learning theory as a theory that emphasizes humanizing individuals and developing their potentials. A more comprehensive understanding of humanistic education is presented by Nimrod Aloni in his work titled "Enhancing Humanity: The Philosophical Foundations of Humanistic Education." Humanistic education is characterized by general and multi-faceted cultivation of the personality of those being educated, in a climate of intellectual freedom and respect for human dignity, towards the best and highest life of which they are capable in three fundamental domains of life: as individuals who harmoniously and authentically realize their potential, as involved and responsible citizens in a democracy, and as human beings who enrich and perfect themselves through active engagement with the collective achievements of human culture. (Nimrod Aloni, 2007)

Based on the various definitions above, it can be concluded that humanistic education focuses on developing human potentials. Its primary goal is to create individuals who are aware of their potentials, responsible within the context of

democracy, and actively involved in the collective achievement of human culture.

Paulo Freire's Biography

Paulo Freire was born on September 19, 1921, in Recife, northeastern Brazil. His father, Joaquim Temistocles Freire, was a follower of a spiritualist movement without formal religious affiliation, while his mother, Edeltrus Neves Freire, hailed from Pernambuco and was a Catholic. From his parents, Freire learned to treat everyone equally and to respect others. Freire's childhood was marked by suffering due to the global economic collapse following the stock market crash in 1929. His parents, belonging to the middle class, experienced a significant financial downturn, leading Freire to temporarily interrupt his education. After his family's economic situation improved, Freire was able to complete secondary school and enrolled at the University of Recife, majoring in law. During his studies, he also delved into philosophy and the psychology of language, while working part-time as a Portuguese language teacher at a secondary school.

After obtaining his law degree, Freire became the director of the education and culture department at the Social Service of Industry (SESI) in the state of Pernambuco from 1946 to 1954. This experience brought him into direct contact with the urban poor and significantly influenced his research, laying the groundwork for the dialogical method in education. In 1956, Freire was appointed as the head of the Education Council in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco. In 1959, he earned his doctorate with a thesis titled "Present-day Education in Brazil." During Joao Goulart's government in 1961, Freire was assigned as the Director of Cultural Extension Services at the University of Recife, implementing literacy programs among farmers. Freire's literacy approach later became known as the Paulo Freire Method.

However, when a military coup occurred on March 31, 1964, the program was halted, and Freire was imprisoned for 70 days on charges of subversive activities. Afterward, he went to Chile, continued his work, and began writing books. There, he completed his first significant work in the field of education, "Education as the Practice of Freedom." Approaching the 1970s, Freire became a Visiting Professor at the Center for the Study of Education and Development at Harvard University, where he wrote his most famous book, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." Freire returned to Brazil during Joao Batista Figueredo's leadership, joined the Workers' Party in Sao Paulo, and was

appointed as a Professor at the State University of Campinas and the Catholic University of Sao Paulo. In 1988, the Workers' Party won the general elections in Brazil, and Freire was appointed as the head of the Education Secretariat for the city of Sao Paulo for approximately two and a half years. Freire passed away on May 2, 1997, at the Albert Einstein Hospital in Sao Paulo, at the age of 75, due to heart disease. (James D. Kirylo and Drick Boyd, 2017)

METHOD

The research method employed in this study utilizes a literature review approach, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources are directly obtained from primary references related to the research topic, such as books, scholarly journals, and articles specifically addressing aspects relevant to the study. Additionally, secondary data from previous literature relevant to the conceptual framework of the research is incorporated. This approach allows the researcher to comprehensively understand theories, previous findings, and concepts that support the research foundation.

For data analysis, the study employs appropriate data analysis tools aligned with the research objectives and complexity. The chosen data analysis tools are utilized to evaluate information gathered from these sources. The data analysis process is conducted carefully and systematically to identify patterns, trends, or findings relevant to the research objectives. By combining both primary and secondary data, the research aims to provide in-depth insights into the studied topic.

In summary, this research method emphasizes a literature review to establish a robust knowledge base. This approach enables the construction of a strong conceptual framework, contributing to a better understanding of the research topic. By combining both primary and secondary data sources and utilizing appropriate data analysis tools, the research aims to yield relevant findings and make a meaningful contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the respective field.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Basis and Objectives of Paulo Freire's Education

In formulating his educational principles, Paulo Freire does not confine himself to a specific philosophical school. According to Dennis Collins, Freire's main ideas are rooted in Christian humanism, which he blends with his life experiences amidst oppression. Observations and reflections on the thoughts of modern and contemporary

philosophers also significantly influence the formulation of his educational philosophy. Five philosophical currents, namely personalism, existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism, and Christianity, intertwine with Freire's humanism. (Dennis Collins, 2011)

When establishing educational objectives, Freire bases his axiology on humanism. This implies that education is seen as a process of "restoring humanity" by liberating individuals from their limitations. Consequently, Freire conceptualizes educational objectives that grant individuals the right to explore their potential and creativity. At least, there are three humanistic educational objectives envisioned by Freire. Furthermore, several thinkers of liberation theology, such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Rubem Alves, and Juan Luis Sugendo, have influenced Freire's ideas. Nevertheless, his central concept of conscientization as the core of critical education is more rational and not solely derived from Christian teachings. The anthropocentric, empirical, and positivistic nature of his educational objectives results in students acknowledging God but isolating God from their daily realities. This fact illustrates that Freire tends to lean more towards being a Secular Catholic. (Abdurrachman Assegaf, 2005)

In the context of determining educational objectives, Freire ensures that his axiological foundation remains rooted in humanistic principles. This implies that education is considered a process of "restoring humanity" by liberating individuals from various forms of entanglement. Therefore, he develops a conceptual framework for educational objectives that grants individuals the right to actualize their potential and creativity. At the very least, three humanistic educational objectives are mandated by Freire. Education for Conscientization, education for Liberation, education for Humanization. (Sugeng Fitri Aji, 2019)

In his writings, Freire asserts that conscientization is the primary aim of education for the oppressed, stating, "The crucial task is to encourage individuals to help themselves, to place them in a position where they critically and consciously face their problems and become agents of their own healing." He envisions a conscientization process leading to dynamic liberation and what he terms a more complete humanity. The outcome of this process is referred to as conscientizacao, signifying the level of awareness where each individual can critically perceive the social system. Conscientizacao is not a method for transmitting information or skills training; instead, it is a dialogical process guiding individuals collectively to solve their

existential problems. Consequently, education must be tailored to the social reality of the community, enabling learners to be conscious and capable of addressing the social realities around them. (Paulo Freire, 2001)

Freire categorizes human consciousness into three levels: magical, naive, and critical. At the magical level, individuals cannot comprehend problems beyond their biological needs, accepting magical explanations due to an inability to understand true cause-and-effect relationships. In naive consciousness, a shift occurs from adapting to unavoidable facts towards renewing deviations committed by individuals within a system. People at this level simplify problems by blaming individuals rather than the system itself. In critical consciousness, the focus is on changing an unjust system. Individuals consciously and empirically strive to replace oppressive systems with fair ones they can control. Unlike naive consciousness, individuals at this level do not blame others but exhibit a true understanding of themselves and the collusive relationship between the oppressed and oppressors. Hence, the conscientization process, Freire's educational goal, aims at critical consciousness, considered the highest level of human awareness. Individuals at this stage understand the objective data of reality and the connections between different pieces of information through reflection. (Paulo Freire, 2001)

According to Freire, education represents a continuous path to liberation. He affirms, "Education faces problems as a humane liberation process, considering it fundamental that the oppressed person must struggle for their liberation." To achieve this, education must instill an understanding that the reality of oppression is not an insurmountable obstacle but a limited situation that can be changed. Once individuals identify their oppressors, this understanding will motivate them to fight for self-liberation, giving rise to praxis. At all stages of liberation, the oppressed must view themselves as humans engaged in the struggle to become fully human. True liberating education does not create a distance from the oppressed by perceiving them as unfortunate and in need of assistance. The oppressed must be an example to themselves in the struggle for their liberation. Therefore, the liberation process must occur through the solidarity of the oppressed. (Paulo Freire, 2001)

Moreover, Freire emphasizes that freedom can only be obtained by seizing it, not as a gift. Liberation demands unwavering determination and a sense of responsibility. Even the most well-intentioned leadership cannot provide independence

as a gift. Thus, if no one liberates themselves through their own efforts, they cannot be liberated by others. Freire likens liberation to a painful birthing process that, despite its difficulties, results in new individuals capable of resolving contradictions between oppressors and the oppressed, creating fully human beings.

The ultimate goal of Paulo Freire's education is the achievement of humanization. He emphasizes, "All efforts to achieve humanization are considered subversive actions. But for those who believe that the ultimate goal of humanity is to become authentic human beings, this effort is a necessity." Humanization entails making humans the complete masters of themselves, freeing them from oppressive situations beyond their will. In their efforts to reclaim humanity, the oppressed must not turn into oppressors but must restore the humanity of both parties. According to Freire, even though this is constantly denied, it is acknowledged through the denial itself. It is recognized by the oppressed longing for freedom and justice and their struggle to rediscover their lost humanity. (Paulo Freire, 2001)

On the other hand, oppressors, to maintain their dominance, attempt to convince the oppressed that they are being protected from the evil influences of agitators and enemies of God. These are all labels addressed to those who fight for the humanization of humanity. Oppressors call themselves builders and accuse the actual builders as destroyers. As a result, humans lose the ability to choose because their choices are made by others, and their decisions come from outside themselves, indicating symptoms of dehumanization.

However, according to Freire, the struggle to achieve humanization is not impossible, as dehumanization is not a fate to be accepted but a result of an unjust order that breeds cruelty toward the oppressors, resulting in dehumanization of the oppressed. Therefore, efforts to achieve humanization are a necessity for the highest values of humanity and to bring forth new individuals in the social-political structure that guarantees everyone's right to participate in the liberation process. (Paulo Freire, 2001)

Ambiguity in Paulo Freire's Humanistic Education

Upon careful examination, the primary underpinning of Freire's education is rooted in humanistic philosophy. This is evident in his perception of education as a process of "re-humanizing individuals" through liberation from oppression, facilitating the realization of their potential and creativity. Humanism places humans and their

rationality at the core of all things, entrusting full faith in reason as a substitute for faith in God. Consequently, Freire establishes reason as the foundation and fount of his educational values. (Muhammad Quthub, 2001)

In comparison to Islam, it becomes apparent that Islamic education emanates from its life philosophy, encompassing perspectives on humanity, the world, and the entirety of reality. The purpose of human creation in Islam is to worship the Creator. In the creation of humans, God has endowed them with various potentials corresponding to His attributes. Thus, worship, in its broadest sense, means developing the attributes bestowed by God. These attributes constitute a significant responsibility. Additionally, Allah has designated humans as stewards on Earth, resulting in at least two types of responsibilities: first, the ability of humans to develop God's attributes within themselves, and second, the management of Earth's resources. However, in fulfilling these duties, humans misuse their trust due to arrogance and the assumption that they know everything, wielding power unfairly. This stems from human weakness in resisting temptations due to their forgetful nature. For this reason, Allah revealed His guidance to the prophets so that humans receive perfect guidance in worship, fulfilling trust, performing duties and responsibilities, and, importantly, recalling the covenant between themselves and God. (Hasan Langgulung, 1995)

Based on this concept, Islam does not base its education on human reason but on two primary sources of Islamic teachings: the Qur'an and Hadith. Through these sources and various methods and approaches such as qiyas, ijma', ijtihad, and tafsir, Islamic education scholars develop Islamic educational thought. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the universe, humanity, society, and the nation, along with human knowledge and ethics, is obtained. Divine revelation, the true foundation of Islamic education, aligns with human reason as creations of God. There is continuity between the purpose of human creation and the purpose of divine revelation. Humans seek happiness in life, and divine guidance serves as a roadmap toward achieving this happiness. While human reason can guide, it has limitations, requiring higher guidance with absolute truth from the Creator. (Jalaluddin, 2001)

Freire's formulated educational goal is the realization of critical consciousness in learners regarding their social reality. According to him, individuals, through understanding objective data and their interconnections via reflection, are prompted to struggle for self-liberation towards achieving humanization. From this perspective,

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Freire perceives reality as a constant process of becoming that requires refinement or resolution. This view is shaped by a historical force known as dialectics, continuously generating problems necessitating solutions. Changes in scientific and philosophical thought contribute to various branched thought systems influencing each other, creating different interpretations of nature and the systems to follow. Consequently, the sought-after goal becomes unstable and ambiguous, causing constant human anxiety and distress due to ever-changing and unpredictable objectives. This phenomenon is evident in psychological disturbances and nerve diseases prevalent in contemporary Western society. (al-Attas, 2019)

Islam, on the other hand, does not view reality as a becoming but as a being. This is because its object of observation is clear, firm, unchanging, and stable. This assertion is absolute, originating from beliefs in divine sciences. As the object is clear, firm, unchanging, and stable, Islam, including its lifestyle, practice, and values, reflects an absolute reflection of that object. Islam rejects the need for perfection or development towards perfection, as it is already complete from its origin. Thus, the concept of true perfection ultimately refers to the spiritual and true essence of humans by returning to their true teachings, achieving tranquility in life. (al-Attas, 2019)

Furthermore, Freire's notion of freedom does not align with the Islamic perspective. Freire, like Western philosophers, views freedom as a state of independence, leading to liberal freedom—freedom according to human will without limitations. Freedom is also depicted as liberation from all forms of constraints, especially religious constraints. The consequence of this concept is the demand for unrestricted pursuit of what is deemed good. In this context, utilitarianism defines goodness as that which brings prosperity, human happiness, and the prevention or elimination of human pain and suffering in the world. Since human-defined well-being and goodness, not based on religion, guide actions, what is considered wrong by religion can become good, yielding to human desires. This relativistic view of truth follows the consensus of the majority, and if the majority disagrees, actions can be deemed bad. (Ahmad Suhelmi, 2001)

In contrast, according to al-Attas, freedom in Islam means striving, an act of devotion. The term striving is bound to the meaning of *khair*, signifying 'good.' Therefore, striving implies choosing what is good, better, and best between two

possibilities. Choosing what is evil does not fall under striving, as it stems from ignorance driven by desires and tends towards wickedness. To practice striving, one must have knowledge of good and evil based on the Qur'an and Hadith as absolute sources of truth. (al-Attas, 2019)

Based on the above, the goal of Islamic education is to instill goodness or justice in individuals, creating virtuous human beings. According to al-Attas, to achieve this goal, educators must instill adab (ta'dib) in their students. Adab means recognizing and acknowledging the correct and true place, position, and conditions in life and disciplining oneself to play a suitable role in oneself and society as a whole, reflecting justice. Adab encompasses the spiritual and material aspects of human life, nurturing goodness within. Therefore, ta'dib implies awareness of the primary purpose of creation, one's nature, recognizing God as the Creator, and governing life as God's vicegerent with wisdom, courage, patience, and justice. Ultimately, the goal of education is to create happiness in both the worldly and afterlife, where a believer meets their Lord. (Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, 2003)

Muhammad Quthub asserts that Islam as a way of life highly values freedom and strives against oppression. According to him, Islam literally means liberation from all forms of slavery by submitting to God. It means freeing humans from dictators who enslave them through coercion and threats, causing them to make mistakes and lose their dignity, wealth, and even their lives. Islam liberates humans from tyranny by teaching them that all power lies with God, who possesses true sovereignty. (Muhammad Quthub, 2001)

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the above discussion highlights Paulo Freire's humanistic education and its discordance with Islamic perspectives regarding philosophy, objectives, and the concept of freedom. Grounded in humanism, Paulo Freire views education as a means to liberate individuals from oppression and enhance critical awareness of social reality. However, criticisms of his education arise concerning the uncertainty of its goals and consequences related to the concept of freedom, along with the potential for psychological disturbances.

On the other hand, Islam bases its education on the teachings of the Quran and Hadith, viewing humans as stewards with moral and spiritual responsibilities. Islam emphasizes the goal of achieving goodness, justice, and happiness in both the worldly

and afterlife. Freedom in Islam is interpreted as striving (ikhtiar) bound to the selection of what is good, avoiding ignorance driven by desires, and adhering to divine guidance originating from God. Critiques of Freire's education include perspectives that see reality as an ever-changing and ambiguous process, whereas Islam perceives it as a steadfast and clear existence. The concept of freedom according to Freire, in a liberal sense and liberation from religious constraints, significantly differs from the Islamic view, which rejects oppression and underscores obedience to God's rules as the sole path to salvation.

Thus, while Freire's humanistic education emphasizes critical awareness and social liberation, Islamic education emphasizes the formation of virtuous character, obedience to divine rules, and the attainment of true happiness. This understanding underscores fundamental differences in worldviews and values that form the basis of both approaches.

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