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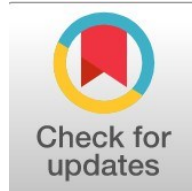
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The Emancipatory Critical Paradigm in Islamic Religious Education as an Effort to Form a Tolerant and Multicultural Attitude

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Abstract

General Background The persistence of religious intolerance and exclusivism within educational contexts reveals unresolved pedagogical challenges in religious education systems. **Specific Background** In Islamic Religious Education, learning practices remain largely normative–doctrinal and transmissive, limiting students’ dialogical engagement and critical awareness within pluralistic social realities. **Knowledge Gap** Although tolerance and multiculturalism have been widely discussed, few studies systematically integrate a critical–emancipatory paradigm into the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of Islamic Religious Education. **Aims** This study analyzes the relevance and conceptual contribution of the critical–emancipatory paradigm as an alternative pedagogical framework for Islamic Religious Education in fostering tolerant and multicultural attitudes. **Results** Using qualitative library research grounded in critical theory, the findings demonstrate that the critical–emancipatory paradigm is theologically and pedagogically compatible with Islamic values such as justice, human dignity, and *rahmatan lil ‘alamin*, while redirecting learning from indoctrinative models toward dialogical, reflective, and contextual practices. **Novelty** This article constructs an integrative conceptual framework linking the critical–emancipatory paradigm with the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of Islamic Religious Education. **Implications** The study contributes theoretically to critical Islamic education discourse and offers a coherent pedagogical orientation for developing tolerance, social empathy, and multicultural competencies within Indonesia’s pluralistic educational context.

Highlights:

- ♦ Normative–doctrinal learning practices are conceptually linked to weak internalization of plural social values.
- ♦ Dialogical and reflective pedagogy aligns with Islamic theological principles of justice and human dignity.
- ♦ Ontological, epistemological, and axiological integration provides a unified framework for

pedagogical renewal.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Critical Emancipatory Paradigm, Tolerance, Multiculturalism, Critical Pedagogy

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, the world of education has faced serious challenges in the form of rising intolerance, religious exclusivism, and a crisis of social cohesion [1]. Education is no longer only required to transmit knowledge, but also to build ethical awareness, dialogue skills, and an attitude of coexistence in a pluralistic society [2]. In this context, religious education occupies a strategic yet problematic position: it is expected to be a moral solution, but in practice it often fails to respond to the complexity of diversity and contemporary social dynamics [3].

In the global context, the issue of religious intolerance and exclusivism in education is also a serious concern [4]. International studies show that religious education that emphasizes doctrinal memorization without space for critical dialogue tends to fail to build tolerant attitudes in pluralistic societies [5], [6]. Biesta (2023) asserts that indoctrinative education risks neglecting the dimensions of pedagogical judgment and moral freedom of students [7]. These findings show that the challenges of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia are related to global pedagogical problems in religious education, thus requiring an internationally relevant pedagogical approach.

In Indonesia, this issue is also evident in the field of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Data from the National Counterterrorism Agency shows that school and university students are vulnerable to exposure to exclusive and radical religious ideologies [8]. This finding is reinforced by a report from the Setara Institute, which reveals that practices of intolerance are still found in schools, whether in the form of discriminatory attitudes, exclusive religious narratives, or restrictions on expressions of diversity [9]. These facts indicate that PAI has not yet fully functioned as a means of fostering tolerance and inclusiveness.

Normatively, Islamic Religious Education aims to shape students who are faithful, have noble character, and are able to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society [10]. However, various studies show that the practice of Islamic Religious Education is still dominated by a normative-doctrinal approach and oriented towards the one-way transmission of religious knowledge [11], [12]. This approach tends to place students as passive objects, thus providing less space for dialogue, critical reflection, and contextual interpretation of diverse social realities. As a result, there is a gap between the ideal goals of PAI and the pedagogical reality in the field, where students are able to memorize religious teachings but lack the capacity to internalize the value of tolerance in social life [13].

These limitations indicate that the problem of intolerance in PAI does not stem solely from Islamic teachings, but rather from the pedagogical paradigm used [14]. Therefore, an alternative approach is needed that can transform PAI learning from an indoctrinative pattern to a dialogical, reflective, and contextual learning process. In this context, the critical-emancipatory paradigm is relevant to examine. Rooted in the tradition of critical pedagogy, this paradigm views education as a process of liberation and awareness, not merely a transfer of knowledge [15], [16]. Education is directed at forming students who are aware, reflective, and able to read social reality critically.

From an Islamic perspective, the critical-emancipatory paradigm is theologically and pedagogically consistent with the basic values of Islamic teachings. The concept of tawhid affirms human equality and rejects all forms of domination and oppression. The Qur'an affirms diversity as *sunnatullah* (QS. al-Hujurat [49]: 13) and rejects coercion in religion (QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 256). The principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* provides a normative basis for Islamic education that is humanistic, inclusive, and just [17]. Thus, the integration of the critical-emancipatory paradigm in PAI has both theological and pedagogical legitimacy.

However, previous studies have shown limitations. A number of studies on PAI and tolerance are still normative-descriptive in nature, emphasizing Islamic teachings on tolerance without systematically linking them to critical pedagogical approaches [13], [18]. On the other hand, studies on critical pedagogy in Islamic education are often not fully integrated with the ontological, epistemological, and axiological frameworks of Islamic Religious Education [19]. In other words, there are not many studies that comprehensively integrate critical-emancipatory paradigms into PAI as a pedagogical strategy to shape tolerant and multicultural attitudes [20].

Unlike previous studies, this article positions tolerance not merely as a normative value, but as the result of a critical, dialogical, and reflective learning process in Islamic Religious Education. The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to construct an integrative conceptual framework between the critical-emancipatory paradigm and the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of Islamic Religious Education. This integration is offered as an alternative pedagogical approach to respond to the problems of intolerance and religious exclusivism in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society.

Based on this background, this article aims to answer the following questions: a) How is the critical-emancipatory paradigm understood in the perspective of pedagogy and Islamic education?; b) Why is the critical-emancipatory paradigm relevant in responding to the problems of intolerance and religious exclusivism in Islamic Religious Education?; c) How does the critical-emancipatory paradigm contribute to shaping tolerant and multicultural attitudes through Islamic Religious Education?

By formulating these questions, this article seeks to strengthen the theoretical position of Islamic Religious Education as an education that is not only normative and ritualistic, but also critical, emancipatory, and transformative in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a type of library research that is analytical-critical in nature [21]. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand, interpret, and construct conceptual meanings in depth, particularly related to critical-emancipatory paradigms and their relevance in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), rather than to measure phenomena statistically [22]. Literature study was used because the object of the study was ideas, concepts, and theoretical frameworks developed in the literature on critical pedagogy, Islamic education, and multicultural education [23].

Methodologically, this study is based on a critical theory approach. This approach views education as a social practice that is not neutral and is always intertwined with power relations, ideology, and the construction of meaning [16], [24]. Critical theory is used to analyze the limitations of the normative-doctrinal paradigm in PAI and to explore the potential of the critical-emancipatory paradigm as a dialogical, reflective, and inclusive pedagogical approach [15].

Results and Discussion

A. Conceptual Findings on the Limitations of Islamic Religious Education in Shaping Tolerant Attitudes

An analysis of secondary empirical literature shows that the practice of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools has not fully functioned as a vehicle for shaping tolerant and multicultural attitudes. A report by the National Counterterrorism Agency shows that school and university students are groups that are vulnerable to exposure to exclusive religious ideologies [8]. This finding is reinforced by a report from the Setara Institute, which notes that practices of intolerance are still found in school environments, such as discriminatory attitudes, restrictions on expressions of diversity, and the use of religious narratives that are not inclusive [25].

Within the framework of conceptual analysis, this secondary empirical data is not understood as evidence of the failure of Islamic teachings, but rather as an indication of a pedagogical gap between the normative objectives of PAI and learning practices in the field. A number of national studies show that PAI learning is still dominated by a normative-doctrinal and transmissive approach, which does not encourage dialogue and critical reflection among students [26], [27]. Thus, the conceptual findings at this stage confirm that the weak internalization of tolerant and multicultural attitudes in PAI is strongly correlated with a learning paradigm that is not yet reflective and dialogical.

B. Critical Synthesis: Critical-Emancipatory Paradigm as a Pedagogical Explanation

To explain these conceptual findings, this study uses the critical-emancipatory paradigm as a lens of analysis [28]. In the perspective of critical pedagogy, learning that places students as passive objects tends to hinder the formation of critical consciousness necessary to understand social reality reflectively [15], [16].

A critical synthesis of secondary empirical data and theory shows that PAI learning that emphasizes text memorization and normative obedience has the potential to shape rigid and exclusive religious understanding. These findings are in line with studies by Jackson (2018) and Gearon (2021), which show that religious education that lacks dialogue and social reflection tends to fail to build tolerant attitudes in a multicultural society [5], [6].

However, this article goes further by asserting that the issue of intolerance in PAI is pedagogical-paradigmatic, not theological. The critical-emancipatory paradigm serves as an explanatory framework that links learning practices with the impact on students' attitudes toward diversity, thereby clarifying the pedagogical cause-and-effect relationship that has not been explicitly stated in previous studies.

C. Integrative Conceptual Findings: Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Dimensions of PAI

Based on this synthesis, this study produced conceptual findings that the transformation of PAI towards tolerant and multicultural learning requires the integration of three main dimensions: ontological, epistemological, and axiological. Ontologically, students are understood as moral and reflective subjects who have the capacity for critical thinking, in line with the concepts of tauhid and Islamic humanism which emphasize human equality and reject domination [29]. Epistemologically, religious knowledge is understood as the result of a dialogue between revelation, reason, and social reality, thus rejecting ahistorical and closed religious understanding [11]. Axiologically, the goal of PAI is directed at the formation of the values of justice, humanity, and rahmatan lil 'alamin as the ethical orientation of learning [17].

The integration of these three dimensions does not stop at the normative level but is operationalized through dialogical learning, discussions of socio-religious cases, and critical reflection on the multicultural reality of students. At this point, the critical-emancipatory paradigm functions as an analytical bridge between educational theory and PAI praxis.

D. Critical Discussion with Previous Research

The conceptual findings of this study confirm the results of research by Mohamed et al. (2025) and Muhyi et al. (2025), which show that dialogue-based and socially reflective PAI learning contributes to strengthening students' tolerant attitudes [26], [30]. Furthermore, this article reinforces the arguments of Jackson (2018) and Gearon (2021) regarding the importance of a dialogical approach in religious education in a pluralistic society [5], [6].

The conceptual findings in this article are also in line with international research that emphasizes the importance of dialogical learning in religious education. Jackson (2018) and Gearon (2021) assert that religious education based on dialogue and social reflection is more effective in building tolerant attitudes than transmissive approaches [5], [6]. However, unlike these studies, this article offers a conceptual contribution by integrating the critical-emancipatory paradigm into the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of Islamic Religious Education, thereby providing a more systematic and contextual analytical framework for Islamic education in Indonesia.

However, this article also criticizes the limitations of previous studies, which generally stop at pedagogical recommendations without mapping out a clear integrative conceptual framework [31]. Unlike previous studies, this article explicitly synthesizes the critical-emancipatory paradigm with the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of Islamic Religious Education as a complete analytical framework. With this synthesis, the article not only repeats existing discourse but also offers a conceptual deepening of how and why Islamic Religious Education can be transformed into tolerant and multicultural education.

E. Conceptual Implications of Findings

Based on these conceptual findings and critical discussions, it can be asserted that the critical-emancipatory paradigm has strategic relevance in Islamic Religious Education. Intolerance in Islamic education does not originate from Islamic teachings themselves, but rather from pedagogical paradigms that are not yet critical and reflective. Therefore, the transformation of PAI through a critical-emancipatory paradigm is an urgent pedagogical necessity in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society.

Conclusion

Based on conceptual findings and critical synthesis of the literature, this study produced a theoretical generalization that the critical-emancipatory paradigm can be positioned as a transformative pedagogical framework in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This paradigm emphasizes a shift in the function of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) from merely transmitting religious doctrine to a process of forming critical awareness and social responsibility in students. In this context, religious education is understood as a humanizing practice that enables students to interpret Islamic teachings contextually, reflectively, and inclusively in a multicultural society.

This study also emphasizes that the problems of intolerance and religious exclusivism in PAI are pedagogical-paradigmatic in nature, not theological. Intolerance does not arise from Islamic teachings, but from a learning approach that is still normative-doctrinal, lacking in dialogue, and insufficiently reflective. The critical-emancipatory paradigm offers an analytical framework that explains the relationship between the learning paradigm, the process of forming religious awareness, and the social attitudes of students. Thus, pedagogical transformation is a key prerequisite for strengthening tolerant and multicultural attitudes in Islamic education.

The main theoretical contribution of this study lies in the integration of the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of Islamic education into a critical-emancipatory paradigm as a single conceptual framework. This integration shows that tolerance and multicultural attitudes cannot be understood merely as normative values, but must be formed through a critical, dialogical, and contextual learning process. Conceptually, these findings expand the discourse on Islamic education by positioning tolerance as an ethical-social competency that is produced by pedagogical praxis, rather than merely a normative goal.

In practical terms, this study has more operational implications for various stakeholders. For educators, the critical-emancipatory paradigm can be implemented through dialogic learning strategies, the use of socio-religious case studies, cross-perspective reflective discussions, and learning assessments that emphasize critical thinking and social empathy. For educational institutions, the results of this study imply the need to strengthen an inclusive school culture, provide space for dialogue between identities, and develop an Islamic education curriculum that is sensitive to diversity. For education policymakers, this study emphasizes the urgency of PAI policies that are not only oriented towards strengthening religious content, but also towards developing critical literacy, social competence, and multicultural awareness as part of a strategy to mitigate intolerance and radicalism.

However, this study has limitations. As a literature study, the findings are conceptual and have not been tested through empirical research in specific classrooms or educational institutions. In addition, this study has not specifically explored variations in the implementation of the critical-emancipatory paradigm in the context of different levels of education and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, further research is recommended to develop empirical studies, either through qualitative field research or mixed methods, to test the effectiveness of implementing the critical-emancipatory paradigm in Islamic education. Further research can also be directed at developing learning models, instruments for evaluating tolerant attitudes, and analyzing Islamic education policies based on the critical-emancipatory paradigm in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society.

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