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## Revisiting Henry Giroux: Decolonizing Islamic Education in East Africa and Southeast Asia

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### Abstract

**Objective:** This study explores the contribution of Henry Giroux's critical pedagogy to the decolonization of Islamic education in East Africa and Southeast Asia, particularly in Kenya, Tanzania, Indonesia, and Malaysia. It examines how Islamic educational institutions can move beyond colonial legacies while maintaining core Islamic ethical and spiritual values.

**Theoretical framework:** The study integrates Giroux's critical pedagogy, viewing education as a space of cultural politics, resistance, and democratic engagement with Islamic educational principles such as tarbiyah (holistic development), akhlaq (moral character), and 'adl (justice). This synthesis provides a foundation for understanding education as both transformative and value-based. **Literature review:** Existing studies highlight the role of critical pedagogy in fostering critical consciousness and resisting hegemonic structures. Meanwhile, research on Islamic education emphasizes moral and spiritual formation but reveals persistent challenges, including colonial curricula and rote learning. However, comparative and thinker-centered applications of Giroux's framework in Islamic contexts

remain limited. **Methods:** This research employs a qualitative and comparative approach, drawing on literature analysis, policy review, and selected case studies of Islamic educational institutions. Data are analyzed thematically using key concepts from Giroux's theory and Islamic educational philosophy. **Results:** The findings indicate that colonial influences persist through rigid curricula and exam-oriented practices. Nevertheless, emerging models such as dialogical learning, community-based education, and social justice integration demonstrate alignment with Giroux's critical pedagogy and Islamic values, enhancing critical awareness and ethical engagement among students. **Implications:** The study suggests the need for curriculum reform, teacher development, and pedagogical transformation toward reflective, participatory, and justice-oriented Islamic education that fosters socially responsible and critically aware Muslim learners. **Novelty:** This study offers a distinctive contribution by positioning Henry Giroux as a central intellectual lens in a comparative, faith-sensitive framework. It bridges Western critical pedagogy and Islamic educational thought in postcolonial contexts.

**Keywords:** henry giroux, critical pedagogy, islamic education, decolonization, transformative education.

## INTRODUCTION

Education shapes people, communities, and even whole societies. It's about more than just learning facts or picking up new skills. Education builds character, teaches right from wrong, and helps people understand their place in the world. In Islamic settings, it goes even deeper. Here, education sparks spiritual awareness, encourages self-discipline, and sharpens ethical thinking. Whether you're looking at madrasahs in East Africa or pesantren in Southeast Asia, you see a long tradition focused on building good character (ta'dib), sharing religious knowledge (ilm), and raising individuals who look out for their communities (ummah). In these places, Islamic education isn't just about lessons, it's about shaping identity, holding on to cultural and religious roots, and offering steady moral guidance [1].

Islamic education systems in East Africa and Southeast Asia keep running into the same old problems. Colonial rule left a mess of foreign curricula, outside teaching styles, and educational setups that pushed aside local and Islamic knowledge. The fallout still lingers. Schools in both regions struggle to give kids a quality education. There's not enough funding, resources are tight, and rote memorization just won't go away [2]. A lot of Islamic schools put a big emphasis on shaping students' character and faith, which matters, but they still lean hard on memorization. So, sure, students learn religious texts, but they don't always get the chance to really question things like social injustice, unfair systems, or their own roles in society. This clash between sticking to tradition and encouraging students to think for themselves is a real hurdle for Islamic education today in both regions [3].

Henry Giroux's idea of critical pedagogy gives us a fresh way to tackle these problems. At its core, critical pedagogy sees education as more than just memorizing facts it's about changing lives, pushing back against injustice, and giving people real power. Giroux wants students and teachers to dig into who holds power, challenge the stories we're told, and figure out how to act with integrity in their communities [4]. When classrooms focus on real thinking, open conversations, and honest reflection, school becomes a place for growth, not just grades. Giroux's vision pushes education to help people become more human, more just, and more democratic. Bringing these ideas into Islamic education can help connect spiritual growth with raising students who think deeply about the world and their place in it [5].

There's a real connection between the aims of Islamic education and Giroux's critical pedagogy, especially when you look at places like East Africa and Southeast Asia side by side. In East Africa, think Kenya, Tanzania, you'll find Islamic schools shaped by old trade routes, colonial history, and the push and pull of today's global world. Over in Southeast Asia, countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have their own lively Islamic education scenes,

where traditional teachings meet government-driven reforms [6]. The details differ, but both regions wrestle with some of the same big questions. How do you keep faith at the center of the curriculum and still prepare students for modern life? How do you get kids thinking critically without losing sight of their religious roots? And how do you tackle social inequality in the classroom? This study digs into these issues, comparing both regions to show how Islamic schools can bring in Giroux's ideas promoting real, liberating learning while still holding on to their core religious and ethical values [7].

This research illustrates how Islamic institutions in East Africa and Southeast Asia deal with the push and pull between religious teachings, social justice, and critical pedagogy. It looks at how schools can shake up their curricula, teaching styles, and classroom routines not just to help students learn facts, but to encourage real moral thinking, sharp self-reflection, and a sense of civic duty [8]. By comparing these two regions, the study highlights what's working, what's new, and where the stumbling blocks are. The whole point is to offer fresh ideas that could help improve Islamic education across both areas. In the end, it shows that Islamic education doesn't have to choose between staying true to faith and preparing students for the real world. It can do both nurturing spiritual growth while also pushing students to think critically, act responsibly, and get involved in building fairer, more just communities [9].

Islamic education in East Africa and Southeast Asia sits right at the crossroads of old ways and new expectations. Sure, teaching strong values and spiritual growth still matters a lot. But too many schools stick to old-school teaching, where memorizing facts beats actually thinking things through. Kids miss out on chances to challenge unfairness in their societies, ask tough questions about what they're taught, or get involved in real changes around them. When schools don't open the door to these experiences, they lose out on what Islamic education could really do and end up out of step with what people need today [10].

Islamic education needs a fresh look, one that blends religious and moral teaching with critical thinking and real-world engagement. Henry Giroux's ideas on critical pedagogy actually give us a solid roadmap for this kind of change, but people haven't really tried to apply them in Islamic schools in places like East Africa or Southeast Asia [11]. There's not much research comparing how schools in these regions might use critical pedagogy to help students become more empowered, active in their communities, and passionate about social justice. This study jumps into that gap, asking how Giroux's approach can help shake up and decolonize Islamic education in both regions [12].

This study digs into a big question: how can Henry Giroux's critical pedagogy actually help decolonize and transform Islamic education in East Africa and Southeast Asia? It looks at how schools in these regions try to balance teaching faith and morals with encouraging real critical thinking [13]. What's getting in educators' way when they try to bring in teaching methods that push for social justice, strong ethics, and active citizenship? The research also takes a hard look at whether Giroux's ideas about education as resistance and transformative learning really fit in the world of Islamic schools. How could the curriculum, teaching styles, and student participation shift to give students more power over their own learning? By comparing what's happening in both regions, the study looks for lessons and fresh ideas they can share, pointing out what they have in common and what's unique about each place's path toward educational change [14].

This study is aimed at exploring the potential of Henry Giroux's critical pedagogy in decolonizing and transforming Islamic education. The focus of this research is to analyze current pedagogies in Islamic schools in East Africa and Southeast Asia, particularly how moral, spiritual, and critical dimensions of learning are addressed [15]. The study also aims to uncover the barriers that the curricula and teaching practices pose in the development of critical consciousness in students. This research will provide practical knowledge about reorienting Islamic education to uphold religious-ethical values and promote emancipatory

social responsibility through the integration of Girouxian principles. In the end, this study is a contribution to the comparison of education changes [16].

This research is significant on multiple levels. In theory, this bridges Islamic educational philosophy and critical pedagogy, suggesting a faith-based education compatible with critical consciousness, social justice, and transformative learning. The findings can guide teachers, the designers of curricula, and institutional leaders in both areas as regards the design and implementation of pedagogical experimentation, possessing moral and spiritual development simultaneously [17]. The study will provide information on how the government and institutions may modernise Islamic education, postcolonial education issues, and introduce curricula that will empower children to deal with the realities of contemporary society. By focusing the analysis on East Africa and Southeast Asia, it also draws comparative insights and highlights adaptable strategies and innovations that can enhance Islamic education across different cultural and historical settings [18].

## LITERATURE REVIEW

East African and Southeast Asian Islamic schooling has been about the development of moral, spiritual, and the transmission of religious values and knowledge. In East Africa, madrasahs and Islamic schools are essential for communities' unity and ethical upbringing. Many, however, still focus largely on rote learning and conventional teaching methods. Thus, the opportunity for critical engagement and problem-solving is limited. In Southeast Asia, pesantren Islamic institutions and Islamic schools have been reformed and have integrated a modern curriculum that nurtures critical thinking and life, along with religion. Even after this reform, both areas still suffer from the post-colonial legacy associated with education, including rigid curricula and authoritative hierarchical control, restraining participation in learning [19].

Henry Giroux showed how education, not critique, could empower and insight to individuals to take social responsibility in his critical pedagogy. Using his principles of education for Islamic education gives us an opportunity to rethink the curriculum, teaching methods, and student engagement in ways that respect religious and moral values while enhancing learning that is emancipatory and socially responsive. Looking at East Africa and Southeast Asia shows that there are differences in what works in schools. But there are also similarities. So these differences and similarities might be used to make schools better in both places [20].

**Table 1. Selected Literature on Islamic Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Regional Perspectives**

Author(s)	Year	Region	Focus Area	Key Findings	Relevance to Study
Omer	2018	East Africa	Madrasah pedagogy	Emphasis on rote learning, limited critical thinking	Highlights the need for pedagogical transformation
Suleiman	2020	East Africa	Islamic moral education	Focus on ethical and spiritual development, less on social engagement	Supports comparison with transformative pedagogy approaches
Rahman	2019	Southeast Asia	Pesantren modernization	Integration of critical thinking into religious curriculum	Shows reform efforts aligning with Giroux's ideas
Ismail	2021	Southeast Asia	Curriculum and pedagogy	Balancing traditional authority with modern	Demonstrates practical application of transformative

				pedagogical methods	teaching
Abdullah	2017	Both regions	Postcolonial education influence	Colonial structures still affect Islamic schools	Justifies the decolonization focus
Yusuf	2020	Southeast Asia	Islamic education reform	Emphasis on student participation and civic engagement	Highlights similarities with critical pedagogy principles
Giroux	2011	Global	Critical pedagogy	Education as resistance, fostering critical consciousness	Provides a theoretical framework for study
Kamau	2019	East Africa	Pedagogical challenges	Resource limitations and traditional teaching impede innovation	Supports comparative analysis with Southeast Asia
Nurdin	2020	Southeast Asia	Transformative learning	Evidence of experimental approaches to integrate moral and critical education	Shows potential applicability of Giroux's pedagogy

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative comparative research to analyze the potential of Henry Giroux's critical pedagogy in decolonizing and transforming Islamic education in East Africa and Southeast Asia [21]. A qualitative approach is suitable because the study seeks to understand educational practices, pedagogical thought, and the socio-cultural context of Islamic schooling rather than measuring. The comparative angle allows for the investigation of similarities and differences, and contextual factors across the countries of the two regions, which can throw light on region-specific problems and innovations [22].

The analysis examines certain Islamic educational institutions in East Africa, including Kenya and Tanzania, and Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and Malaysia. The choice of these sites reflects the many ways of approaching Islamic education, represented by their curriculum design, teaching methodology, and the practice of critical and transformative learning. The target population includes teachers, school administrators, curriculum developers, and students who all take part in the learning process directly. Thus, they can share their insights on teaching techniques, course content, and classroom behaviour [23].

Data was collected through multiple qualitative strategies to facilitate triangulation and to provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews with teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers will gather their thoughts on teaching methods, curriculum developments, and notions of critical pedagogy. Focus group conversations with students established their learning experiences, critical engagement, and opinions about moral and social education. Document analysis of curricular content, lesson plans, and institutional policy documents was undertaken to explore the content, structure, and pedagogical orientation of Islamic education in both regions. Throughout the investigation, observations at classrooms in selected institutions provided an opportunity for the researcher to investigate pedagogical practice, student-teacher interactions, and opportunities for critical and transformative learning. The combination of these methods utilises rich, multi-dimensional data representing theoretical and practical aspects of Islamic education and its potential for change through Girouxian pedagogy [24].



**Figure 1. Ethical Considerations in Research**

The research observed the reviewed ethical standards to ensure participant welfare and rights. The study plan prioritized obtaining informed consent from all participants, which will include discussion of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the ability to withdraw at any time. The study protected anonymity in reporting findings, while ensuring secure access and storage of data, limiting access to only the researchers. All cultural or religious sensitivities were respected throughout the research, as the study is occurring in the context of a faith-based project [25].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of Henry Giroux and his Thoughts

Henry Giroux is one of the most influential contemporary theorists in the field of critical pedagogy, widely recognized for his contributions to educational theory, cultural studies, and democratic thought. Born in 1943 in Providence, Rhode Island, United States, Giroux emerged as a leading intellectual voice advocating for education as a transformative and political practice rather than a neutral transmission of knowledge. His academic career has been associated with prominent institutions such as Boston University and McMaster University, where he has served as a professor and public intellectual.

Giroux's intellectual profile is shaped by his engagement with critical theory, particularly the works of Paulo Freire. Building on Freire's ideas, Giroux reconceptualizes education as a site of cultural politics where power, ideology, and identity are actively negotiated. He challenges traditional schooling models that emphasize rote learning, standardization, and passive student roles. Instead, he positions teachers as "transformative intellectuals" who foster critical thinking, ethical awareness, and social responsibility among learners.

A central element of Giroux's thought is the concept of critical pedagogy. He argues that education should empower students to question dominant narratives, analyze structures of inequality, and participate actively in democratic life. For Giroux, classrooms are not isolated

spaces but are deeply connected to broader social, political, and economic contexts. He emphasizes that issues such as neoliberalism, cultural domination, and social injustice must be critically addressed within educational practices.

Giroux also introduces the idea of education as a form of resistance. He critiques neoliberal educational reforms that reduce education to market-driven outcomes and standardized testing. In contrast, he advocates for a humanistic and emancipatory model of education that prioritizes dialogue, inclusivity, and critical consciousness. His work highlights the importance of cultural representation, media literacy, and youth agency in shaping democratic societies.



Figure 2. Henry Giroux's Profile and Thoughts

Overall, Giroux's contributions lie in bridging theory and practice. His ideas continue to influence educators globally, particularly in contexts seeking to reform education systems toward social justice, ethical engagement, and transformative learning.

### Persistence of Colonial Legacies in Islamic Education

Students' agency and intellectual growth are significantly impacted by the continuation of examination-oriented and teacher-centered procedures. Students are positioned as passive recipients rather than active participants in the learning process in many Islamic educational contexts, where information is viewed as fixed and indisputable. Opportunities for discussion, introspection, and contextual interaction with religious texts are restricted by this teaching approach. Because of this, students may perform exceptionally well on formal tests and memorization, but they may find it difficult to apply Islamic ethical precepts to actual social, political, and economic problems. Giroux contends that these educational methods serve to uphold prevailing ideological frameworks by normalizing conformity and silencing dissenting opinions [26].

Additionally, the prevalence of inflexible curricula limits the pedagogical liberty of teachers. Teachers frequently have to finish predetermined curricula in constrained amounts of time, which leaves little opportunity for student-centered activities or critical discussion. Standardized national exams exacerbate this strain in East African environments, whereas institutional expectations of uniformity and discipline enhance it in Southeast Asian situations. As a result, even educators who understand the importance of critical pedagogy encounter structural obstacles that hinder its complete application. Giroux's claim that educational reform must target institutional power relations rather than just classroom methods is supported by this study [27].

The study finds pockets of resistance inside Islamic educational institutions in spite of these limitations. In order to encourage pupils to connect Islamic teachings to topics like social justice, poverty, governance, and moral responsibility, some educators use informal dialogical tactics. Despite their narrow focus, these methods show how Islamic education can serve as a place of critical interaction rather than ideological replication. In line with both Giroux's vision of emancipatory education and Islamic values of justice ('adl) and moral accountability, learning becomes transformative when students are encouraged to ask questions and reflect critically [28].

Crucially, the results imply that a reorientation of both pedagogy and philosophy is necessary for decolonizing Islamic education. Decolonization is changing how knowledge is created, taught, and questioned, rather than just substituting Islamic content for Western content. While Islamic educational philosophy offers an ethical framework based on spirituality, community, and justice, Giroux's critical pedagogy gives instruments for opposing epistemic oppression. By incorporating these viewpoints, Islamic education can develop critical consciousness without sacrificing its religious underpinnings, producing students who are socially conscious, morally sound, and intellectually autonomous [29].

**Table 2. Comparative Overview of Pedagogical Characteristics in Islamic Education**

Region	Dominant Pedagogical Approach	Key Colonial Legacy	Impact on Students	Potential for Critical Pedagogy
Kenya	Examination-driven, rote learning	Colonial assessment systems	High memorization, low critical engagement	Emerging through dialogical teaching
Tanzania	Teacher-centered instruction	Rigid curriculum structure	Passive learning, limited inquiry	Moderate, dependent on teacher initiative
Indonesia	Standardized curriculum with reforms	Bureaucratic educational control	Balanced academics, limited critique	Growing through community-based learning
Malaysia	Discipline-oriented, curriculum-driven	Institutional uniformity	Strong compliance, weak questioning	Increasing but institutionally constrained

### Emergence of Critical Pedagogical Practices

The increasing transition of teachers' roles from authoritative information transmitters to critical discourse facilitators is one noteworthy development. Instead of imposing a single, unquestionable meaning on Islamic texts, teachers in classrooms where critical pedagogical practices are growing promote questioning, contemplation, and interpretive discussion. Giroux's idea of teachers as transformational intellectuals who assist students in analyzing power dynamics, social realities, and moral conundrums in both religious and societal contexts is reflected in this change [30].

The incorporation of community-based learning into Islamic education is another noteworthy approach. Through social projects, service-learning opportunities, and ethical conversations based on Islamic principles, several educational institutions urge students to interact with their local communities. Through these experiences, students can apply their religious understanding to real-world issues, including social justice campaigns, poverty reduction, and community duty. Giroux's focus on education as a type of cultural politics that connects classroom instruction to more extensive social change is consistent with such activities [31].

The results also show that students' confidence and critical awareness are positively impacted by dialogical and interactive learning environments. Students have a greater sense of intellectual agency when they are given the chance to voice their thoughts, discuss interpretations, and participate in group learning. By fostering what Giroux refers to as critical consciousness, this technique empowers students to see societal injustices and challenge prevailing narratives while firmly establishing their viewpoints in Islamic ethical values [32].

Critical pedagogical methods, however, continue to develop unevenly and are frequently influenced more by individual teachers than by institutional policy. Due to curriculum limitations, assessment demands, and inadequate teacher training, dialogical methods are frequently used informally and inconsistently. This emphasizes how institutionalizing critical pedagogy in Islamic education requires systemic support. Without this kind of assistance, creative approaches run the risk of staying isolated projects rather than serving as catalysts for more extensive changes in education [33].

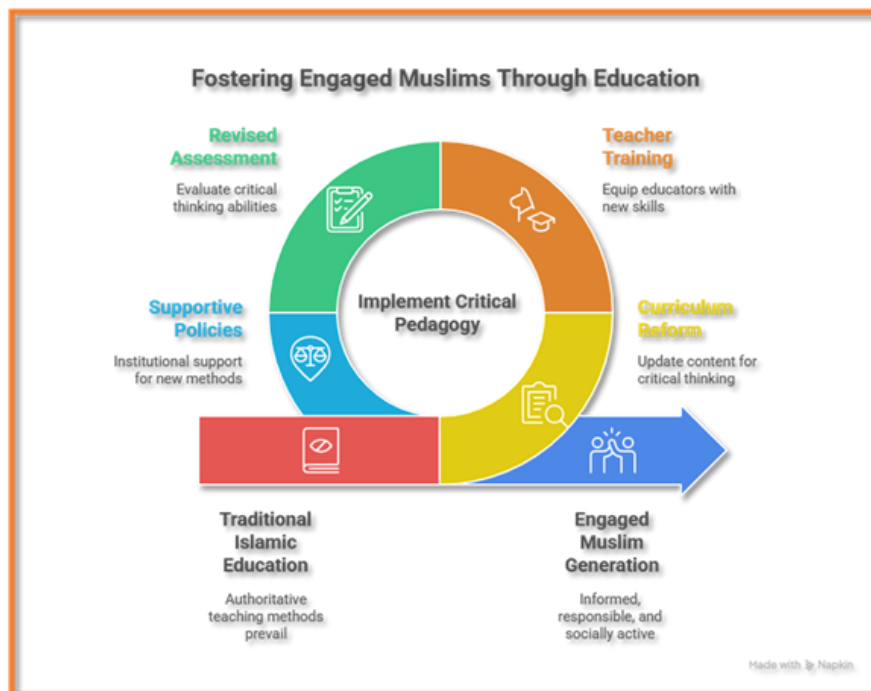


Figure 3. Fostering Engaged Muslims Through Education

### Alignment of Critical Pedagogy with Islamic Educational Principles

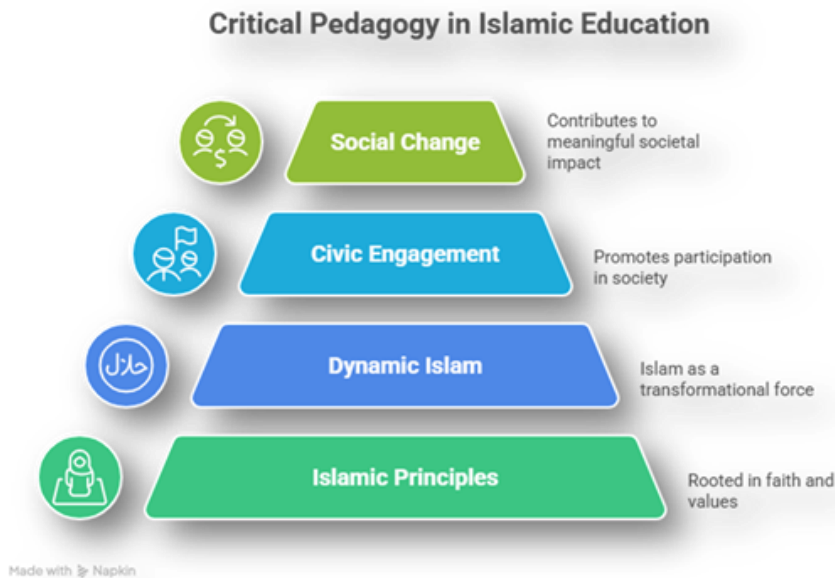
The same emphasis on moral agency and ethical responsibility is a crucial area of agreement. Islamic education aims to develop people who behave honorably, justly, and compassionately in society, in addition to imparting religious information. By helping students to consider the moral consequences of their knowledge and actions, critical pedagogy supports this goal. In order to increase the absorption of akhlaq as a lived ethical practice rather than a theoretical concept, students are encouraged via critical inquiry to question injustice, confront unethical actions, and assess social reality in light of Islamic moral principles [34].

Giroux's holistic approach to teaching also clearly aligns with the idea of tarbiyah. Tarbiyah places a strong emphasis on fostering the learner's academic, spiritual, emotional, and social aspects. Education transcends memorization when critical pedagogy is used within this framework to promote moral discernment and intellectual independence. In order to interact critically with knowledge while upholding spiritual humility and duty toward

others, students are urged to enhance their reasoning abilities, self-awareness, and social empathy [35].

A solid basis for incorporating critical pedagogy into Islamic education is also provided by the concept of "adl" (justice). Islam views justice as a fundamental ethical principle that encompasses social justice, moral responsibility, and legal fairness. Critical pedagogy gives students the analytical skills they need to recognize societal oppression, power disparities, and systemic injustices. Students are enabled to pursue justice as a moral duty and a social practice grounded in faith when these analytical abilities are framed within Islamic ethical discourse [36].

Lastly, the development of socially conscious and thoughtful Muslim individuals is facilitated by the alignment of critical pedagogy with Islamic educational values. Students learn about Islam as a dynamic and transformational force in society rather than seeing Islamic education as disconnected from modern reality. While staying rooted in Islamic principles, this integration promotes civic engagement, interfaith communication, and communal development. Critical pedagogy thereby strengthens Islamic education's applicability and capacity for transformation in postcolonial settings [37].



**Figure 4. Critical Pedagogy in Islamic Education**

### **Role of Teachers and Institutional Support**

The scarcity of organized professional development programs that emphasize critical pedagogy in Islamic educational institutions is one of the main issues noted. Subject competence and classroom discipline are frequently given precedence over pedagogical reflection and critical engagement in teacher preparation programs. Because of this, teachers may have a deep understanding of religion and a strong moral commitment, but they lack the methodological resources needed to promote discussion, debate, and critical thinking. Teachers' capacity to implement Giroux's vision of education as a transformational activity is limited by this divide [38].

Teachers' pedagogical decisions are further influenced by institutional limitations. Flexibility in classroom instruction is restricted by strict curricula, standardized tests, and administrative expectations. Teachers are frequently judged more on how well their pupils score on exams than on their ability to think critically or morally. This institutional focus reinforces traditional teacher-centered forms of instruction by discouraging experimentation

with dialogical and participatory approaches. Giroux contends that fundamental power dynamics inside educational systems limit even well-meaning instructors in the absence of institutional backing [39].

Despite these drawbacks, the results show that some teachers exhibit resistance and agency by including important pedagogical components within preexisting limits. Often in casual classroom settings, these educators bring contextual analysis of Islamic texts, ethical conversations, and reflective questioning. These methods show how teachers can behave as transformative thinkers who question prevailing instructional conventions. However, without structural support, these initiatives' viability is still in jeopardy [40].

Another important aspect of promoting critical pedagogy is the role of school leadership. Critical engagement is fostered by principals and administrators who support pedagogical innovation, collaborative learning communities, and reflective teaching. On the other hand, leadership that places a higher priority on discipline, compliance, and test results limits the opportunity for pedagogical change. Therefore, whether or not critical pedagogy may be effectively included in Islamic education depends critically on institutional culture [41].

**Table 3. Role of Teachers and Institutional Support in Implementing Critical Pedagogy in Islamic Education**

Dimension	Observed Conditions	Key Challenges	Implications for Critical Pedagogy
Teacher Preparedness	Strong commitment to moral and spiritual instruction	Limited formal training in critical pedagogy	Critical engagement occurs inconsistently and informally
Pedagogical Practice	Predominantly teacher-centered instruction	Lack of dialogical and participatory methods	Students remain passive recipients of knowledge
Professional Development	Focus on subject mastery and discipline	Minimal emphasis on reflective and critical teaching	Teachers lack the skills to function as transformative intellectuals
Institutional Curriculum	Rigid, examination-oriented curricula	Limited flexibility for innovative pedagogy	Critical inquiry is marginalized
Assessment Systems	Emphasis on standardized examinations	Critical thinking not formally evaluated	Pedagogical innovation is discouraged
School Leadership	Varied administrative support	Inconsistent encouragement of pedagogical reform	Institutional culture shapes the success of critical pedagogy
Institutional Culture	Compliance- and discipline-driven norms	Resistance to pedagogical experimentation	Transformative practices remain isolated
Alignment with Islamic Values	Strong focus on akhlaq and tarbiyah	Limited integration with critical inquiry	The potential of Islamic education remains underutilized

## Analysis

This article offers a compelling and timely examination of how critical pedagogy can intersect with Islamic educational traditions in postcolonial contexts. By placing Henry Giroux's theoretical framework at the center, the study effectively reframes Islamic education not merely as a site of moral transmission but as a dynamic arena for intellectual resistance and social transformation. The comparative lens across East

Africa and Southeast Asia is particularly valuable, revealing both shared colonial legacies and context-specific adaptations in pedagogical practice.

One of the study's major strengths lies in its conceptual synthesis between Giroux's emphasis on critical consciousness and Islamic principles such as *tarbiyah*, *akhlaq*, and *'adl*. This alignment demonstrates that faith-based education need not be opposed to critical inquiry; rather, it can deepen ethical awareness and civic responsibility. The findings convincingly show that dialogical learning and community engagement already exist as emerging practices, although they remain uneven and often dependent on individual teacher initiative.

However, the analysis also highlights persistent structural constraints, including rigid curricula, examination-oriented systems, and limited professional training. These barriers underscore the necessity of institutional reform, not only pedagogical innovation. Without systemic support, transformative practices risk remaining isolated rather than scalable. Overall, the article contributes significantly to both Islamic education studies and critical pedagogy discourse. It provides a nuanced framework for decolonizing education that respects religious identity while fostering critical engagement. Future research could further strengthen the study by incorporating empirical fieldwork data and exploring student-centered outcomes more deeply, ensuring that theoretical insights translate into sustainable educational transformation across diverse Islamic contexts. Such expansion would enhance the practical relevance of the framework, offering clearer guidance for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers seeking to implement justice-oriented and critically engaged models of Islamic education in contemporary global societies today and beyond immediate regional comparisons and limitations observed in this study.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that revisiting Henry Giroux's critical pedagogy offers a significant and timely framework for decolonizing Islamic education in East Africa and Southeast Asia. Across countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Indonesia, and Malaysia, Islamic educational institutions continue to reflect the enduring influence of colonial legacies, particularly through rigid curricula, examination-oriented systems, and the persistence of rote learning. These structures often position students as passive recipients of knowledge, limiting their ability to critically engage with religious teachings and contemporary social realities. As a result, the transformative potential of Islamic education remains only partially realized. Nevertheless, the findings of this study reveal strong possibilities for renewal and transformation. The integration of Giroux's critical pedagogy with core Islamic educational principles—such as *tarbiyah* (holistic development), *akhlaq* (moral character), and *'adl* (justice)—demonstrates a meaningful convergence between faith-based values and critical inquiry. This alignment challenges the assumption that religious education and critical thinking are incompatible. Instead, it shows that Islamic education can cultivate students who are not only spiritually grounded but also intellectually active, ethically reflective, and socially responsible. Emerging pedagogical practices, including dialogical learning, community engagement, and reflective interpretation of religious texts, provide practical evidence of this potential across both regions. This study shows that there is a great deal of potential for change through the incorporation of Henry Giroux's critical pedagogy, even though Islamic educational institutions in East Africa and Southeast Asia still reflect colonial legacies through strict curricula, examination-oriented systems, and rote learning. The results show that students' critical consciousness, ethical awareness, and social responsibility are strengthened without sacrificing religious values when critical pedagogical approaches are in line with Islamic educational concepts like *tarbiyah*, *akhlaq*, and *'adl*. However, as inconsistent implementation is frequently hampered by a lack of

professional training and structural limitations, the success of this integration largely rests on teacher readiness, institutional support, and leadership commitment. Ultimately, sustainable transformation requires more than isolated innovations in classroom practice. It calls for comprehensive systemic reform, including curriculum redesign, investment in teacher professional development, and the cultivation of institutional cultures that support dialogue, critical reflection, and participatory learning. By embracing this integrated and transformative approach, Islamic education can move beyond its colonial constraints and contribute to shaping empowered Muslim learners who are capable of addressing contemporary global challenges while remaining firmly rooted in their ethical and spiritual traditions.

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### **Author Contribution**

Maisuna Mustapha Yahya led the conceptualization, theoretical framework, and manuscript preparation. Abdulrohim E-sor contributed to literature review and critical analysis of pedagogical perspectives. Mariam Elbanna supported data interpretation and contextual analysis. Muhammad Ndow assisted in comparative regional insights and revisions. Qudra Bezibweki contributed to methodological framing and editing. Abdul-Samiu Abass supported proofreading and final manuscript preparation. All authors reviewed, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. This research was conducted independently without any financial, institutional, or commercial influence that could be perceived as biasing the findings or interpretations. No external funding with vested interests supported this study. The authors affirm their commitment to academic integrity, objectivity, and ethical research practices. All conclusions presented are based solely on scholarly analysis and critical engagement with relevant literature.

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