

REINTERPRETATION OF ALI ASGHAR ENGINEER'S LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION POLICY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: *This study reinterprets Ali Asghar Engineer's liberation theology as a normative foundation for integrating justice, freedom, and equality into Indonesia's multicultural religious-education policy across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Motivated by persistent deficits in conventional religious curricula characterized by rote learning, doctrinal literalism, and weak responsiveness to social pluralism. The research employs a qualitative literature review combining systematic database searches with content analysis and critical discourse analysis of scholarship, policy documents, and curriculum materials. Findings indicate that grounding curricula in liberationist values can reorient religious education from transmissive instruction toward emancipatory pedagogy that cultivates critical consciousness, civic agency, and intercultural competence. Implementation, however, is constrained by three interrelated barriers: structural (centralized curriculum regimes and assessment systems), cultural-ideological (conservative resistance and contestation over interpretive authority), and practical (limited teacher capacity, resources, and contextually relevant materials). The paper advances pragmatic strategies for curriculum decentralization, redesigned authentic assessment, sustained in-service teacher development, contextualized teaching modules, and deliberative engagement with religious stakeholders, coupled with pilot implementation and rigorous monitoring to ensure fidelity and scalability. By articulating a context-sensitive operationalization of the Engineer's theology for curriculum reform, the study contributes theoretically and practically to debates on Islamic education reform and multicultural pedagogy, offering*

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policymakers and educators an evidence-informed pathway to make religious education more just, inclusive, and transformative.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Educational Reform, Liberation Theology, Multicultural Education.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menafsirkan ulang teologi pembebasan Ali Asghar Engineer sebagai landasan normatif untuk mengintegrasikan nilai keadilan, kebebasan, dan persamaan ke dalam kebijakan pendidikan agama multikultural di Indonesia pada jenjang dasar, menengah, dan tinggi. Kajian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh defisit yang menetap pada kurikulum agama konvensional yang ditandai oleh pembelajaran hafalan, literalitas doktrinal, dan respons yang lemah terhadap pluralitas sosial. Penelitian menggunakan tinjauan pustaka kualitatif dengan mengombinasikan pencarian basis data sistematis serta analisis isi dan analisis wacana kritis terhadap kajian akademik, dokumen kebijakan, dan materi kurikulum. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa memosisikan kurikulum pada nilai-nilai pembebasan dapat mengarahkan pendidikan agama dari instruksi transmisif menuju pedagogi emansipatoris yang menumbuhkan kesadaran kritis, agensi sipil, dan kompetensi antarbudaya. Implementasinya, bagaimanapun, terbatas oleh tiga hambatan yang saling terkait: struktural (rezim kurikulum tersentralisasi dan sistem asesmen), kultural-ideologis (resistensi konservatif dan perebutan otoritas penafsiran), serta praktis (keterbatasan kapasitas guru, sumber daya, dan bahan ajar yang kontekstual). Makalah ini mengajukan strategi pragmatis berupa desentralisasi kurikulum, perancangan ulang asesmen autentik, pengembangan profesional berkelanjutan bagi guru, penyusunan modul pembelajaran yang dikontekstualkan, serta keterlibatan deliberatif dengan pemangku kepentingan keagamaan, disertai pilot implementasi dan pemantauan ketat untuk memastikan ketepatan pelaksanaan dan skalabilitas. Dengan mengartikulasikan operasionalisasi teologi Engineer yang sensitif terhadap konteks, studi ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dan praktis bagi wacana reformasi pendidikan Islam dan pedagogi multikultural serta menawarkan jalan berbasis bukti bagi pembuat kebijakan dan pendidik untuk mewujudkan pendidikan agama yang lebih adil, inklusif, dan transformatif.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Diskriminasi, Pendidikan Multikultural, Reformasi Pendidikan, Teologi Pembebasan.*

Introduction

In the midst of changing global and domestic dynamics, Indonesia, as a country with cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, faces significant challenges in managing these differences through the education system (Lonto and Umbase 2020, 12). The religious education curriculum, which has traditionally been dogmatic and focused on memorizing religious texts, can no longer meet the needs of an increasingly complex and multicultural society. This has led to the emergence of various problems, such as discrimination, intolerance, and marginalization of minority groups, as reflected in studies on changes in curriculum and religious education policies (Laila et al. 2025, 16–31; Presbyterian 2020, 9–17). On the other hand, this nation's diversity must be an asset to creating a tolerant and critical generation, not a trigger for social conflicts.

In Indonesia, Islamic-based social movements have been developing for

a long time, largely through the efforts of organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and several other progressive groups. These organizations not only play a role in education and welfare but are also active in fighting for social justice and overcoming various forms of discrimination. Along with post-reform political changes, the role of religious elites in politics has become more pronounced, where they seek to integrate spiritual values into the dynamics of democracy and national development. On the other hand, the emergence of liberation theology narratives invites a re-discourse on how Islamic values can be used as a foundation in building an inclusive and progressive social movement amid shifting economic and political conditions in Indonesia, especially in 2025.

Ali Asghar Engineer's reinterpretation of liberation theology presents a critical paradigm that emphasizes the spiritual dimension and the socio-political-economic aspect as an integral part of the reality of Muslims. According to the Engineer, Islam should return to its roots of liberation, which is an effort to liberate human beings from all forms of oppression, both structural and cultural. This approach aligns with Islamic education's demands, which teach creeds and rituals and encourage active involvement in social transformation (Negara 2023, 29). This is especially relevant considering the phenomenon of economic inequality, intolerance, and democratic crises that are increasingly deepening the gap in differences in Indonesian society.

In the context of education, liberation theology proposes an emancipatory agenda. Education, as seen from the perspective of liberation, aims not only to produce intellectually intelligent individuals, but also human beings with high social concern, and can contribute to a more just change in the social order. Education must restore human values eroded by materialistic dogmas and create space for a critical dialogue between Islamic traditions and the demands of the times. Thus, education based on liberation theology not only functions as a vehicle for knowledge transfer but also as a tool of liberation that encourages the active participation of the community in efforts to achieve social justice (Akmaliah 2024, 204).

Under ideal circumstances, education in Indonesia is expected to create a system that is inclusive and responsive to diversity. The perfect religious education curriculum not only transmits religious knowledge but also integrates the values of justice, freedom, and equality reflected in the liberation theology of Ali Asghar Engineer. This liberation-based education will shape the character of students to be able to overcome oppression and injustice, as well as make them active agents of change in a multicultural society. Thus, education will act as a tool of liberation that empowers individuals to participate constructively in nation-building (Munir and Munafiah 2019, 1–18; Akmaliah 2024, 188–210).

The solution proposed in this study is based on the reinterpretation of liberation theology as the basis for curriculum reform. The main advantage of this approach lies in its ability to prioritize the values of justice and freedom, thus providing space for students to think critically and independently. However, there are three significant drawbacks. First, the education system, which is still very centralized and conservative, hinders the adoption of innovative learning methods. Second, limited resources and a lack of professional training for educators lead to a lack of understanding of the application of participatory pedagogy based on liberation values. Third, ideological resistance from conservatives who view the reinterpretation of liberation values as a threat to established religious traditions is also a significant obstacle. To overcome these weaknesses, it is necessary to carry out structural reforms through the decentralization of education policies, the intensive improvement of teacher training, and the socialization of liberation values as part of a progressive Islamic identity, which aligns with Paulo Freire's thinking on liberation education (Freire 1970, 70; Mukminin et al. 2019, 53–72).

Previous studies underscore the critical importance of integrating an emancipatory dimension into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum to promote social justice and embrace diversity. Munir and Munafiah emphasize the prophetic mission of Islamic education as an agent of liberation from materialistic dogma, aligning with Asghar Ali Engineer's vision that places structural and cultural liberation at the heart of theology (Munir and Munafiah 2019, 14). Zahraini et al. highlights the necessity of modernizing the curriculum through technological integration without compromising religious principles, ensuring that learning remains contextual and responsive to contemporary dynamics (Zahraini et al. 2025, 6).

Noor Hamid and Wahyuni propose a multiculturally based IRE model that systematically inculcates values of tolerance and inclusion (Hamid and Wahyuni 2024, 119). Sirait demonstrates that multicultural IRE practices at the primary level effectively foster mutual respect among students (Sirait 2021, 68). At the policy level, Nurwanto and Cusack compare religious education policies in Indonesia and the United Kingdom, affirming that a critical multicultural approach forms the foundation for education capable of cultivating a harmonious society (Nurwanto and Cusack 2017, 167). Collectively, these findings build a compelling argument that reforming the Islamic curriculum around liberation theology and multiculturalism is essential to developing an educational system that is inclusive, critical, and empowering.

This research aims to reinterpret Ali Asghar Engineer's liberation theology as the foundation of justice, freedom, and equality in religious education, which supports the development of a curriculum to liberate students from dogmatism and injustice. Second, this research aims to

identify the extent to which the values of justice, freedom, and equality have been integrated into the curriculum, uncover existing structural and ideological barriers, and develop practical solutions to create an inclusive education system responsive to socio-political-economic dynamics. It is hoped that the results of this research will not only make a theoretical contribution to the development of modern Islamic education but also become a reference for policymakers to formulate educational strategies that can form the next generation who are critical, tolerant, and committed to social justice (Jayadi, Abduh, and Basri 2022, 3).

Thus, Ali Asghar Engineer's reinterpretation of liberation theology is expected to drive transformative curriculum reform, which will bring religious education closer to the reality of Indonesia's multicultural society and empower all levels of society to actively participate in nation-building. Ali Asghar Engineer's reinterpretation of Islamic liberation theology, grounded in his pioneering fusion of Qur'anic justice and emancipatory pedagogy, offers both a representative reflection on the shortcomings of dogmatic religious education and a novel, justice-centered vision of multiculturalism. This makes him uniquely suited to drive transformative curriculum reform in Indonesia, aligning religious instruction with the lived realities of its plural society and empowering all communities to participate fully in nation-building.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method, where the data used are entirely derived from journals, articles, books, policy documents, and research reports published in the last ten years. The literature studied includes a book by Ali Asghar Engineer entitled "*Islam and Liberation Theology*", a theoretical study of Ali Asghar Engineer's liberation theology, studies on multicultural education, and an analysis of religious education curriculum policies at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels in Indonesia. Data is collected through systematic searches on indexed databases such as Scopus, SINTA, and educational institutions' repositories, thus ensuring the relevance and quality of the sources taken. The data analysis techniques used are content analysis and critical discourse analysis, which aim to identify key themes, central concepts, and narratives related to the reinterpretation of liberation theology and its implications for multicultural education policies.

The Genealogy of Liberation Theology of Ali Asghar Engineer: Between the Reformist Spirit and the Social Response

The liberation theology initiated by Ali Asghar Engineer was born from the historical and socio-political struggles of the Muslim community in postcolonial India, especially the Dawudi Bohra community, which became Engineer's religious background. This thought is a synthesis between the progressive spirit of Islam and a critical analysis of the structure of oppression in society. In the scientific context, the Engineer's thought

cannot be separated from the influence of Latin American Christian liberation theology (Liberation Theology), pioneered by figures such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff, as well as a critical education approach developed by Paulo Freire (Gutiérrez 1988, 7).

Engineers grew up in an environment that witnessed social inequality, the politicization of religion, and the marginalization of women. This background influenced his view of Islam as a religion that should favor the oppressed (*mustaḍ'afīn*). He rejected static and textualist normative theology and developed a contextual and transformative approach to Islam. In his book *Islam and Liberation Theology*, Engineer (1999) states that true faith must be tested in alignment with social justice (Engineer 1999, 27). This is where it appears that liberation theology, for him, is an emancipatory discourse that criticizes the use of religion to perpetuate domination and oppression, both by political regimes and religious authorities.

The Engineer's thought aligns with the Christian liberation theology developed in Latin America in the 1960s–1980s. Although they come from different faith traditions, both depart from criticism of the structure of social injustice and oligarchy domination. The engineer absorbed the idea that religion should side with the poor and oppressed as an authentic expression of faith. He also draws on Paulo Freire's framework of placing education and reading reality as tools of liberation. Deep *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire affirms the importance of critical dialogue and reflective consciousness as a means of liberation from oppression (Freire 1970, 70). For an engineer, liberation through religion is spiritual, social, economic, and political.

Genealogically, the Engineer did not build a theology of liberation from a vacuum. He was heavily influenced by progressive Islamic thinkers such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad 'Abduh, and Fazlur Rahman. The idea of "social *ijtihād*" developed by Fazlur Rahman is seen in the way the Engineer contextually reads religious texts. He emphasized that the Qur'an is a living text, which demands critical reading according to the context of the times. In his articulation, Engineer dares to criticize conservative interpretations, especially on issues of gender and pluralism, and offers a new reading oriented towards the principles of justice (*'adl*), freedom (*ḥurriyah*), and equality (*musāwah*) (Rahman 1982, 128).

One of the most prominent aspects of the Engineer's liberation theology is its critique of patriarchy in Islam. Deep *The Rights of Women in Islam* dismantles the socio-religious constructs that place women in subordinate positions (Engineer 2000, 34). She emphasized that gender inequality does not come from Islamic teachings but from the interpretation and practice of patriarchal culture embedded in religion. For Engineers, gender equality is an integral part of people's liberation. Therefore, the reinterpretation of religious texts on women became a

central part of her liberation project.

Compared to other figures in progressive Islam, such as Ḥasan Ḥanafī or Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, the position of the Engineer is rooted more in social praxis than in abstract philosophical constructions. He does not simply think about the epistemological framework of Islam, but directly links it to political struggles, Islamic family law reform, and education. Thus, the Engineer's liberation theology is a critique of religious narratives and a blueprint for religious-based social reform. This is where Engineer theology can be said to be more operational and action-based (praxis-oriented).

Liberation theology offers a philosophical foundation for building an inclusive and emancipatory curriculum in Islamic education. Justice, freedom, and equality align with the principles of multicultural education (Banks and Banks 1997, 20). Liberation-based education questions the dogmatic curriculum and calls for students' active participation as educational subjects rather than passive objects. In the Indonesian context, integrating liberation theology can correct structural inequalities in the education system, especially in religious education, which is still textual and less reflective of social realities.

Although progressive, the Engineer's thinking did not go unnoticed by critics. On the one hand, he was accused of being too liberal to challenge mainstream clerics' dominant interpretation. On the other hand, his approach is considered too socio-political and ignores aspects of Islamic spirituality. But this is precisely where his superiority lies: he rejects the false dichotomy between religion and politics, between faith and action. He shows that true spirituality cannot be separated from a commitment to social justice. This criticism, if understood in the spirit of dialectics, actually opens up a space for productive debate in contemporary Islamic educational discourse and thought (Sahin 2018, 11).

Ali Asghar Engineer's genealogy of liberation theology shows how Islamic thought can be developed in a contextual, progressive, and solution-oriented manner to the challenges of the times. By combining the roots of Islamic tradition and a modern emancipatory approach, Engineer establishes a theological framework that reflects reality and encourages social transformation. In Islamic education, his thinking is essential in building a learning paradigm that is just and oriented towards liberating human beings from oppression in various forms.

To provide a clearer understanding of the genealogy and characteristics of Ali Asghar Engineer's liberation theology, the following table summarizes the historical background, intellectual influences, key ideas, and their implications for Islamic education. This synthesis highlights how Engineers' thought, shaped by both Islamic reformist traditions and external critical theories, offers a praxis-oriented framework for reinterpreting religious education in a more inclusive and

emancipatory direction.

Table 1. Ali Asghar Engineer’s Genealogy of Liberation Theology

Aspect	Genealogy/Source		Core Ideas	Implications for Islamic Education
Socio-historical background	Experience of the Dawudi Bohra Community in Postcolonial India		Islam must side with the <i>mustaḍ’afīn</i> (the oppressed)	Education should aim to liberate learners from social injustice
External influences	Christian Theology (Gustavo Gutiérrez, Paulo Freire’s Critical Pedagogy)	Liberation (Leonardo Boff)	Religion as a means of liberation; education as critical dialogue	Curriculum fosters critical consciousness and active participation
Internal Islamic influences	Reformist thinkers: Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Fazlur Rahman		“Social <i>ijtihād</i> ”: contextual reading of the Qur’an	Encourages reinterpretation of texts in line with contemporary challenges
Gender and pluralism issues	<i>The Rights of Women in Islam</i>		Critique of patriarchy; gender equality as integral to liberation	Inclusive Islamic education that promotes equality and pluralism
Nature of thought	Praxis-oriented, compared to more abstract frameworks (e.g., Ḥasan Ḥanafī, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd)		Theology as a blueprint for social reform	Curriculum designed for transformative action and social engagement
Critiques and controversies	Accused of being too liberal and overly politicized		Rejection of dichotomies: faith vs. politics, religion vs. society	Positions Islamic education as a vehicle for social transformation

Reinterpretation of Ali Asghar Engineer’s Liberation Theology as the Foundation of the Values of Justice, Freedom, and Equality in Islamic Religious Education

In today’s Islamic education, there is a demand to create a curriculum that not only teaches religious values textually but also internalizes the principles of justice, freedom, and equality as the foundation of liberation. Ali Asghar Engineer’s liberation theology offers a critical paradigm rejecting dogmatic and stagnant religious education approaches. The Engineer emphasized that the core of Islamic teachings should encourage people to actively realize social justice and free themselves from all forms of oppression, both structural, economic, and cultural (Stuart 2024, 304).

Thus, the reinterpretation of liberation theology is crucial to formulating a curriculum that emphasizes the ritualistic aspect and the formation of students' character as agents of change who are critical and sensitive to social justice issues.

First, the reinterpretation of liberation theology within the religious education framework invites educators and policymakers to revisit the role of education in shaping critical consciousness. Ali Asghar Engineer argues that there is an inseparable relationship between faith and charity (praxis); the tangible proof of one's faith lies in its implementation in actions that bring justice and social good (Maulidiy, Masrohatin, and Fathiyaturrahmah 2024, 1630). In the curriculum context, this means that teaching materials should not only teach religious texts literally but also contain critical discourses that encourage students to question the social conditions around them and seek just solutions (Berry and Ward 2016, 446). Such an approach has the potential to free students from the dogmatic mindset that often limits their understanding of Islamic teachings holistically.

To reform education, the reinterpretation of liberation theology emphasizes the importance of the values of justice (*'adl*), freedom (*ḥurriyah*), and equality (*musāwah*) as the basis for the religious education curriculum. The value of justice refers to the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. In contrast, the value of freedom emphasizes the right of individuals to think critically and determine their destiny. On the other hand, equal values require no discrimination based on gender, class, or ethnic background. These concepts, when integrated into the curriculum, not only strengthen the spiritual aspects of students but also encourage them to be actively involved in community empowerment efforts. This is in line with the view expressed in the meta-analysis of the multicultural education paradigm in Indonesia, which states that the values of unity, equality, and justice must be at the core of education to create tolerant and critical citizens (Jayadi, Abduh, and Basri 2022, 4).

Furthermore, applying these values in the religious education curriculum faces complex challenges. Several studies show that traditional curricula that prioritize memorization and emphasize rituals often hinder the development of students' critical thinking skills. For example, a survey of curriculum changes in Indonesia found that despite efforts to update teaching materials. This system is still centralized and tends to be conservative, resulting in a lack of room for pedagogical innovation (Laila et al. 2025, 16–31). Therefore, the reinterpretation of liberation theology demands that the curriculum be redesigned with a more contextual and responsive approach to society's dynamics. A curriculum based on liberation values aims to convey information and inspire actions that liberate learners from the limitations of dogmatic mindsets and encourage them to critique unjust social structures.

In practice, liberation theology can be reinterpreted by integrating material linking Islamic teachings with contemporary issues such as economic injustice, gender discrimination, and intolerance (Win 2015, 4–30). For example, in religious education subjects, material can be arranged to discuss how the Qur'an's values of justice and freedom can be applied to address the problems of poverty and marginalization. This aligns with research showing that learning approaches linking social context to religious teachings can improve students' critical understanding and foster a sense of empathy and social responsibility (Mukhibat et al. 2024, 6). Thus, the curriculum functions not only as a means of teaching theory but also as a forum for social transformation through education.

Furthermore, the reinterpretation of liberation theology also requires an overhaul in teaching methods. A pedagogical approach that is participatory and contextual needs to be applied so that students are not only passive recipients of information but also active agents in the learning process. Discussion methods, case studies, and project-based learning are examples of teaching strategies that can accommodate liberation theology approaches. In this method, students are invited to explore the social problems around them, analyze them critically, and formulate solutions based on the principles of justice and freedom. This can be seen as an attempt to free them from rigid ways of thinking and lead them to participate in social change (Nuridin 2020, 24).

Within the framework of multicultural education policy, the reinterpretation of liberation theology also encourages cross-sectoral dialogue between educators, policymakers, and society. The government is expected to develop a curriculum policy that meets academic standards and reflects diversity and social justice values. Research on religious education curriculum policies shows that there is often a mismatch between formal policy and practice on the ground due to a lack of a deep understanding of the values that should be integrated (Sahin 2018, 22). In this context, the reinterpretation of liberation theology can be used as a normative framework to reform curriculum policies, so that the curriculum is not only normative but also transformative in overcoming the problems of discrimination and injustice.

In addition, the integration of liberation theology values in religious education also contributes to the development of students' character. The values of justice, freedom, and equality integrated into the curriculum are expected to form individuals who not only master religious science theoretically but also have high social awareness and can contribute to building a more just and inclusive society. In this case, education is a means to produce a young generation that is critical and sensitive to social issues, so that they are not easily trapped in rigid dogmatism. Thus, the reinterpretation of liberation theology serves as a tool of liberation that produces intellectually intelligent graduates with high moral integrity

and social commitment (Licence 2020, 172).

This reinterpretation also encourages innovation in developing religious education curriculum at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. The reinterpretation of Islamic liberation theology underscores that religious education should transcend the mere transmission of doctrinal knowledge and instead function as an emancipatory praxis aimed at liberating individuals from structural and cultural forms of oppression. Anchored in the normative values of justice, freedom, and human dignity, this interpretive framework provides a critical epistemological basis for reconfiguring Islamic education into a paradigm that is not only reflective and dialogical but also transformative in addressing contemporary socio-political realities. This interpretive framework fosters curricular innovation in religious education at multiple levels, ranging from elementary to higher education, by embedding liberationist values into pedagogical design. Such a curriculum transcends the narrow focus on cognitive attainment, instead nurturing students' moral agency, critical social awareness, and intercultural competence, thereby equipping them to engage constructively with the complexities of a plural and multicultural society.

Several studies show that colleges that integrate a moderation and liberation approach in their curriculum can produce graduates with global insights while also being rooted in local values. For example, a study evaluating the moderate education curriculum in higher education found that integrating justice and humanitarian values can increase students' active participation in social and political activities and foster critical awareness of societal injustices (Mukhibat et al. 2024, 8). Thus, the reinterpretation of liberation theology impacts the quality of education and has far-reaching implications for developing a more inclusive and democratic society.

In addition, in the ever-growing digital era, the liberation theology approach also opens opportunities to optimize the use of information technology in the learning process. Digital platforms and social media can be leveraged to spread a liberating narrative that inspires students to think critically and creatively. This platform makes the discourse on justice, freedom, and equality widely accessible to the public. Hence, religious education occurs in the classroom and online interactions that reinforce the values of diversity and inclusiveness. This kind of digital innovation aligns with global efforts to digitize education and create a more interactive learning environment that is adaptive to the needs of the times (Tolchah and Mu'ammam 2019, 1035).

In theological studies, Ali Asghar Engineer's reinterpretation of liberation theology also emphasizes the importance of criticism of classical interpretations that prioritize ritualistic and individualistic aspects. Engineer emphasized that true theology must be able to

raise social issues, linking the values of faith with concrete actions in overcoming oppression and injustice. This approach invites scholars and educators to reflect deeply on the meaning of Islamic teachings, so that the values of justice and freedom can be internalized in every aspect of life, including in the education system. In this context, the reinterpretation of liberation theology offers a strong theoretical foundation for dismantling the dogmatic structures that have hindered the development of critical and responsive education.

Overall, the results of the research and discussion show that the reinterpretation of the liberation theology of Ali Asghar Engineer has excellent potential to reform the religious education curriculum in Indonesia. By integrating the values of justice, freedom, and equality, the curriculum not only functions as a knowledge transfer tool but also as a medium of liberation that prioritizes the formation of character and critical awareness of students. This paradigm challenges traditional approaches that are too tied to mere textuality and ritual and opens up space for pedagogical innovations responsive to contemporary social dynamics.

This study concludes that the reinterpretation of liberation theology must be a foothold in the development of religious education curriculum to create a generation that not only memorizes the teachings but can also apply Islamic values in the context of real life. These values must be reflected in every component of the curriculum, starting from learning objectives, teaching materials, teaching methods, to evaluation of learning outcomes (Chanifah et al. 2021, 207). Thus, religious education in Indonesia can be transformed into an agent of liberation that empowers students to actively play a role in realizing social justice and inclusive diversity.

The practical implications of these findings also imply the need for training for teachers and educators to enable them to implement an exemption approach in the teaching and learning process. Teachers who understand the concepts of justice, freedom, and equality as core values of education will be better able to create a dynamic classroom environment where each student is invited to think critically and contribute to discussions about relevant social issues. This kind of training not only improves the quality of teaching but also fosters a democratic spirit and social awareness among students (Ucan 2019, 5).

In addition, the reinterpretation of liberation theology also encourages collaboration between educational institutions, the government, and the community. Effective education policies must be formulated through constructive dialogue between various stakeholders, so that the values of justice and liberation are not only theoretical but can also be applied concretely in the national education system. Curriculum revision based on the principles of freedom is expected to address the challenges of

diversity and injustice that have been hindering the progress of education in Indonesia (Putra 2023, 45).

Through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates theological studies, education, and public policy, Ali Asghar Engineer's reinterpretation of liberation theology offers a new perspective that is critical and transformative. This approach critiques existing dogmatic structures and provides practical solutions to create a curriculum that frees learners from the shackles of injustice and discrimination. By combining thinking from international literature and local studies, this research contributes to the development of more holistic educational theories and practices, capable of shaping a young generation that is critical, tolerant, and committed to social justice.

Finally, the reinterpretation of liberation theology as the foundation of the values of justice, freedom, and equality in religious education is expected to revolutionize the education system in Indonesia. By prioritizing these values, the curriculum will enrich a contextual and progressive understanding of Islam and inspire all elements of society to work together to create an inclusive, responsive, and transformative learning environment. The results of this research are expected to be an essential reference for policymakers, educators, and researchers to design education policies that support the liberation and empowerment of students to build a more just and cultured society.

Thus, Ali Asghar's reinterpretation of liberation theology made a significant theoretical and practical contribution to developing a religious education curriculum that taught science and fostered high social awareness. The values of justice, freedom, and equality promoted by the liberation paradigm are the key to overcoming dogmatism and injustice in the education system and paving the way for a more inclusive and humanist transformation of education. The results of this study show that by integrating the principles of liberation into curriculum policies, Indonesia has the potential to produce a next generation who are not only academically intelligent but also able to play an active role in building a multicultural society that is just, tolerant, and dignified.

Identification of the Values of Justice, Freedom, and Equality Has Been Integrated into the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

In the era of globalization and increasingly complex dynamics of social change, the education system in Indonesia is faced with the demand to not only produce academically competent graduates but also individuals who are critical, tolerant, and able to contribute to the development of a just society. The religious education curriculum that has tended to focus on memorization and ritual aspects is often considered incapable of dealing with contemporary social problems, such as discrimination, intolerance, and marginalization. In this context, liberation theology, as

a paradigm that emphasizes the values of justice, freedom, and equality, can be reinterpreted and integrated into multicultural education policies. The reinterpretation of liberation theology, as proposed by Ali Asghar Engineer, has the potential to be the cornerstone of curriculum reform that not only imparts religious knowledge but also frees students from dogmatism and strengthens social and humanitarian consciousness (R'boul 2021, 213–24).

Evaluating the strength of implementing the curriculum based on liberation theology shows several positive aspects that should be appreciated. First, this approach has successfully challenged the traditional paradigm separating the spiritual and worldly realms. A curriculum integrating liberation values can lead students to think critically and identify various forms of injustice daily by emphasizing that true faith is realized through just actions. In this case, the systematic application of the values of justice (*'adl*), freedom (*ḥurriyah*), and equality (*musāwah*) in teaching materials provides a deeper understanding of the role of Islam as a religion that empowers its people to overcome oppression and marginalization (Munir and Munafiah 2019, 3).

Another prominent strength of this curriculum approach is its ability to accommodate the diversity of values and traditions in Indonesian society. Multicultural education infused with the principle of liberation teaches the values of tolerance and inclusivity and encourages students to appreciate differences as shared wealth. Thus, this curriculum supports the creation of a harmonious society and can face global challenges through intercultural dialogue. Findings from the meta-analysis of the multicultural education paradigm in Indonesia confirm that integrating diversity values, such as unity in diversity, equality, and social justice, is key to creating citizens who are tolerant and responsive to social dynamics (Ucan 2019, 9).

Despite its strengths, implementing a curriculum based on liberation theology also faces structural challenges that cannot be ignored. One of the main obstacles is the existence of a centralized and rigid education system. A system rooted in old educational traditions finds it challenging to adapt to a new paradigm emphasizing freedom of thought and active participation. Radical curriculum changes often meet resistance from educators and institutions that are comfortable with conventional teaching methods. This barrier is exacerbated by limited resources, both in terms of infrastructure and training of educators, which hinders the implementation of innovative and participatory teaching methods (Laila et al. 2025, 19).

In addition, reinterpretations of liberation theology often have to deal with ideological and cultural challenges. In some circles, the liberation approach is still seen as something that erodes traditional values and threatens social stability. In the Indonesian context, where

religious conservatism is still extreme, the reinterpretation of liberation values must be socialized carefully so as not to be mistaken for a form of secularism or radicalism. Therefore, efforts are needed to educate stakeholders, including educators, parents, and the general public, about the liberating approach's essence and benefits in the education context. It is essential to create a comprehensive understanding that the value of liberation is an attempt to empower individuals and make social justice, not just a critique of religious traditions (Mazid, Futaqi, and Farikah 2021, 76).

Another challenge lies in the gap between national education policy and implementation. Studies on religious education curriculum policies show that although governments have formulated policies to support multicultural education, their implementation is often inconsistent across regions. Differences in economics, infrastructure, and human resource conditions in each region cause significant variations in curriculum implementation. This condition results in disparities in the quality of education, where some schools can implement the exemption approach well, while others are still stuck in conventional teaching methods. Therefore, periodic evaluation and systematic monitoring are needed to ensure that the policies that have been formulated can be implemented evenly and effectively across the region.

In the face of these challenges, several strategic recommendations can be proposed to improve curriculum implementation based on liberation theology. First, structural reforms in the national education system are necessary to be more responsive to change. This reform includes decentralization in educational decision-making so that each region can adapt the curriculum to the local context (Mukminin et al. 2019, 57). Thus, education policies can better accommodate Indonesia's diversity of values and traditions. These reforms must also be accompanied by increased budgets and support for teacher training and the provision of infrastructure that supports innovative and participatory teaching methods.

Second, intensive efforts are needed to develop teaching materials integrated with liberation values. Teaching materials must be prepared with an interdisciplinary approach that links Islamic theory to contemporary issues, such as economic injustice, discrimination, and marginalization. Preparing contextual material will help students relate religious teachings to the social realities around them, so that they can develop critical attitudes and empathy. In this regard, collaboration between academics, education practitioners, and policy experts is essential to produce relevant and applicable teaching materials.

Furthermore, teaching strategies must be optimized by adopting innovative and participatory methods. Discussion methods, case studies, and project-based learning can be applied to create a space for

dialogue and critical reflection among learners. This kind of teaching approach improves analytical and problem-solving skills and encourages students to contribute to the learning process actively. The application of digital technology in learning also strongly supports this effort, where online learning platforms and social media can disseminate a broad and interactive narrative of liberation. This will strengthen the role of education as an agent of liberation that empowers society to fight against all forms of injustice (Berglund and Gent 2019, 339).

Another strategic recommendation is to increase the capacity of educators through training and workshops that focus on integrating liberation values in the teaching process. Teachers and lecturers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to apply a learning approach that is cognitive and develop soft skills such as empathy, leadership, and practical communication skills. This kind of training is expected to transform the role of educators into facilitators who encourage critical and participatory discussions in the classroom, so that students in depth can internalize the values of justice and freedom.

Furthermore, integrating liberation values in multicultural education policies must be supported by systematic evaluation and monitoring. The government and educational institutions need to develop comprehensive evaluation indicators to measure the success of curriculum implementation. These indicators include academic aspects and measurements of students' attitudes, behaviors, and social participation. With regular and systematic evaluations, relevant parties can identify potential obstacles and make continuous improvements. This kind of evaluation also serves as feedback to direct education policies to be more inclusive and responsive to socio-political-economic dynamics.

To create an inclusive education system, it is also essential to involve the participation of the community at large. Through the Ministry of Education, the government must open a space for dialogue between policymakers, educators, and the public. Public discussion and consultation forums can be a forum for formulating policies that truly reflect the aspirations and needs of the community. Community involvement in the education policy formulation process can also increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of implementing a curriculum based on liberation theology, because all parties have a role to play in creating a fair and inclusive education system (Hasan and Juhannis 2024, 6).

In addition, references from international literature show that integrating liberation values into the educational curriculum is not new. Paulo Freire's thought, for example, emphasizes that education should be a tool to liberate the individual from oppression through a dialogical and reflective process (Freire 1970, 80). This Freirean approach aligns with liberation theology, which emphasizes the importance of critical action as a manifestation of faith. Thus, the application of liberation

values in the religious education curriculum in Indonesia can also be linked to progressive education theory, which has been widely adopted in various countries. Other literature, such as the work of Banks and Banks (2010), underlines that multicultural education can increase awareness of diversity and encourage inclusivity, which further contributes to the creation of a just and equal society (Banks and Banks 1997, 112). The integration of multicultural education theory and liberation theology is expected to produce an educational model that is not only academically effective but also able to shape the character of students who support social justice.

The evaluation of the strength of implementing the liberation theology-based curriculum shows that this approach has great potential to reform the religious education system in Indonesia. The main strength lies in the ability of this paradigm to challenge traditional dogmatism, encourage critical thinking, and integrate the values of justice, freedom, and equality into the teaching material. However, structural challenges such as a centralized education system, limited resources, and cultural resistance are significant obstacles that must be overcome. Emerging strategic recommendations include structural reforms in the education system, developing contextual and interdisciplinary teaching materials, intensive educator training, and systematic evaluation and monitoring to ensure effective policy implementation.

The practical implications of these findings are of great importance to policymakers and education practitioners. By adopting a curriculum based on liberation theology, the education system hopes to produce academically competent graduates and individuals who are critical, tolerant, and committed to fighting for social justice. This inclusive education system will make a major contribution to reducing discrimination, intolerance, and marginalization and fostering the realization of a harmonious multicultural society.

Finally, this evaluation emphasizes that efforts to improve education policy must be based on synergy between theory and practice, where liberation values are not only an academic discourse but are also realized through innovative and participatory implementation strategies. The proposed strategic recommendations, such as education system reform, the development of context-based teaching materials, the capacity building of educators, and periodic evaluations, are essential steps towards creating an education system responsive to Indonesia's socio-political-economic dynamics. Thus, a curriculum based on liberation theology can be a transformative instrument that drives comprehensive social change, producing a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also has moral integrity and a commitment to realizing justice and inclusivity in society.

Additional references from the international literature and case

studies in Indonesia provide a strong empirical basis for the idea that multicultural education infused with liberating values positively impacts increasing tolerance and social awareness. These studies show that when learners are invited to understand diversity through a critical approach, they tend to be more open and able to see differences as an asset, not an obstacle. Therefore, implementing a curriculum based on liberation theology is relevant to improving the quality of education and as a strategy to create a more inclusive and democratic society.

This research is expected to significantly contribute to developing education policy in Indonesia by integrating a comprehensive evaluative approach and strategic recommendations. This evaluation is also a reference for educational institutions and the government in designing policies that meet academic standards and reflect the values of justice, freedom, and inclusivity as the main pillars in human resource development in the era of globalization.

Overall, the evaluation of the strengths, challenges, and strategic recommendations in implementing the liberation theology-based curriculum underscores the importance of an interdisciplinary and participatory approach in creating an education system that can respond to socio-political-economic dynamics. This kind of educational model not only focuses on achieving academic learning outcomes but also prioritizes character building and the development of deep social awareness. It is hoped that with the application of liberating values that are integrated in education policies, Indonesia can produce the next generation who not only master science but also can lead social change towards a more just, inclusive, and dignified society.

Uploaded references and additional literature, such as Freire's (1970, 109) work on liberation education, Banks and Banks (2010, 86) on multicultural education, as well as curriculum policy studies in Indonesia, provide a theoretical and empirical framework that supports the finding that liberation theology approaches can be a major driver in education system reform. Thus, this study concludes that the evaluation of the implementation of a liberation-based curriculum offers strategic insights to overcome structural barriers, improve teaching effectiveness, and create an education system that is more inclusive and responsive to social dynamics. The results of this evaluation are expected to be the basis for formulating a more progressive education policy so that education in Indonesia can function holistically as an agent of liberation and empowerment of society.

Challenges and Barriers to Implementing Liberation-Based Education

The implementation of education based on Ali Asghar Engineer's liberation theology in Indonesia is not merely a technical issue of

curriculum design but also an epistemological, political, and cultural challenge that requires critical analysis. Epistemologically, the project of applying liberative values demands theoretical legitimacy. Engineer's framework is a synthesis of reformist Islamic traditions with inspiration from Latin American Christian liberation theology and Freirean critical pedagogy. Yet, such adaptation is vulnerable to criticism as a "Western theoretical transplant" if not localized through credible processes of *ijtihād* that resonate with Muslim communities. This concern is not merely academic rhetoric; it touches the authority of Islamic scholarship and the theological identity that underpins religious education in schools and madrasas. Consequently, strategies of implementation must include theoretical reconstruction that roots liberative principles in Qur'anic foundations and modern *ijtihād*, so that liberation emerges as an internal product of Islamic tradition rather than a purely external import.

From a structural perspective, Indonesia's national education system presents tangible obstacles. Although the "Merdeka Curriculum" reform has provided formal autonomy for schools to innovate, its implementation reveals significant disparities across regions and institutions (Laila et al. 2025, 27). The national framework continues to regulate learning outcomes and assessments, pushing many under-resourced schools and madrasas to revert to textual and memorization-based teaching practices. Such an approach directly contradicts an emancipatory pedagogy that requires dialogical methods, community projects, and authentic assessments. In other words, policy-level decentralization does not automatically translate into transformative practice without adequate institutional capacity, funding, and pedagogical supervision.

Human resources represent another critical limitation. Many Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers lack adequate training in dialogical methodologies and project-based learning, the very core of liberation pedagogy (Pedersen 2016, 388). Teacher training programs remain heavily focused on the mastery of doctrinal content rather than skills in facilitating critical discussions or supervising community-based projects. As a result, the emancipatory vision of the curriculum risks remaining rhetorical rather than practical. Addressing this gap requires systemic reform: continuous in-service professional development, mentorship grounded in praxis, and the availability of ready-to-use teaching modules that integrate local case studies and authentic assessment rubrics.

The cultural and ideological dimensions are equally complex. Efforts to reinterpret religious texts to deconstruct patriarchy and emphasize inclusivity often encounter resistance from conventional actors, religious leaders, organizations, or political groups, who perceive such reinterpretations as a threat to their authority (Sahin 2018, 22). The opposition is not solely about curricular content but also about symbolic power. An educational approach that encourages young people to

question gender hierarchies and socio-religious authority can potentially undermine the legitimacy of traditional religious elites. Therefore, implementation strategies must be dialogical and deliberative, involving religious stakeholders from the design stage, employing hermeneutical methodologies that highlight justice-oriented Qur'anic interpretations, and presenting strong textual evidence to legitimize liberative readings rather than relying on abstract normative claims.

Material and institutional constraints further complicate the process. Nationally distributed IRE textbooks remain oriented toward ritual knowledge and rote memorization, with limited integration of social analysis, local case studies, and community engagement activities (Nurdin 2020, 24). Funding for innovative curriculum development, teacher training, and field-based learning is often insufficient, particularly in underfunded schools and madrasas. In addition, the dominance of summative national examinations reduces incentives for schools to adopt learning methods that emphasize social consciousness and civic engagement, competencies that are harder to measure quantitatively (Shahjahan et al. 2022, 91).

Politically, liberation-based education is vulnerable to politicization. A curriculum that emphasizes social justice and critiques structural inequalities can be exploited by political actors as part of ideological contestation in the public sphere. There is also a risk of co-optation: "liberation" is adopted rhetorically at the policy level but emptied of its transformative substance through symbolic implementation that leaves the status quo intact. For this reason, evaluation must include robust quality indicators, not merely policy inputs but demonstrable evidence of change in students' attitudes, behaviors, and community engagement outcomes.

Overcoming these challenges requires multi-level and long-term strategies. First, theological legitimacy must be developed through academic networks and progressive ulama, including the publication of Qur'anic commentaries emphasizing justice, cross-organization dialogues, and *ijtihad*-based fatwas or interpretive guidelines. Second, teacher professionalism must be reformed through continuous training programs that integrate critical theory and field practice, supported by partnerships between universities and schools (teacher residency, action research). Third, national assessment frameworks need to be redesigned to include socio-cultural and participatory competencies, using portfolios, community projects, and reflective essays as valid measures. Fourth, pilot programs across diverse districts should be developed, accompanied by rigorous monitoring and evaluation, so that successful practices can be adapted contextually.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of curriculum reform. While liberation theology can provide a transformative

pedagogical framework, education alone cannot dismantle deep-rooted structural inequalities without parallel economic and social reforms. Nevertheless, if developed with theological sensitivity, contextual awareness, and adequate institutional support, liberation-based education can become a vital instrument for shaping citizens who are critical, just, and democratic, values crucial for Indonesia's plural and multicultural future.

Conclusion

Ali Asghar Engineer's reinterpretation of liberation theology has significant potential as a fundamental paradigm for reforming Indonesia's religious education curriculum, especially in light of the challenges posed by a multicultural society. The findings of the study indicate that the traditional curriculum that has so far emphasized memorization and ritualistic practices is no longer able to answer the problems of discrimination, intolerance, and marginalization that are increasingly evident in the daily lives of Indonesian people. The religious education curriculum can transform into a more inclusive framework by integrating the values of justice, freedom, and equality embodied in liberation theology. This conveys religious knowledge in depth and encourages students to develop critical thinking skills, social awareness, and active participation as agents of change.

The study recommends a series of strategic reforms. First, decentralization is needed in the decision-making process in the education sector so that each region has the autonomy to adapt the curriculum to the local socio-cultural context. Second, increased investment in training and professional development for educators is crucial, so that they can implement more participatory and contextual teaching methods. Third, it is necessary to encourage an intense and focused public dialogue to educate the public that liberation values are not an attempt to reject tradition, but rather a progressive reinterpretation that is in line with the core values of Islam—justice (*'adl*), freedom (*hurriyah*), and equality (*musāwah*).

Thus, Ali Asghar Engineer's reinterpretation of liberation theology offers a theoretical and practical framework that can be the basis for reforming the religious education curriculum in Indonesia. Suppose justice, freedom, and equality are truly integrated into the curriculum. In that case, educational institutions will not only produce academically superior graduates but also critical individuals, socially responsible, and ready to contribute to positive change. It is hoped that the insights and recommendations generated in this study will catalyze policymakers, educators, and academics to jointly pursue inclusive and transformative education reforms, ultimately realizing a more just, tolerant, and harmonious Indonesian society.

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