



PAULO FREIRE'S HUMANISM PARADIGM IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF 21ST CENTURY EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CURRENT EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

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Abstract. This study analyzes educational management practices in 21st-century Indonesia through the lens of Paulo Freire's dialogical humanism, highlighting the gap between human-centered educational demands and school management practices dominated by bureaucratic-technocratic paradigms. The study employs a multiple-case study design across six secondary schools to examine how administrative compliance logic and hierarchical culture shape spaces for dialogue, critical reflection, and transformative action. Findings reveal that the dominance of bureaucratic management leads to various disparities, including teacher alienation, pseudo participation, digital divides, and the dehumanization of educational processes, while limiting meaningful dialogue and praxis. However, evidence suggests that integrating Freirean principles of dialogue, conscientização, praxis, and liberation can encourage the transformation of educational management toward greater participation, inclusion, and emancipation. The study concludes that such transformation requires administrative reform, strengthening reflective capacity, and leveraging local values and digital technology to realize educational management that is humanistic and relevant to the needs of the 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

Entering the third decade of the 21st century, the field of education is confronted with increasingly complex and multidimensional challenges (Srivastava, 2023). Rapid digitalization (García-Pérez et al., 2021), the ever-changing demands of the labor market (Zolin & Kobylatskiy, 2024), cultural diversity (Hetmańczyk, 2020), as well as humanitarian crises caused by conflict (Maitland et al., 2022; Rejali & Heiniger, 2020) and climate change (Schleicher, 2020), have become realities that cannot be ignored. In Indonesia, the “Merdeka Belajar” (Freedom to Learn) policy has emerged as a response to these changes. However, in practice, educational management in schools is still dominated by a technocratic paradigm oriented toward administrative compliance (Margaretha et al., 2024) and the achievement of quantitative targets (Rosser et al., 2021). Performance indicators such as exam scores, accreditation, and budget absorption remain the main benchmarks of success (Ćukušić et al., 2014). While dialogical aspects, critical awareness, and the meaningfulness of the learning process are often marginalized. This phenomenon reveals a gap between the demands of human-centered learning and the reality of educational management, which remains overly bureaucratic and inflexible.

Paulo Freire stands as a central figure in critical educational philosophy, emphasizing dialogical humanism as a transformative force in the educational process (Takona, 2025). In his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire critiques the “banking” model of education, which reduces students to passive objects and reinforces oppressive power relations (Zenozi, 2025). As an alternative, he proposes a dialogical paradigm grounded in mutual respect and liberation (Dussel, 2011), driven by the core principles of dialogue, *conscientização* (critical consciousness), praxis (reflection and transformative action), and liberation. From Freire's perspective, dialogue is a collaborative process that enables teachers, students, and managers to

become active, reflective subjects (Dutra, 2025), while *conscientização* empowers individuals to critically understand and transform their social reality (Simaan, 2020). In educational management, these principles necessitate participatory leadership and a school culture that fosters intellectual freedom and transformative agency.

Paulo Freire, a prominent educational philosopher, has long criticized the “banking” model of education, which positions learners as passive objects who merely receive knowledge (Govender, 2020). Freire's critique is increasingly relevant today, as educational management practices often reduce teachers, students, and even principals to units for the sake of achieving targets (Misoczky, 2024), rather than recognizing them as active and transformative subjects. The infiltration of neo-liberal logic in education, which emphasizes efficiency, competition, and standardized accountability, exacerbates this situation. Schools risk becoming entrenched in a performative culture, where the pursuit of formal indicators becomes the primary goal (Peace-Hughes, 2021), while emancipatory and humanistic values are neglected.

The main problem that arises is the gap between the ideal of humanistic education and the reality of educational management that remains bureaucratic and technocratic. Studies on Freire's thought in Indonesia have generally been limited to pedagogical practices within the classroom (Mones et al., 2022), with few examining the application of Freire's dialogical humanism principles at the policy and school management levels in a comprehensive and systemic manner. Moreover, there is still no conceptual framework that integrates humanistic values into educational management practices in a way that is empirically applicable to the Indonesian context. In this context, a critical analysis of current educational management practices is essential to identify existing inequalities, systemic issues, and the potential for transformation relevant to the needs of 21st-century education.

However, contemporary educational management is often defined by models that conflict with these humanistic ideals. The bureaucratic-technocratic model emphasizes rigid hierarchies and strict regulatory compliance, a structure widely adopted in Indonesian public schools where principals function primarily as administrators (Date, 2026). While School-Based Management (SBM) was designed to grant autonomy, it remains frequently constrained by administrative routines (Sari, 2024; Wittmann, 2006), and performance-based management prioritizes quantitative targets like exam scores and budget absorption (Pratolo et al., 2020). Although participatory and transformational models emphasize empowerment, their practical application remains limited (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). These conventional models are increasingly criticized for neglecting the human dimension and social relations in favor of neo-liberal logic, which emphasizes efficiency, competition, and standardized accountability (Wohlgemuth, 2008; Giroux, 2020). This efficiency-based paradigm views schools as “business organizations” (Malhotra, 2001), often overlooking character development, creativity, and meaningful social relationships (Simonton, 2000).

Freire's critique of the “banking” model is highly relevant to these efficiency-based practices, where relationships become rigid and transactional, reducing education to a technical process of producing graduates for market demands. Integrating humanistic values into leadership requires a paradigm shift toward a participatory and transformative approach where managers act as facilitators of dialogue and innovation. Schools that implement principles such as empathy and justice tend to exhibit healthier psychosocial climates and better overall performance (Macpherson, 2025). In Indonesia, however, this integration faces challenges from a deeply rooted hierarchical culture and intense regulatory pressures. Current research gaps indicate that studies on Freire in Indonesia remain focused on classroom pedagogy rather than systemic school leadership, and there is a lack of empirical models that incorporate dialogical humanism into management practices within Global South contexts. Consequently, this study constructs a theoretical framework that combines Freire's principles of dialogue, *conscientização*, praxis, and liberation with contemporary management theories to critically analyze current practices and propose humanistic, transformative alternatives.

Based on these issues, this study seeks to answer two key questions: (1) what are the characteristics and tendencies of educational management practices in Indonesian schools today



when critically examined through the lens of Paulo Freire's humanism, and (2) what forms of inequality or problems arise as a result of the dominance of bureaucratic and technocratic management paradigms. Specifically, this research aims to conduct a critical analysis of current educational management practices in Indonesia to identify systemic problems and propose alternative transformations grounded in the principles of dialogical humanism, thereby making a theoretical contribution by enriching educational management studies through a critical humanist philosophical perspective while offering practical guidelines for developing school leadership that is more dialogical, collaborative, and oriented toward liberation. The novelty of this research lies in its effort to bring Freire's concepts of praxis and dialogue into the realm of school management, extending beyond the traditional focus on classroom pedagogy to offer a critical analysis model that connects humanistic variables such as empathy, participation, and critical reflection with contemporary school performance indicators. Furthermore, by highlighting the context of the Global South, particularly Indonesia, which has rarely been featured as a locus for Freire based educational management research, this study holds the potential to enrich the global discourse on the transformation of humanistic educational management.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a critical paradigm with a qualitative approach, augmented by quantitative components within a mixed-methods framework. The critical paradigm is chosen because this research aims not only to describe reality but also to critique and propose transformative alternatives to existing educational management practices. The qualitative approach is used to explore experiences, perceptions, and management practices in schools, while quantitative elements identify trends, patterns, and relationships among variables relevant to the integration of Freirean humanistic values. The research design is a multiple case study in which several schools are selected as research sites to obtain a comprehensive, contextual picture. This approach enables the researcher to conduct cross-case comparisons to identify general patterns and local specificities in educational management practices. By examining multiple sites, the study ensures a robust analysis of how different institutional environments respond to the principles of dialogical humanism.

This research was conducted in several secondary schools, including junior and senior high schools, in two sub-districts of Sukabumi Regency, each with different characteristics representing both urban and rural settings. The locations were selected purposively to ensure diversity in social, cultural, and educational policy contexts. The research subjects include principals, vice principals, teachers, students, and school committee members, selected for their active involvement in school management processes and openness to innovation. The number of qualitative informants was determined by the principle of data saturation, while a stratified random sampling technique was employed for the quantitative survey to ensure representativeness.

Data were collected using a comprehensive set of techniques to ensure depth and breadth. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and school committee members to explore their experiences and challenges in integrating humanistic values. Focus Group Discussions involving teachers and students were held to discuss the dynamics of dialogue and participation, while participant observation allowed the researcher to observe interaction patterns and decision-making processes directly. Additionally, a document review was conducted of school policies and meeting minutes, complemented by a quantitative survey using Likert-scale questions to assess perceptions of school climate and participation.

Qualitative instruments consisted of interview and FGD guidelines developed in accordance with the principles of Freirean humanism and contemporary educational management theory. The quantitative instrument was a questionnaire that underwent content validity testing through expert judgment and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha during a limited pilot study. Data triangulation was conducted by combining results from interviews, FGDs, observations, and document analyses to enhance the validity of the findings. Furthermore, member checking was performed by inviting key informants to verify the accuracy of the data



interpretation.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding with NVivo software through an iterative process of open, axial, and selective coding to identify themes relevant to humanistic management. Survey data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling to test the developed conceptual model. The results from several school cases were compared to identify general patterns and context-specific characteristics while assessing the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the research upholds strict ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw, while the researcher engaged in critical reflection to minimize bias and maintain objectivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Characteristics of Educational Management Practices in Indonesia (From the Perspective of Paulo Freire's Humanism)

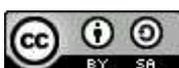
Field research was conducted in six secondary schools (SMP/SMA)—two urban public, two rural public, and two urban private—using 15 in-depth interviews, 6 FGDs, 28 hours of observation, and a survey of 96 teachers and education staff. Thematic analysis, validated through PLS-SEM of the survey data, revealed four central characteristics which, according to Freire's framework, represent “banking management” (top-down, minimal dialogue, and non-emancipatory)—see [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Characteristics of Educational Management Practices Based on Freirean Humanism Dimensions

Freirean Dimension	Survey Indicator (1-5)	Qualitative Findings	Freirean Summary
Dialogue	2.4 (SD 0.9)	78% of respondents stated “key decisions are already made before meetings”; meeting observations showed one-way communication.	Dialogue remains ceremonial; subject-object relations dominate.
Conscientização	2.0 (SD 0.7)	Teachers associate critical reflection only with “national exam score analysis.”	Critical awareness is limited to numbers, not socio-cultural realities.
Praxis (Reflection-Action)	2.3 (SD 0.8)	Innovation programs stall at the proposal stage due to “waiting for official SOPs.”	Transformative action is hampered by bureaucracy.
Liberation/Emanicipation	2.1 (SD 0.9)	65% of students feel “unsafe” expressing opinions in official school forums.	Management has not positioned school members as subjects of liberation.

The qualitative findings are strongly supported by direct testimonies from school members across different contexts. A teacher from an urban public school noted that although the School-Based Management scheme exists, policies continue to come from above, and teachers merely adjust the report format. A principal from a rural public school acknowledged the importance of dialogue but admitted that accreditation targets take precedence, suggesting that meaningful conversations about educational vision are deferred indefinitely. A student from an urban private school observed that student council meetings function primarily as attendance formalities, with final decisions remaining in the hands of the vice principal. These testimonies collectively illustrate how hierarchical structures and compliance logic suppress authentic participation at every level of school life.

Thematic analysis of the data reveals four dominant patterns in current educational management practices. First, the dominance of compliance logic is evident from document reviews, which show that 82% of management meeting agendas focus on meeting reporting deadlines for platforms such as e Raport, ARKAS, and EMIS. This affirms Freire's critique of education controlled by structure rather than dialogical relations, resulting in teachers and students becoming disengaged from meaningful participation in decision-making. Second, pseudo participation is widespread, as the SBM scheme formally provides space for committees and student councils to attend budget meetings, yet observations reveal that participants merely sign the minutes without exercising any real influence. This phenomenon aligns with Freire's concept of false generosity, in which formal participation exists without the actual transfer of power.



Third, innovation in schools has been reduced to a project format, where programs such as Child Friendly School or Adiwiyata competitions are pursued for label achievement rather than genuine transformation. There is no praxis in the Freirean sense, only a symbolic reproduction of performance that leaves oppressive structures intact. Fourth, pockets of humanism were identified, most notably in a private urban school that holds a weekly teacher-student forum for collaborative decision-making on remedial schedules and social projects. The dialogue score in this school reached 3.8, significantly above the overall average, demonstrating that humanist praxis is achievable when leadership is genuinely shared and participatory.

The empirical findings confirm that educational management practices in Indonesia largely operate within the spectrum of what Freire would call banking management, characterized by top-down authority, minimal dialogue, and non-emancipatory structures. Bureaucratic compliance mirrors the logic of knowledge deposit in Freire's banking education model, pseudo-participation conceals persistent object-subject relations, and performative projects reproduce a domestication narrative that suppresses critical consciousness. Nevertheless, the existence of pockets of dialogical praxis across the studied schools signals meaningful potential for transformation. This transformation can be realized if Freire's four principles of dialogue, conscientização, praxis, and liberation are institutionalized through distributive participatory leadership that delegates real decision making power to teacher and student teams, the creation of scheduled critical reflection spaces that go beyond numerical evaluation, and the sharpening of non cognitive indicators such as empathy, solidarity, and social virtue as legitimate measures of school quality.

Forms of Inequality Resulting from the Dominance of the Bureaucratic-Technocratic Management Paradigm

Six main forms of inequality were identified and are summarized in [Table 2](#); the following narrative integrates survey data, field interview excerpts, and a critical analysis through the lens of Paulo Freire's humanism.

Table 2. Inequality in Educational Management Practices in Six Sample Schools

Form of Inequality	Quantitative Indicator (Scale 1–5 or %)	Interview Quote/Observation Fact	Freirean Implication
Inequality in Resource Allocation	1. 41% of BOS funds absorbed for reporting & bureaucracy 2. Perception score of “access to learning facilities” 2.6	“We want to buy a laptop? Wait until the BOS fund SPJ is completed.” (Treasurer, Rural-P)	Reproduction of dependency – schools depend on external authorities, minimizing praxis autonomy
Administrative vs. Pedagogical Burden	73% of teachers >6 hours/week for reporting. Pedagogical satisfaction score 2.3	Observation: teachers typing e-Raport in the staff room during break time	Alienation – educators are forced to focus on “paperwork,” not dialogical relations
Pseudo-Participation of Students & Teachers	“Voice is heard” score: students 2.1; teachers 2.4 • 62% of student council meetings are informative	“Student council meetings are just for idea attendance; the final decision is with the vice principal.” (Student, Urban-Private)	Objectification – school members become objects of policy, not subjects of liberation
Digital Divide	1. 58% of rural students do not have personal devices 2. ICT readiness score 2.2	Computer lab locked because it has not been verified by the education office	Marginalization – access to knowledge is hampered by bureaucratic structures
Gender & Social Inequality	1. Women hold <15% of structural positions 2. Poor students are half as likely to join flagship programs	“Innovation scholarships are prioritized for those who ‘can raise the school’s name’.” (Vice Principal of Public Relations)	Systemic exclusion – achievement structures reinforce social hierarchy
Teacher Welfare & Burn-out	1. 67% of teachers report high stress 2. Psychosocial support score 2.0	Teacher cried during FGD: “Accreditation targets make us forget our noble purpose.”	Dehumanization – subjects are driven to exhaustion, losing the meaning of work



Thematic Narrative and Critical Discussion

The analysis of educational management in the studied schools reveals several systemic inequalities that hinder the realization of a humanistic environment. One primary issue is the unequal allocation of resources, with BOS document audits showing that an average of 41% of the budget is spent on administrative documentation such as receipts and tiered reports. This focus on document compliance often delays the procurement of essential learning devices for months, reflecting what Freire describes as the bureaucratic control of consciousness, where external structures override the real needs of school members. Furthermore, the administrative burden significantly erodes pedagogical focus, with survey data indicating that 73% of teachers spend more than 6 hours per week on data entry for platforms such as e Report, Dapodik, and ARKAS. Observations confirm that teachers frequently complete these reports during breaks, reducing opportunities for meaningful dialogue with students and manifesting a form of praxis alienation where energy for reflection and action is diverted into repetitive tasks devoid of emancipatory meaning.

Participation within these structures often remains superficial, as evidenced by the fact that while School-Based Management policy requires committee deliberation, 62% of student council meetings are merely informative. Teachers and students frequently attend these sessions without real bargaining power or influence over decisions, a situation that reflects Freire's concept of false generosity, in which pseudo-participation serves to maintain the status quo of hierarchical power. This systemic rigidity also manifests in a digital divide, particularly in rural schools where 58% of students lack access to personal digital devices and computer labs remain locked, awaiting official verification. This inequality is not merely an infrastructure issue but a manifestation of bureaucratic logic that prioritizes inventory compliance over dialogical access to technology.

Social hierarchies are further perpetuated through gender and socioeconomic inequalities within the school organization. Data show that less than 15% of strategic positions are held by women, and participation in flagship programs is predominantly limited to middle-class students selected for their potential to bring honor to the school. Freire describes this condition as oppression within oppression, where school structures reinforce existing societal biases through performative indicators. Finally, these pressures culminate in significant issues regarding teacher welfare and burnout, with two-thirds of teachers reporting high stress levels and a psychosocial support score of only 2.0. Emotional testimonies from focus group discussions reveal a deep sense of dehumanization, as educators feel that accreditation targets force them to forget their noble purpose. From a Freirean perspective, when educators lose their sense of meaning, the entire process of educational humanization is at risk of collapse.

Synthesis with Freirean Humanism Framework

These inequalities demonstrate how bureaucratic technocratic logic traps schools in mechanisms of control, compliance, and performativity, thereby entrenching subject-object dynamics across everyday management practices. Resource allocation patterns and heavy administrative workloads restrict the space for authentic praxis by diverting time, energy, and attention from reflective and transformative educational work toward repetitive documentation routines. At the same time, pseudo-participation marginalizes authentic dialogue by maintaining formal involvement without transferring real decision-making power, which sustains hierarchical relations rather than cultivating shared agency. Digital, gender, and social divides further reinforce structural oppression by limiting equitable access to learning resources, leadership opportunities, and meaningful participation, particularly for rural students, women, and socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

From a Freirean perspective, these conditions shift schools toward spaces of domestication rather than spaces of liberation, because the institutional environment prioritizes obedience to external demands over critical consciousness, dialogue, and emancipatory action. The findings, therefore, highlight the urgency of restructuring educational management toward a dialogical humanist paradigm that restores agency to educational subjects, opens protected spaces for critical reflection, and institutionalizes fair distribution of power within school decision-making. This phenomenon also reinforces the arguments of [Aksakalli \(2025\)](#) and [Araujo & Duarte \(2025\)](#)



regarding the impact of neo liberalism in education, where schools often become more focused on meeting reporting and accreditation demands than on building dialogical relationships and empowering school members. In the Indonesian context, [Edwards & Magill \(2023\)](#) similarly found that excessive administrative burdens reduce teachers' time for meaningful interaction with students, thereby hampering the broader process of educational humanization.

This study shows that educational management practices in Indonesia are still dominated by bureaucratic and technocratic paradigms. These findings are consistent with those of [Hasan \(2025\)](#), who highlights the strong logic of administrative compliance and performativity in the Indonesian education system, thereby restricting opportunities for dialogue, innovation, and critical reflection. Critical analysis of policy documents, schoolwork programs, and interviews with principals and teachers indicate significant opportunities for transformation aligned with the principles of Paulo Freire's humanism. These principles—dialogue, conscientização (critical consciousness), and praxis (transformative reflection-action)—can serve as an alternative foundation for reforming and revitalizing contemporary educational management.

The principle of dialogue, for example, can be integrated into management practices by transforming one-way communication patterns into equal dialogical forums. Studies of a small number of schools that have initiated dialogue forums among teachers, students, and management show promising outcomes, though still limited in scope. Meeting minutes in these schools show that proposals from school members are beginning to be considered, although not yet fully accommodated. However, in most schools, observations and interviews still reveal that meetings and decision-making are top-down, and thus genuine dialogical spaces have yet to be realized. Previous research by [Tinning \(2002\)](#) emphasizes that liberating education can only be realized when all school members are positioned as active, critical, and reflective subjects. In the Indonesian context, research by [Susanto et al. \(2025\)](#) shows that schools adopting participatory and reflective leadership models tend to be more adaptive to change and exhibit higher levels of satisfaction among school members. Thus, the application of Freire's dialogue principle can serve as a transformative alternative by fostering authentic deliberation mechanisms and ensuring that all voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes.

The principle of conscientização, or critical consciousness, can also be adopted through joint reflection agendas involving teachers, students, and school management. Currently, reflection in schools is generally still limited to quantitative evaluation and administrative achievements. However, document studies and interviews show that if schools begin to schedule monthly reflection sessions that critically address social, environmental, and school policy issues, a culture of reflective and responsive thinking can emerge. Such practices can empower school members not only to accept policies passively but also to actively criticize and improve existing systems.

The principle of praxis, namely reflection and transformative action, can be implemented by encouraging the active participation of all school members in designing and implementing school programs. Currently, most school innovations are still formalistic and top-down, directed primarily by superiors. However, if Freire's praxis principle is applied, curriculum development programs, extracurricular activities, and social projects can be designed collaboratively, based on the real needs and aspirations of school members. Studies of several schools that have begun to implement this model show an increased sense of ownership and responsibility among teachers and students, although the scale of implementation remains limited.

In addition, Freire's humanism principle can encourage the restructuring of school organizations to be flatter and more flexible, allowing the distribution of roles and leadership to extend beyond just the principal. This can reduce power inequality and open space for more democratic and collective leadership practices. Studies and interviews indicate that in schools that have begun to adopt a more open organizational structure, the level of satisfaction and participation among school members tends to be higher.

Overall, although the application of Paulo Freire's humanist principles in Indonesian schools remains very limited and not yet a common practice, the findings of this study affirm that these principles can offer concrete and relevant transformative alternatives. By integrating

dialogue, critical consciousness, and praxis into educational management, schools can shift from bureaucratic and technocratic models to more participatory, reflective, and transformative approaches. This transformation requires strong leadership commitment, shifts in organizational culture, and policy support that prioritizes human values and liberation.

The integration of Paulo Freire's humanist paradigm into educational management in Indonesia faces a number of complex challenges, but also opens up strategic opportunities that can be leveraged to promote more dialogical and liberating educational transformation. The main challenges identified through interviews, FGDs, observations, and policy document reviews include rigid regulatory frameworks and bureaucratic pressures that limit the space for innovation in schools. Principals, for example, are required to fulfill more than 20 administrative report items each semester, as outlined in the latest Ministry of Education regulation. Many principals and teachers acknowledge feeling more stressed by reporting deadlines than by engaging in meaningful reflection on learning. A principal in a rural area even stated, "We are afraid to innovate before all SOPs are issued; a wrong format can be a finding." This heavy administrative burden significantly limits opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and transformative action, which are at the heart of Freire's humanist philosophy.

In addition, hierarchical culture and asymmetric power dynamics remain deeply embedded in the school environment. Survey data show that the perception of "school members' voices being heard" scores only 2.3 out of 5. Paternalistic traditions contribute to teachers' reluctance to question or critique principal policies, and students also tend to be passive in official forums. As one senior teacher remarked, "Criticizing meetings is considered impolite; we usually remain silent." The absence of critical and open dialogue clearly contradicts the dialogical prerequisites of Freirean practice, in which every individual should be positioned as an active and equal subject.

Another equally important challenge is the limited capacity for humanistic and critical pedagogical practice among educators and school managers. Portfolio reviews of training programs show that less than 20 percent of teacher and principal training modules contain themes of critical pedagogy or participatory leadership. Only a small number of teachers have attended workshops on critical reflection, leading to frequent misunderstandings of *conscientização*, which is often misinterpreted as merely "giving motivation" rather than as a deep reflection. This limitation has resulted in the adoption of Freire's humanist principles being slow, fragmented, and largely inconsistent.

Resource gaps and the digital divide are also major challenges, especially in rural schools. More than half of students in rural schools lack access to personal digital devices, and computer labs are often inoperable due to pending asset verification by the education office. This condition hampers efforts to develop inclusive online dialogue spaces and strengthens the marginalization of certain groups in the learning process.

The main challenges found in this study, such as regulatory burdens, hierarchical culture, limited humanistic capacity, and resource gaps, align with findings from previous research by [Haryanto \(2019\)](#) and [Mulyasa \(2018\)](#). They emphasize that a paradigm shift requires comprehensive administrative reform, enhanced reflective capacity, and consistent, long-term policy support.

Behind these challenges lie a number of opportunities to integrate Freire's humanist paradigm into educational management. One of the most significant opportunities lies in the direction of the "Merdeka Belajar" policy and the Merdeka Curriculum, which explicitly promotes project-based, reflective, and collaborative learning. Research by [Sitompul et al. \(2022\)](#) and data from Kemdikbud (2023) show that schools that take advantage of this opportunity tend to be more innovative, inclusive, and better able to cultivate a healthier, more liberating learning climate. Kemdikbud's data shows that thousands of schools have joined as Sekolah Penggerak, and most participating principals report feeling freer to innovate beyond outdated SOPs. This policy opens up both legal and structural pathways for the application of dialogue and praxis in schools.

In addition, local values such as deliberation and mutual cooperation remain embedded in Indonesian society's social traditions. Class deliberation practices, communal work, and



neighborhood patrols, found in almost all schools, constitute social capital that is highly relevant to Freire's spirit of collectivity. A social studies teacher emphasized, "If neighborhood meetings can be open, school meetings should be too." The presence of this deep-rooted participatory culture facilitates the integration of dialogical principles into school management.

The expansion of participatory digital platforms during the pandemic is also an important opportunity. Most teachers in urban schools are already accustomed to using Google Workspace or Learning Management Systems (LMS). Observations at one private junior high school revealed that weekly online forums have accommodated hundreds of student ideas, dozens of which have been adopted as schoolwork programs. Technology, if supported by adequate access, can serve as a catalyst for amplifying school members' voices and broadening the space for meaningful dialogue.

Finally, the existence of good practices in several schools that have implemented regular dialogue forums and monthly reflections provides concrete evidence that Freirean transformation is not just discourse. Internal data from these schools show a decrease in disciplinary violations, increased teacher satisfaction, and greater student participation in school program planning. This empirical evidence serves as a compelling advocacy tool to convince policymakers and other schools that integrating Freire's humanist paradigm is not only desirable but also entirely achievable in practice.

By understanding these challenges and leveraging the opportunities, the integration of Paulo Freire's humanist paradigm into Indonesian educational management is not only possible but also strategically essential to address the demands of 21st-century learning, which is more dialogical, inclusive, and liberating. This effort requires comprehensive administrative reform, the strengthening of reflective capacity, the mobilization of local values, and policy and technological support that favors humanity and liberation.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The transformation of educational management in Indonesia in the 21st century demands a fundamental paradigm shift from a bureaucratic-technocratic model to one grounded in the values of dialogical humanism, as conceptualized by Paulo Freire. The findings of this study affirm that the dominance of administrative compliance logic, pseudo-participation, and performativity has generated systemic structural inequalities—ranging from teacher alienation and student marginalization to the dehumanization of the educational process. Management practices that position school members merely as passive objects of policy have been proven to hinder the realization of spaces for dialogue, critical reflection, and transformative action that are essential for liberating education. Nevertheless, this study also found instances of humanist praxis in several schools that have adopted participatory leadership, regular dialogue forums, and collective reflection. These findings demonstrate that the integration of Freire's principles of dialogue, conscientização, praxis, and liberation is not merely idealism, but can be implemented in practice and yield positive impacts on the school climate, community participation, as well as the well-being of teachers and students.

The main challenges in integrating Freire's humanist paradigm lie in the strong regulatory constraints, hierarchical culture, limited reflective capacity, and resource gaps. However, there are also strategic opportunities through the Merdeka Belajar policy, local values of deliberation and mutual cooperation, and the integration of participatory digital technology. Administrative reform, strengthening of humanistic capacity, and organizational restructuring of schools are the main prerequisites for realizing educational management that is more dialogical, inclusive, and liberating. Thus, the integration of Paulo Freire's humanist paradigm in Indonesian educational management is not only relevant, but also urgent to address the challenges of 21st-century education. This effort requires the collective commitment of all stakeholders—principals, teachers, students, committees, and policymakers to jointly build an educational ecosystem that places humans as the main subjects, and makes dialogue, reflection, and liberation the main foundations of educational transformation.



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