

Between Memorization and Critical-Transformative Pedagogy: Translating Islamic Religious Education Reform in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract. *This article examines how official curriculum texts in Indonesia and Malaysia translate Islamic Religious Education (IRE) reform into pedagogical design. It addresses a curricular translation gap: reform vocabulary such as critical thinking, learner agency, religious moderation, ethical judgment, and digital discernment is increasingly visible in policy discourse, but its conversion into classroom-actionable pedagogy remains uneven. Using qualitative document analysis and reflexive thematic analysis, the study examines purposively selected official curriculum texts, teacher and student materials, Malaysian DSKP standards, and UNESCO reform frameworks published or accessed between 2021 and 2025. The documents were selected because they make visible learning outcomes, activity sequences, teacher guidance, assessment expectations, and transnational reform language relevant to IRE. The analysis distinguishes competency rhetoric from operational pedagogy by examining whether reform aims are supported by task sequences, teacher moves, student roles, and assessment criteria. Four findings are presented: memorization and correct performance remain the most procedurally explicit elements; criticality is often stated as an outcome rather than scaffolded as practice; moral formation is strongly visible but is not always accompanied by ethical reasoning routines; and transformative elements exist but are fragmented across curriculum components. The article contributes by conceptualizing the curricular translation gap and by proposing a staged curriculum logic in which memorization supports comprehension, interpretation, dialogue, ethical reasoning, and responsible action.*

Keywords. *Islamic Religious Education; Curriculum Reform; Critical-Transformative Pedagogy; Curricular Translation Gap; Religious Moderation*

Abstrak. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana teks kurikulum resmi di Indonesia dan Malaysia menerjemahkan reformasi Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) ke dalam desain pedagogis. Studi ini menyoroti kesenjangan translasi kurikuler, yaitu kondisi ketika istilah reformis seperti berpikir kritis, agensi peserta didik, moderasi beragama, penalaran etis, dan literasi digital telah hadir dalam wacana kebijakan, tetapi belum selalu berubah menjadi panduan pedagogis yang siap diterapkan. Dengan menggunakan analisis dokumen kualitatif dan analisis tematik reflektif, penelitian ini menelaah teks kurikulum resmi, buku guru dan buku siswa, dokumen DSKP Malaysia, serta kerangka reformasi UNESCO yang diterbitkan atau diakses antara 2021 dan 2025. Dokumen dipilih karena memuat capaian pembelajaran, urutan aktivitas, panduan guru, ekspektasi asesmen, dan bahasa reformasi transnasional yang relevan dengan PAI. Analisis membedakan retorika kompetensi dari pedagogi operasional melalui telaah atas urutan tugas, peran guru, peran peserta didik, dan kriteria asesmen. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa hafalan dan performa benar masih menjadi unsur paling prosedural; dimensi kritis lebih sering hadir sebagai capaian daripada praktik yang dipandu secara bertahap; pembentukan moral sangat kuat tetapi belum selalu disertai rutinitas penalaran etis; dan elemen transformatif hadir, namun masih terfragmentasi.

Artikel ini berkontribusi dengan merumuskan konsep kesenjangan translasi kurikuler dan mengusulkan logika kurikulum bertahap yang menempatkan hafalan sebagai dasar bagi pemahaman, interpretasi, dialog, penalaran etis, dan tindakan bertanggung jawab.

Kata Kunci. Pendidikan Agama Islam; Reformasi Kurikulum; Pedagogi Kritis-Transformatif; Kesenjangan Translasi Kurikuler; Moderasi Beragama

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) now operates in educational systems shaped by plural societies, global citizenship discourse, and digitally mediated knowledge. In Indonesia and Malaysia, IRE is still expected to transmit canonical knowledge, cultivate piety, and form morally responsible learners. At the same time, contemporary curriculum reform asks religious education to support critical thinking, dialogical competence, religious moderation, ethical judgment, and responsible engagement with digital information (Agbaria, 2022); (Ashraf et al., 2021); (Millar et al., 2024); (Mu'ti, 2023); (Tarozzi, 2023); (Tuna, 2024). The central curriculum problem is therefore not whether IRE should transmit religious knowledge or develop critical agency, but how official texts translate these aims into pedagogical arrangements that teachers can enact and students can experience.

Indonesia and Malaysia provide analytically productive comparative cases because both locate Islamic Religious Education within state-sanctioned curriculum systems, yet they translate reform vocabulary through different curriculum architectures: Indonesia foregrounds competence, moderation, and learner-centered implementation, whereas Malaysia organizes Islamic Education through standards, mastery descriptors, and higher-order thinking expectations. Reading these two cases together allows the study to examine how similar reform aspirations are made pedagogically explicit, partially specified, or left under-scaffolded across related but distinct national contexts.

Recent scholarship in Islamic Education has increasingly argued for reflective, dialogic, and context-responsive forms of learning (Alkouatli, 2018); (Altinyelken, 2021); (Felsenthal & Agbaria, 2026); (Sahin, 2018). Studies of curriculum reform in Indonesia similarly point to tensions between competence-based reform language and the practical constraints of classroom implementation (Aulia et al., 2025); (Puad & Ashton, 2022); (Wahid & Hamami, 2021). Research on religious moderation further shows that moderation becomes educationally meaningful only when it is translated into concrete pedagogical practices, not when it remains an abstract moral slogan (Mukhibat et al., 2024); (Prasetyo et al., 2023). Malaysia's standards-based curriculum reforms and the emphasis on higher-order thinking skills (HOTS/KBAT) raise a comparable issue: curriculum documents can name inquiry and thinking skills while leaving teachers with uneven guidance for designing dialogic and interpretive learning.

This article uses the term curricular translation gap to name the distance between reform discourse and explicit pedagogical architecture. A gap appears when official texts articulate desirable learner attributes, such as critical thinking, religious moderation, responsible citizenship, or digital discernment, but do not sufficiently specify the task sequences, teacher mediation, student roles, assessment criteria, and reflection routines through which these attributes might be learned. The concept draws attention to curriculum texts as consequential policy artifacts. Official curriculum texts do not simply list content; they authorize some pedagogical actions, make others less visible, and delimit what teachers can plausibly recognize as legitimate practice (Bowen, 2009); (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The need to analyze curriculum texts is especially important in IRE because pedagogy is inseparable from authority, interpretation, moral formation, and the legitimacy of questioning. Recitation, memorization, repetition, and normative transmission have

historically had a legitimate place in Islamic learning. Disciplined memory can support self-cultivation, adab, textual familiarity, and ethical seriousness (Alkouatli, 2018); (Sahin, 2018). The analytical issue is not the existence of memorization. The issue is whether memorization functions as an endpoint or as a foundation for comprehension, interpretation, ethical reasoning, and responsible action.

The digital turn adds another layer to the problem. Students encounter religious claims through search engines, social media, short videos, and increasingly AI-generated text. In this environment, religious education must cultivate source evaluation, contextual reading, ethical filtering, and judgment about authority (Arif et al., 2025); (Gouseti et al., 2025); (Holmes et al., 2022); (Revuelta-Domínguez et al., 2022); (Smestad et al., 2023). Official texts therefore need to show how religious moderation, *tabayyun*, and digital discernment are pedagogically practiced rather than merely named as outcomes.

This study asks three questions: (1) How are IRE teaching methods represented in contemporary official curriculum texts in Indonesia and Malaysia? (2) How do these texts position memorization, transmission, inquiry, reflection, and transformation? (3) What contradictions, silences, and possibilities emerge when the texts are read through critical pedagogy, constructivist learning theory, and classical Islamic educational thought? The article contributes in three ways. *First*, as an empirical-documentary contribution, it identifies the dominant textual patterns through which pedagogy is framed in official IRE curriculum discourse. *Second*, as a conceptual contribution, it develops curricular translation gap as an analytical term for the distance between reform discourse and classroom-actionable pedagogical architecture. *Third*, as an implication of the analysis rather than a predetermined model, it proposes a staged curriculum logic in which memorization is retained but repositioned as preparation for comprehension, interpretation, dialogue, ethical reasoning, and responsible action.

B. METHOD

This study employed qualitative document analysis (QDA). Curriculum documents were treated as policy artifacts that prescribe, authorize, and normalize pedagogical practice rather than as neutral repositories of information (Bowen, 2009). QDA was appropriate because the aim was not to measure classroom implementation directly, but to examine how official texts represent legitimate pedagogy. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used as the analytic procedure for identifying patterned meanings across the corpus while remaining attentive to hierarchy, omission, and rhetorical emphasis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021); (Nowell et al., 2017). In this design, QDA defined the documentary object of inquiry, while RTA guided the movement from coding to theme construction.

The corpus was assembled through criterion-based purposive sampling. Documents were included when they met four criteria: they were official or issued by a recognized curriculum/policy authority; they were publicly accessible; they contained material on learning outcomes, student activities, teacher guidance, assessment, or curriculum reform vocabulary; and they were sufficiently current to represent contemporary reform discourse. Documents were excluded when they were unofficial reposts, duplicate files, clearly superseded versions, or texts without pedagogically relevant content. UNESCO texts were not treated as national IRE curriculum equivalents. They were included as transnational reform frames because they shape the global vocabulary of learner agency, transformation, ethical responsibility, and AI/digital competence against which national curriculum translation can be interpreted.

Table 1. Document corpus and analytical relevance

Category	Document / corpus item	Year(s)	Analytical relevance
Indonesia	Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti untuk SMP Kelas VII (Suryadi & Sumiyati, 2021b)	2021	Shows student-facing sequencing of Qur'anic, moral, reflective, and applied learning tasks.
Indonesia	Buku Panduan Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti untuk SMP Kelas VII (Suryadi & Sumiyati, 2021a)	2021	Makes teacher mediation, lesson flow, learning methods, reflection, and assessment guidance visible.
Indonesia	Capaian Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti: Fase D (Badan Standar, 2024)	2024-2025	Provides official competency language on moderation, <i>tabayyun</i> , environmental responsibility, and religious understanding.
Indonesia	Panduan Pembelajaran dan Asesmen (Badan Standar, 2025)	2025	Provides wider official language on deep learning, flexible planning, and assessment.
Malaysia	DSKP KSSR Semakan 2017 Pendidikan Islam Tahun 1 (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2016)	2025 access	Locates Islamic Education within standards-based primary curriculum architecture and learning standards.
Malaysia	DSKP KSSR Semakan 2017 MP Pendidikan Islam Tahun 6 (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2025c)	2025 access	Shows later primary Islamic Education standards, content progression, and mastery expectations.
Malaysia	DSKP KSSM Pendidikan Islam Tingkatan 1 (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2025a)	2025 access	Shows how lower-secondary Islamic Education is organized through standards, mastery, and content domains.
Malaysia	DSKP KSSM Pendidikan Islam Tingkatan 4 dan 5 (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2025b)	2025 access	Clarifies upper-secondary standards, maturity of content domains, and expectations for reasoning and practice.
UNESCO	Transformative education: Policy brief (UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, 2022)	2022	Supplies transnational reform language on transformation, learner agency, and social responsibility.
UNESCO	Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021)	2021	Provides a global futures-of-education frame on transformation, human agency, and collective responsibility.
UNESCO	AI competency framework for teachers (Miao & Cukurova, 2024)	2024	Frames teacher competencies in AI ethics, human agency, and AI pedagogy.
UNESCO	AI competency framework for students (Miao et al., 2024)	2024	Frames student competencies in critical judgment, ethics, and responsible AI participation.

Source: Compiled by the author from the primary documents analyzed in this study; full bibliographic details are provided in the References section.

The unit of analysis was a pedagogical textual segment. A segment was delimited as a clause, sentence, table entry, activity instruction, competency statement, teacher note, assessment descriptor, or reflection prompt that performed a pedagogical function. Segments were coded when they indicated what students should learn, what teachers should do, what activities students should perform, how learning should be assessed, or what moral/digital dispositions should be cultivated. This definition reduced the subjectivity of the earlier phrase 'pedagogically meaningful segment' by tying segmentation to identifiable textual functions.

Operational pedagogy was distinguished from competency rhetoric. A statement was coded as operational pedagogy when it included at least one of the following: a sequence of classroom actions, explicit teacher mediation, specified student roles, a learning task with procedural detail, assessment criteria, or a reflection routine. A statement was coded as competency rhetoric when it named an expected outcome, such as critical thinking or moderation, without corresponding guidance for enactment. This distinction allowed the analysis to examine not only what reform values appear in the texts, but also how far those values are translated into pedagogical design.

Table 2. Coding decisions and analytical distinctions

Analytical decision	Operational definition	Example of coded signal	Interpretive use
Pedagogical segment	A clause, table entry, instruction, outcome, note, or descriptor with pedagogical function	Learning outcome, activity step, teacher note, reflection prompt	Defines what counts as analyzable data
Competency rhetoric	Names a desired learner attribute without enactment detail	Critical thinking, moderation, <i>tabayyun</i> , HOTS stated as outcomes	Identifies reform language
Operational pedagogy	Specifies task sequence, teacher move, student role, assessment criterion, or reflection routine	Memorize, recite, discuss, verify, present, assess with rubric	Identifies classroom-actionable guidance
Fragmentation	Reform element appears without alignment across outcomes, tasks, teacher guidance, and assessment	Reflection prompt exists but is not connected to assessment	Explains weak curriculum translation

Source: Developed by the author from the coding framework applied to the document corpus in this study.

Coding proceeded in four stages. First, all documents were read in full or, for large frameworks, through sections relevant to pedagogy, assessment, ethics, learner agency, and digital competence. Second, open coding combined deductive and inductive strategies. Deductive codes were derived from critical pedagogy, constructivism, and Islamic educational thought, including authority, voice, dialogue, scaffolding, ethical reasoning, adab, memorization, and gradual progression. Inductive codes emerged from the documents, including recitation, *hafazan*, correct performance, *tabayyun*, KBAT/HOTS, project work, digital filtering, reflection prompts, and learner independence. Third, codes were clustered into categories representing pedagogical logics. Fourth, categories were refined into cross-document themes through iterative comparison and analytic memoing.

The theoretical frameworks were operationalized as analytical lenses rather than as predetermined conclusions. Critical pedagogy directed attention to voice, compliance, dialogic participation, and the distinction between domestication and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Constructivist and social-constructivist theory directed attention to scaffolding, active meaning-making, feedback, and the alignment between tasks and assessment (Almulla, 2023); (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016); (Le & Nguyen, 2024). Classical Islamic educational thought prevented the analysis from treating memory, discipline, and transmitted authority as inherently regressive. It allowed memorization to be evaluated by its curricular position: whether it supports understanding and ethical judgment or becomes an endpoint.

Table 3. Operationalization of theoretical frameworks

Framework	Analytical questions	Evidence sought in documents
Critical pedagogy	Who speaks? Is questioning legitimized? Does learning move beyond compliant reproduction?	Voice, dialogue, authority, compliance, conscientization, social action
Constructivist learning theory	Are learners scaffolded from prior knowledge to deeper meaning-making?	Activity sequence, feedback, collaboration, inquiry, alignment of tasks and assessment
Classical Islamic educational thought	How are memory, adab, discipline, and gradual progression positioned?	Memorization as endpoint or foundation; ethical formation; disciplined progression

Source: Developed by the author from Freirean critical pedagogy, constructivist learning theory, and Islamic educational thought as operationalized in this study.

Credibility was supported through corpus triangulation across countries, document genres, and policy scales. Dependability was strengthened through explicit inclusion criteria, a coding protocol, and coding examples. Confirmability was pursued through reflexive memoing and by distinguishing documentary representation from classroom enactment (M. Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Transferability was addressed by providing enough corpus detail for readers to judge relevance to other IRE contexts. The main limitation is that document analysis cannot establish how teachers enact the curriculum in classrooms. The claims in this article therefore concern official curricular representation, not observed instructional practice.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Four themes emerged from the analysis. They are presented as interpretive findings supported by documentary indicators and comparative patterns rather than as claims about actual classroom practice.

Table 4. Thematic synthesis of findings

Theme	Documentary indicators	Comparative pattern	Reform implication
Memorization structurally central	Recitation, <i>hafazan</i> , repetition, correct performance, visible recall tasks	Indonesia and Malaysia show subject-specific memorization/practice; UNESCO does not prescribe IRE content	Reposition memorization as foundation rather than endpoint
Criticality under-specified	HOTS, inquiry, moderation, <i>tabayyun</i> , learner agency appear as outcomes	Indonesia provides explicit moderation/ <i>tabayyun</i> language; Malaysia shows KBAT/HOTS emphasis; both require stronger task scaffolding	Specify inquiry routines, source comparison, dialogical tasks, and reflective assessment
Moral formation stronger than ethical-reasoning routines	Discipline, piety, harmony, proper conduct, adab	Moral aims are clear across national texts; deliberative routines are less visible	Add principled disagreement, case-based reasoning, and ethical justification
Transformative elements fragmented	Reflection prompts, projects, digital ethics, learner agency, responsibility	UNESCO provides broad reform frames; national texts need stronger subject-specific translation	Align outcomes, teacher guidance, student tasks, and assessment criteria

Source: Developed by the author from the thematic analysis of the official curriculum and policy documents examined in this study.

First, memorization, recitation, and correct performance remain structurally central. Across the Indonesian and Malaysian national curriculum materials, the most procedurally visible pedagogical elements are those related to reading, reciting, memorizing, repeating, demonstrating correct practice, and displaying proper conduct. In the Indonesian materials, Qur'anic learning sequences commonly move from reading and understanding toward practice, reflection, and application, but the most explicit steps are often those tied to recitation, repetition, and correct enactment. In the Malaysian DSKP materials, *tilawah*, *hafazan*, ibadah practice, akhlak, and standards of mastery are highly visible as curriculum categories. UNESCO documents, by contrast, do not prescribe IRE-specific memorization; they provide broader reform language on transformation, agency, ethics, and digital competence. This contrast indicates that memorization is not simply a universal feature of reform discourse, but a subject-specific curricular legacy that national IRE texts must deliberately reposition.

This finding should not be read as an argument against memorization. Within Islamic education, memorization can be formative when it supports textual familiarity, devotion, discipline, and ethical seriousness. The issue is proportionality and sequencing. Memorization becomes problematic when it is the most detailed pedagogical architecture while interpretive reasoning, comparative judgment, and dialogic engagement remain less explicit. The curricular translation gap begins here: reform vocabulary is present, but the operational grammar of learning remains more secure for transmission than for transformation.

Second, criticality is more visible as competency rhetoric than as operational pedagogy. The texts frequently invoke higher-order thinking, inquiry, learner independence, problem solving, moderation, *tabayyun*, and reflective learning. The Indonesian Fase D learning outcomes, for example, explicitly refer to moderate religious understanding and the importance of verifying information so that learners avoid falsehood and fake news. These statements are significant because they connect IRE with plural citizenship and digital discernment. Yet the curriculum documents do not always specify the full pedagogical chain through which students learn to compare sources, justify interpretations, evaluate authority, or deliberate about contested religious claims. In Malaysia, KBAT/HOTS language similarly signals reform aspirations, but standards documents are stronger in naming expected competencies than in providing detailed classroom routines for dialogic inquiry and assessment.

Operational pedagogy was therefore uneven. Some teacher-facing materials offered prompts for discussion, peer learning, project work, and reflection. However, these prompts were not always aligned with assessment criteria that would make reasoning visible. In many cases, the curriculum states what kind of learner is desired more clearly than how teachers should cultivate that learner through sequenced tasks. This pattern mirrors wider research showing that critical thinking is often promoted in policy before it becomes stabilized in task design and assessment (Abrami et al., 2015); (Andreucci-Annunziata et al., 2023); (Felix et al., 2025); (Jegstad et al., 2025). It also resonates with studies of Indonesian curriculum reform showing tensions between flexible reform language and practical implementation (Aulia et al., 2025); (Puad & Ashton, 2022).

Third, the documents construct a strong moral learner, but the pathway from moral formation to ethical reasoning requires clearer scaffolding. The earlier term 'hidden curriculum of moral regulation and pedagogical obedience' has been moderated here to avoid overstating the evidence. The texts consistently value learners who are pious, disciplined, respectful, harmonious, balanced, and morally upright. These are legitimate aims in religious education. The analytical issue is whether moral formation is accompanied by explicit opportunities for ethical reasoning, principled disagreement, and interpretive

dialogue. A curriculum may form moral dispositions through habituation, but students also need to learn how to reason through ambiguity, misinformation, plurality, and conflicting claims.

The distinction between moral formation and pedagogical compliance is important. Moral formation refers to the cultivation of virtues, adab, responsibility, and religious commitment. Pedagogical compliance appears when virtue is mainly scripted as correct reproduction or sanctioned conduct, while the process of deliberating about complex situations remains thin. The curriculum texts analyzed here contain both tendencies. They articulate virtues and responsibilities clearly, but they are less consistent in designing classroom routines for moral argument, source comparison, and principled disagreement. This finding strengthens rather than rejects the role of religious moderation: moderation should be taught as a disciplined capacity for judgment, not only as a value to be affirmed (Agbaria, 2022); (Mu'ti, 2023); (Mukhibat et al., 2024); (Prasetyo et al., 2023); (Tuna, 2024).

Fourth, transformative elements are present, but fragmented and weakly aligned. Fragmentation refers to three patterns: reform elements appear in isolated activities rather than in sustained sequences; teacher guidance, student tasks, and assessment descriptors are not always aligned; and transnational reform language is not consistently translated into subject-specific IRE pedagogy. The corpus contains real openings toward reflection, project-based learning, cross-disciplinary learning, religious moderation, environmental concern, digital ethics, and AI-related competence. Indonesian curriculum discourse is especially notable for linking IRE with *tabayyun*, moderation, and environmental responsibility. Malaysian standards are notable for their structured curriculum architecture and attention to mastery standards. UNESCO frameworks contribute a language of human agency, ethics, inclusion, and AI competence. Yet these elements often remain distributed across documents rather than integrated into a coherent pedagogical sequence.

The digital dimension illustrates this fragmentation. UNESCO's AI competency frameworks for teachers and students explicitly emphasize human-centered mindsets, AI ethics, critical judgment, and responsible participation. Indonesian IRE outcomes include verification of information and avoidance of false news. These are promising curricular openings for teaching *tabayyun* as digital religious literacy. However, the national IRE materials would be strengthened by more explicit examples of how students evaluate online religious claims, distinguish scholarly authority from virality, and use evidence when discussing contested issues. Without such scaffolding, digital ethics risks becoming another declarative competence rather than a classroom practice.

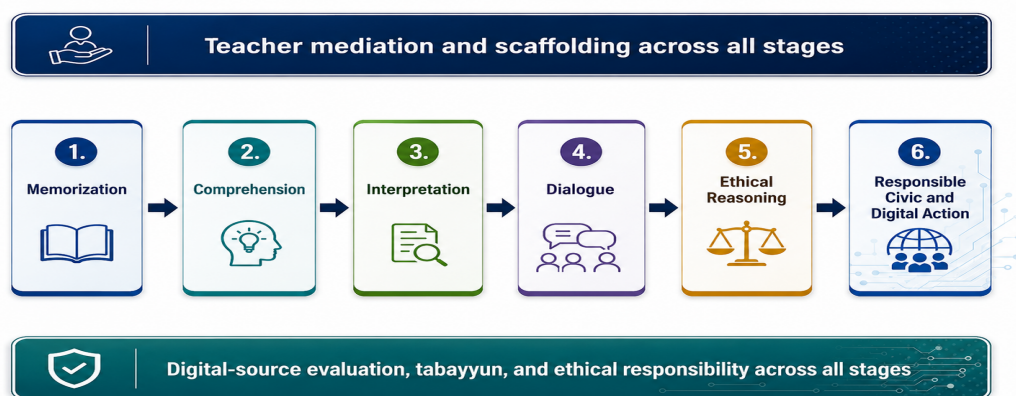
The concept of curricular translation gap therefore has three dimensions. The first is discursive: reform language is present in official texts. The second is pedagogical: the tasks, sequences, teacher moves, and assessment criteria needed to enact reform remain uneven. The third is comparative: Indonesia, Malaysia, and UNESCO texts display different strengths, but none should be treated as a complete solution. Indonesia offers visible reform vocabulary around moderation, *tabayyun*, and learner-centered implementation; Malaysia offers standards-based structure and mastery language; UNESCO offers transnational ethical and digital horizons. The gap lies in the incomplete translation of these resources into explicit IRE pedagogical architecture.

The theoretical contribution of the article lies in bringing critical pedagogy, constructivist learning theory, and Islamic educational thought into one analytical conversation. A Freirean lens helped identify when curriculum discourse privileges compliant reproduction over dialogic agency. Constructivism clarified why reform requires scaffolding, feedback, active sense-making, and alignment between outcomes, tasks, and assessment. Islamic educational thought complicated the critique by showing that memory and discipline are not inherently opposed to transformation. When these traditions are read

together, the problem is not memorization itself, but memorization without progression toward understanding, interpretation, ethical reasoning, and responsible action.

The practical implication is a staged curriculum logic. Memorization should function as early cognitive and devotional grounding. Comprehension should require contextual explanation. Interpretation should involve comparison and justification. Dialogue should normalize structured disagreement. Ethical reasoning should connect textual knowledge to real dilemmas. Responsible action should extend learning into civic, ecological, and digital conduct. This sequence does not import an external reform model into IRE. It reconstructs IRE pedagogy by placing classical resources of memory, discipline, and adab in dialogue with contemporary demands for critical agency, religious moderation, and digital discernment.

Figure 1. Proposed staged curriculum logic for critical-transformative IRE



Source: Developed by the author from the findings and conceptual synthesis of the present study.

D. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that official IRE curriculum texts in Indonesia and Malaysia occupy a space between memorization and critical-transformative pedagogy. They preserve recitational, normative, and moral-formative legacies while increasingly incorporating the language of critical thinking, learner agency, religious moderation, ethical judgment, and digital responsibility. The central contribution of the article is the concept of the curricular translation gap: the gap between reform discourse and the explicit pedagogical architecture required to make reform teachable, assessable, and sustainable.

Theoretically, the study contributes to Islamic Education and curriculum studies by demonstrating that critical pedagogy, constructivist learning theory, and Islamic educational thought need not be treated as competing paradigms. Critical pedagogy illuminates questions of authority, voice, and agency; constructivism explains the need for scaffolding and active meaning-making; Islamic educational thought legitimizes memory and discipline when they are oriented toward understanding and ethical formation. Together, these lenses make it possible to critique rote reduction without dismissing the formative value of memorization.

Practically, the findings suggest that future curriculum development should move beyond naming reform values toward designing sequences of learning. IRE curriculum texts should show teachers how memorization leads to comprehension, how comprehension leads to interpretation, how interpretation is tested through dialogue, how dialogue supports ethical reasoning, and how ethical reasoning becomes responsible civic and digital action. The study is limited by its reliance on document analysis; it cannot determine how teachers enact these texts in classrooms. Future research should therefore test and extend

the concept of the curricular translation gap through classroom observation, teacher interviews, textbook-task analysis, assessment audits, and comparative studies across additional Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts. Such work is important because the future credibility of IRE reform depends not only on the language of transformation, but on the coherent pedagogical design through which reform aspirations become teachable, assessable, and ethically meaningful in educational practice.

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Alwazir Abdusshomad, et al.: Between Memorization and Critical-Transformative Pedagogy...

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