Research Article

# Qoriyah Tayyibah Learning Community (KBQT): Representation of Critical Education in Indonesia

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**Abstract.**
In recent years, communities have gained increased access to diverse educational options. While formal education remains the primary choice, non-formal education is gradually becoming a viable alternative. This study aims to explore the growing preference for non-formal education within learning communities and how such educational programs are implemented. Using a case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Informants included learning community managers, tutors, learning residents, and local community members. The data were analyzed using interactive descriptive analysis, and the validity of the findings was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods. The results showed that non-formal education is favored for several reasons: limited access to formal education among lower-income groups, dissatisfaction with the quality of formal education among the middle and upper classes, and the increasing recognition that non-formal education is no longer viewed as merely a secondary option, but as a meaningful and respected path to learning.

**Keywords:** critical awareness, independent learning, non-formal education

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# 1. Introduction

It cannot be denied that education is the most important investment for a nation. The indicators of a nation's progress can also be seen from the level of education of its people. Many efforts have been made to improve the quality of education. Starting from the level of government policymakers at the central level down to the regional level through binding regulations and laws. Education, which we generally understand takes the form of 3 forms, namely formal, non-formal and informal education, it seems that at this time these boundaries are starting to melt. The growing demands of the times are not sufficient to rely solely on one form of education, but require criticism in it. Giroux (2016) states that education is an ideological project and material conditions that can work together, collaborate, inform their teaching. In this sense, teaching that informs

traditional critical pedagogy must provide criticism, social responsibility, and a critical will towards citizens.

All forms of education make their respective contributions to community development. One indicator of formal education that differentiates it from non-formal and informal education is the legalization of the process and learning outcomes which are highly measurable and conditions with administrative problems. Perhaps this is an obstacle for formal education to develop learning according to the needs of its students (Martono, 2010). Another problem is that access to formal education has several limitations because it is limited by age and certain academic standard ability requirements. For rural communities, limited access and reach as well as cost issues are still obstacles to informal education. In line with (Maertens and Just, 2014), the majority of developing countries rely on the agricultural sector to support their lives. They face many risks, one of which is the uncertainty of the income they get from their crops. The cost of education is a challenge for the farming community because the income they have is not guaranteed. Combs and Ahmed (1985) stated the limited outreach experienced by rural communities to access to formal education can be combated through non-formal education which leads to more practical skills needed by local communities. In other words, non-formal education is considered to provide more practical benefits for the community to be able to rise from poverty and improve their welfare.

Besides, non-formal education is a solution to the lack of formal education as a panacea for the development needs of third-world countries (Egbezor and Okanezi, 2008). Non-formal education is proven to have a significant relationship to human and national development so that it strongly supports the MDGs (Ololube and Egbezor, 2012), (Blaak, et.al, 2013), (Affeldt, et.al., 2016). To be more acceptable to various groups of society and government, the community and other non-formal education needs to develop more concrete evidence-based education programs and build capacity in the learning community (Archibald, 2015), (Mitchell and Sackney, 2001). There is a reconceptualization of non-formal education that involves three aspects, namely formal education as a compliment, as alternative education, and as a complement to formal education, it needs to be integrated through 3 pillars, namely regulation, system, and process (Brennan, 1997).

Until now, formal education is still the chosen one and the main reference for education in the majority of people, especially in countries that still prioritize formal diplomas as the main standard in determining a person's education level (Norqvist and Leffler, 2017). Formal education also has the function of eliminating stigma and

discrimination in workers experiencing mental health and being an adaptive solution to climate change (Hampson, et.al., 2017), (Wamsler, et.al., 2012). There are still frequent debates between the importance of formal and non-formal education, formal education is considered less rooted in the socio-cultural context in which these students live (Mahmud, 2011), (Kedrayate, 2012).

Although it cannot be denied that both forms of formal and non-formal education will be optimal if they can be implemented in an integrated manner. Given the world of work also still gives higher appreciation to formal education graduates through a certificate they have. Although on the other hand, there has been criticism of formal education which is considered to lack skills in graduates and tends to be more cognitive. These various criticisms are then formulated in an INQF (Indonesian National Qualification Framework) policy, in which informal education at each level each graduate must have special skills according to the agreed qualifications. The policy is interesting, only problems in the field are technically incompatible. Teachers have not been fully able to provide space for expression to students to develop their full potential. This qualification is rather difficult to fulfill if the implementation of the learning technology has not led to the predetermined indicators. For example, learning that is still in student centers and classes is still a silent culture for students. Thus the learning process does not lead to critical thinking and develops the skills of each student. Therefore, it is not surprising that a small proportion of people have started to think and choose alternative education models that are considered more responsive to the needs of their children. Non-formal education is a major educational force in the current postmodern era because it is currently filled with uncertainties and requires fast and precise solutions (Romi and Schmida, 2009), (Siegel, 1997), (La Belle, 2000), (Armer and Youtz, 2018), (Abdullai, et.al., 2012), (Hoppers, 2006).

In general, before the zoning policy, the community had some difficulties in accessing good quality formal education. Formal education is still the main target of education for the community, therefore people are competing to get the best formal education for their children. However, in some communities, there are still problems with access to formal education. People who still experienced limited access to formal education at that time were poor farming communities. Limited access to education is still found in rural communities. This condition occurs because; the location of the village is quite far from the location of the school, the weak family economy, the high cost of tuition fees which make them have to find other alternatives to keep their children educated without being preoccupied with access and cost issues, namely in the community school, Baharudin

(2007). How is the community school formed and how the learning process is carried out so that it can raise critical awareness of the importance of learning in these learning citizens which will then be photographed using Freire's critical education. This article aims to find out why non-formal education in the learning community is the choice of society in accessing education and how the implementation of learning is applied in the learning community.

## 2. Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method (Yin, 2019). The design types in case studies include single cases and multiple cases. Single case selection usually occurs in critical testing of significant theories, extreme or unique cases, and disclosure of the cases themselves. Whereas multi-case is used on a more stimulating and stronger finding, multiple sources to research, and requires extra time. There are 4 (four) types of case study designs, namely (1) holistic single case; (2) Single-case embedded; (3) Multi holistic cases; and (4) Multi embedded cases (Yin, 2019). Case studies are used and become a strategy in this research because case studies allow researchers to maintain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as how the shift in non-formal education orientation occurs in KBQT, why people have non-formal KBQT education, and how learning is implemented. to be able to liberate students/citizens to learn. The case study in this research is a single case because KBQT is a unique learning community and is rarely found in Indonesia. Therefore, KBQT is interesting to be appointed as a case study in educational institutions, especially in the learning community. The historical setting of the establishment of the KBQT is very interesting to review. There was a shift in orientation in KBQT, initially intended as an alternative education when people were unable to access formal education. However, nowadays it is a choice when people start to not trust informal education.

There were 10 informants in this study consisting of learning community managers, learning facilitators/assistants, students/study residents, parents of students, and the surrounding community. The criteria used in selecting informants are based on class and age, experience, background. The initiator and manager of KBQT became the key informant in this study, which furthermore the data was also completed from the parents who made it possible to communicate.

The instruments used in this study were interview and observation guidelines which were arranged based on problem formulations and developed according to the context in the field. Interview, observation, and documentation techniques are used to obtain in-depth research data. This research was conducted continuously, meaning that to update the developments that occurred in the community, the researchers continued to communicate with the informants. Particularly for some learning facilitators and students, namely through group WhatsApp. The communication discusses various things, including the learning process during the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted in person and through communication media. Face-to-face interviews were conducted when the researcher visited the KBQT location and had a dialogue with the initiators of the KBQT. Furthermore, to explore each question item the researcher is directed to communicate with several students and facilitators who meet the research criteria. Subsequent interviews were conducted with the students' parents through communication media, given their presence which was far from the KBQT location so that it was not accessible face-to-face. Observations are made directly and indirectly. Directly, the researcher makes observations when the researcher visits the location and has the opportunity to observe various activities carried out by students and facilitators naturally. Documents obtained are in the form of lesson plan documents, learning schedules, students' books published by local and national publishers, and other related documents.

Data analysis in case studies is generally carried out through stages 1) Matching patterns, which include non-equivalent variables as patterns (dependent), counter-explanations as patterns (independent), and simpler patterns 2) Expansion making 3) Time series analysis, which includes simple time series, complex time series, and chronological (Yin, 2019). Data analysis was performed with interactive descriptive data analysis and data validity by triangulating data on several data sources as well as on relevant theories and concepts. The data that has been collected is then reduced by sorting out a large amount of information and data collected. The data are selected based on the collection of information that is most relevant to the formulation of the research problem. To make it easier to understand the contents of the data, each problem formulation is then made tabulation of the data and by providing code. In the next step, the data is presented and verified by simplifying the information that occurs from each data in one relevant concept so that the data becomes more concise so that it is easily understood and interpreted properly until it finds a pattern of relationships that exist in the data.

# 3. Research Result and Discussion

## 3.1. KBQT: An Educational Need or Urgent for the Community?

The Qoriyah Tayyibah Learning Community, hereinafter abbreviated as KBQT, is a form of alternative education that was born at the pressure of the social and economic situation of the community at that time. Economic inability and problems of access to formal education are the main factors. Prasetyo (2008) financial inability becomes a disease of poor people so that they are unable to touch education in the form of schools. Responding to this situation, the initiator together with some of his friends who are members of a farmer group in Kalibening village began to think about finding another educational model that would be acceptable to the people in his village and around him. Armed with volunteer teaching staff who are also members of the farmer group, he and his friends opened a garden/study center. To win the hearts and trust of the community, the park/learning center he established did not run independently but was still in partnership with schools and schools chasing packages.

Why is that? As we know, administrative issues in the form of proof of study/diploma are still the orientation of society in accessing education. Therefore the partnership carried out is more functional to gain legality and gain public trust. A struggle that was not easy to gain public trust, he received various comments and criticisms from those who were less able to accept such an educational model. Over time, there have been more responses and enthusiasm from the community, not only from the region and the middle to lower socioeconomic status but instead, the responses come from outside the region and even outside the island and with a variety of socioeconomic status. Formal education or even education in urban areas is considered to lack attractive colors and challenges. Anderson and Summerfield (2010) stated that urban schools tend to negate local wisdom that has the potential to provide new insights to students. Urban schools are more concerned with cognitive aspects with various competitions that make learning less humanistic for children.

Seeing the progress that has occurred in KBQT, there has been a shift in the educational orientation which initially emerged as an alternative to the powerlessness of the community to access formal education, which has become the goal and need for education that is more capable of providing sure hope for the future of students. An education model that gives more freedom to children to be able to determine their future without depriving children of their rights. Elliot et al. (2014) civilized learning is

learning that brings students closer to nature and its creator. Children can explore all their potential and harmonize with natural potential without compulsion and pressure. Likewise, with learning carried out at KBQT in addition to bringing students to critical thinking, it also brings students/students closer to nature and the surrounding environment, and the creator. In general, the process of transforming formal learning into community learning runs quite slowly, because it needs to be preceded by a change in mindset and awareness of the importance of learning to share and work together (Wells and Feun, 2007).

## 3.2. Learning that is Liberating and Based on Student Needs

What distinguishes KBQT from other schools or learning communities is the learning process. The learning process that takes place at KBQT can be said to be somewhat unique and eccentric and even deviates from the perspective of the general public. By maximizing all the potential of students and by utilizing all corners of the environment, allowing exploration and interaction of both. The learning concept applied is adult education where there is no classical relationship between students and teachers. What happens is a learning process together in which adults act as facilitators or guides who can provide input and process together. The learning process that does not impose a curriculum limitation from an ethical perspective, but rather processes learning by adjusting the needs and interests of students to be able to develop their potential and creativity, is what became known as a liberating school. In this liberating school, students are given the authority to determine their future and the facilitator is tasked with guarding and directing how they realize their dreams.

During the learning process, students themselves discuss the curriculum, the methods to be used, and even how to conduct evaluations to determine the achievement of the output targets in each theme and forum. This kind of process is the antithesis of the learning model that generally occurs in schools. Where the curriculum and learning are more dominated by schools and teachers. As long as learning is still controlled by one of the agents (teachers) and students are only subjects, students will not be able to name and discover their world forever. Austin (2015) struggles to know and name the world is a central aspect of any decolonization project, and Freire's idea of conscientizaç ao (awareness) refers to a form of critical engagement with the realities of the life experiences of a colonized world. It's not enough just to know the world; knowledge must be brought in to change the world.

Routine activities are always carried out in learning are starting from planning (lesson plans), implementing learning (teaching-learning), and measuring the success of learning (evaluating). Likewise what happened in KBQT, interaction and communicative dialogue between learning citizens, facilitators, and the environment gave birth to ideas that became the basis for the emergence of goals and dreams for each student, hereinafter referred to as learning outputs or individual learning outcomes. This process is not easy, considering that the ability of each citizen to learn to recognize their potential is also diverse, so it requires extraordinary diligence. Concerning planning, implementation, and evaluation, it is always based on the output it wants to achieve. Therefore, students can use all their power, mindset, knowledge and skills, facilitated by experienced facilitators. The pure facilitator acts as a companion, whose movements are more passive but are always ready to respond to student needs, including in responding to suggestions and input and questions. Learning never ends, when finding one thing raises the next question and so on until it is achieved at the expected goals and outputs. According to Freire in Collins (2011: 27) learning is a process of naming nature and its surroundings, the agreement of the new concept is the real result of learning. The investigative process is the key in this dialogical liberation learning.

The learning process that is carried out emphasizes more on dialogical activities. Where every planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning always prioritize dialogue and openness to one another. The openness here teaches each student to be able, to be honest, and explore their potential by involving other parties to provide input to make it easier to achieve their respective learning goals. There are various activities carried out in learning at KQBT, the naming of activities and types of activities is determined by each student based on mutual agreement. They have formed various dialogue forums to achieve learning objectives from ceremonial forums, class forums, interest forums, Harkes, and Tawasi. These activities are part of a program and curriculum that is mutually agreed upon between fellow learners and with the facilitator. The output of each learning activity that has been designed in the curriculum of each learning citizen is manifested in various works. The forms of work they make are following the wishes of each learning citizen, in the form of books, videos/films, events, social action exhibitions, and so on. Everett and Peterson's (2013) film in education is one of the most real educational works and requires high creativity in students.

KBQT is also a learning community with a very adaptive learning model in responding to various changes. Among them in responding to 2 major issues that have influenced

the development of education today, namely the industrial community 4.0 and responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Like other educational institutions, learning at KBQT has also made adjustments in response to the pandemic situation. Learning is carried out online, students learn from their respective homes by staying in touch with their mentors online so that they can still achieve their learning targets. At first glance, something is missing, namely that interaction with the environment is beginning to be replaced by interactions with internet sources. Even so, it is not a serious obstacle for KBQT, considering that students are accustomed to being independent in learning and using various internet sources to achieve targets according to their respective abilities. It is undeniable that the awareness and independence of each child also vary, especially for low-grade students who need the help of facilitators to jointly discover their potential. So far the strategy taken by KBQT in getting around learning during the Covid-19 pandemic is to maximize parents in accompanying and facilitating children to achieve their learning targets. Although this strategy is admittedly not optimal, given the very diverse types and characteristics of parents (interview, 13 June 2020).

## 3.3. KBQT: Freire's Critical Education Representation

One of Bahrudin's references in carrying out education at KBQT is liberating education from Freire. Maria and Freire (2005) Freire devoted her life to practicing a consciousness that enables men and women to transform themselves from being the oppressed objects of elite and authoritarian societies to those who are indeed historical subjects, thus enabling them to speak their world. Bahrudin, armed with his knowledge, was able to initiate a change movement in the meaning of education. Basic problems (access and economic limitations) that occur in the farming community have triggered a movement to create a more meaningful educational model. The basic idea taken in the management of KBQT is the principle of freedom in learning, awareness of one's nature as a human being, and a dialogical learning model "hadap-masalah" (dealing with problems).

The principle of Freire's humanist education leads to liberation, namely liberation from all pressures, shackles, oppression, domination that limit the space for movement and creative ideas of learning citizens. Regardless of the aims and objectives contained in it, the concept of oppression or dehumanization is not allowed to apply to humans as well as in the education and learning process of students. Freire narrates the concept of humanization in the form or model of conventional learning/teacher center (student objects and subject teachers) so that interactive communication is not established and

students' creativity and critical reasoning do not emerge. This condition is what Freire calls "Bank Style" education. (Freire: 2008). Teachers are investors who have a myriad of investments and students are objects that are ready to accept investment from investors. The logic is that the more investment that is made, the more valuable the asset is. Regardless of whether the asset brings benefits to the object or not. The ideology of liberation that Freire wants to build is the parallel between teachers and students so that there are no barriers that are shackled in education. The principle of this kind of liberation can be seen in the implementation of learning, starting from curriculum preparation, implementing learning to evaluation, which is designed and implemented based on mutual agreement between fellow learners and with the facilitator. Agree on time, place, study, method, and facilities needed. Students are given the freedom to choose the theme or learning study they want and explore each of these themes in-depth in their way. This freedom is given to provide opportunities for every citizen to learn to explore all their potential to realize their dreams and aspirations.

The second principle that inspires the implementation of KBQT is education which is also a realization. The essence of education is to humanize humans. However, the education that has been taking place so far has obscured this essence. Humans with their nature and various potentials have drowned as a result of the very heavy and lame curriculum burden. The disconnection between the world of reality and the world of schools is what keeps people away from the world of their daily lives. Freire (2007) real humans are humans who can have the awareness to face the world and reality. Real humans are not fatalistic humans, accept the conditions as they are without criticizing and making changes for the better. Surrender is a condition of helplessness over the situation of the oppression that pervades him. In the context of KBQT, this awareness principle is carried out through several activities, one of which is a ceremony forum. In this forum, each child is allowed to reflect on their learning outcomes. Whether the learning they have done is following their respective targets or not. If not, what obstacles are faced and how to solve these obstacles. The self-reflection test here is an important part of the effort to realize that every individual has the potential and ability to become a creator and problem solver, especially in their respective studies.

The next principle is dialogue and problem-posing which is applied in the learning model in KBQT. The dialogical principle can be realized when there is mutual openness to various experiences and an agreement to jointly name the world (Freire, 2008). Thus an understanding is reached and no one is harmed by one another. To reach the essential truth of knowledge, academics and researchers interpret knowledge and

discuss it reflectively and the connection between one opinion and another and one phenomenon with another (Mezirow, 2018). In the context of KBQT, the absence of a firm structure for teachers and students makes the interaction and communication between students and facilitators equal. The fluidity of the relationship between teachers and students will remove the barrier and authoritarianism of teachers that hinder the human process of becoming and being (Freire, 2008). Schmidt (2016) the authority that teachers have in managing the classroom on behalf of education is a structured and massive frame of oppression. The teacher is more of a facilitator who is always ready to assist students when there are difficulties and need help. The curriculum is structured based on the needs of students, not because of the needs of education managers. This method of dealing with problems affirms that humans as creatures in the process of becoming existent are never finished and continue to seek which is directed towards humanization and the historical nature of being human.

## 4. Conclusion

The Qoriyah Tayyibah Learning Community is a representation of the emergence of critical education in society. Judging from the historical aspect of its emergence, the learning community was born out of a situation of helplessness among the peasant community which was responded to by a handful of people by giving birth to an alternative education model that could answer community needs. From the aspect of implementing the learning, it confirms the idea of Freire's liberation education concerning awakening existence as human nature, liberating in determining students' future choices and applying dialogical equality learning models, and dealing with problems.

This kind of learning model has not received legal recognition in the educational system in Indonesia. This happens because formal education is still the main prerequisite for the educational system in our country. Although it is recognized that this kind of education model is proven to bring students to interpret their existence and what they want. It is a challenge for the government to be able to truly present a view of education liberation in schools. So, the independence and critical awareness that is built through this learning model has made people, who are starting to fade their level of trust in formal education, flock to look for alternative schools that give their children more meaning to learning. The Qoriyah Tayyibah Learning Community is an educational option that frees children to develop various potentials and dreams they want. The education model

developed by KBQT is in line with Freire's ideas and thoughts, namely education that is liberating.

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