

Ali Asghar Engineer's Thoughts on Liberation Theology and Its Implications for Islamic Education

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v10i6.1642>

*Ziad Fikri, Muhammad Qorib^{ab}

¹²Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.

Corresponding Author: ziadfikri3@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia faces a fundamental crisis characterized by three main problems: educational goals oriented to ritual obedience without critical awareness of social injustice, a curriculum dominated by normative-doctrinal approaches without integration of contemporary social reality analysis, and authoritarian learning processes that do not provide space for critical thinking. This research aims to analyze Ali Asghar Engineer's thoughts on liberation theology and its relevance to the transformation of contemporary Islamic education. The research method uses a qualitative approach with library research and philosophical analysis of Engineers' thinking through primary and secondary sources. The findings show that Engineer's liberation theology is built on three fundamental pillars: monotheism as a theological foundation that rejects servitude other than God, movement as an instrument of practical change, and social justice as the ultimate goal. Implications for Islamic education include: (1) the transformation of educational goals from ritualistic to transformative-liberative that results in a critical awareness of social injustice, (2) the reconstruction of the liberative curriculum with an Engineer hermeneutic approach that distinguishes normative (justice, equality, peace) and contextual elements in the Qur'an, (3) the implementation of liberating values (justice, equality, anti-discrimination, freedom of critical thinking) through methodology Dialogical-Democratic Learning. This research contribution provides a theoretical-practical framework for the development of Islamic education that is responsive to contemporary challenges such as radicalization, social inequality, and gender discrimination, and enriches liberation theology discourse in the Islamic tradition with a focus on educational applications that have not been explored much in previous research.

Keywords: *Liberation Theology, Ali Asghar Engineer, Islamic Education, Social Justice, Liberative Curriculum*

Article History:

Received 31st October 2025

Accepted 28th November 2025

Published 30th November 2025



INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia faces a paradigmatic crisis characterized by ritual formalism, doctrinal dogmatism, and the loss of the values of social transformation. This phenomenon is manifested in educational practices that reduce Islam to a rigid ritual system without critical awareness of the reality of social injustice. Muhaimin in his research notes that Islamic education has lost its vitality as an agent of liberation, where Islam is only understood as a standard ritual system, not as a progressive principle to create a civilized and anti-discriminatory order of life (Muhaimin., 2009). Ramayulis emphasized that contemporary Islamic religious education tends to produce a generation that is ritually obedient but lacks social sensitivity to the problems of poverty, economic inequality, and structural discrimination (Ramayulis, 2005).

This crisis is clearly seen in three interlocking dimensions. First, the dimension of educational goals that is still oriented towards the formation of ritually obedient individuals without developing a critical awareness of social injustice. The purpose of Islamic education tends to emphasize the aspect of mahdhah worship without integrating a commitment to social transformation and the liberation of the oppressed. Second, the curriculum dimension is dominated by a normative-doctrinal approach without integrating critical analysis of contemporary social realities. The learning material dwells more on abstract theological-

normative aspects without linking them to concrete issues such as economic inequality, gender discrimination, and marginalization of minority groups. Third, the dimension of the learning process tends to be authoritarian and does not provide space for the development of freedom of critical thinking and constructive dialogue. The dominant learning method is one-way lectures with the teacher as the sole authority, while students are positioned as passive objects who must accept doctrine without critical questions.

The problem of Islamic education is actually not a local phenomenon, but part of the global challenges faced by Muslims in actualizing the liberating values inherent in Islamic teachings. In the global context, some progressive Muslim thinkers have developed the concept of Islamic liberation theology in response to this crisis. Hassan Hanafi, an Egyptian intellectual, developed Islamic liberation theology with a phenomenological approach that emphasized the transformation of consciousness from the passive to the active-revolutionary. Farid Esack, a South African theologian, formulated the Qur'anic liberation hermeneutics based on the experience of the struggle against apartheid, emphasizing siding with the oppressed as the key to the interpretation of religious texts (Mutmainnah, Maliki, 2016). Meanwhile, Ali Asghar Engineer, an Indian intellectual, developed a unique Islamic liberation theology by integrating criticism of capitalist and patriarchal socio-economic structures with a radical theological foundation of monotheism (Engineer, 2006).

Among the three thinkers, Ali Asghar Engineer's thought offers the most comprehensive and applicable framework for the context of Islamic education. Engineer conceptualizes Islam not only as a religion in the technical sense, but as a driver of social revolution that fights against oppressive structures, with the basic goal of universal brotherhood, equality, and social justice (Abror, 2006). His liberation theology is built on three fundamental interrelated pillars: monotheism as a theological foundation that rejects all forms of servitude other than to Allah – which means liberation from human domination over man in economic, political, and social forms; movement (*Praxis*) as an instrument of change that emphasizes that theology should not dwell only on the theoretical level but should encourage real action to change oppressive structures; and social justice as the ultimate goal of all liberation efforts that include economic, political, gender, and cultural justice.

What distinguishes Engineer from other liberation theological thinkers is his integrative approach between the analysis of historical materialism and the contextual hermeneutics of the Qur'an. Engineer developed a hermeneutic methodology that distinguishes between the normative elements of the Qur'an – in the form of universal values of justice, equality, and peace – and contextual elements tied to specific socio-historical situations (Mutmainnah, Maliki, 2016). This hermeneutic approach has great potential to transform the perspective of religious texts from the dogmatic to the liberative and contextual, but it has not been systematically implemented in the development of Islamic educational learning methodologies.

Several previous studies have examined Ali Asghar's thinking from various perspectives, but with limited focus and approach. Zumma Nihayatun Nafi'ah conducted a hermeneutic study of the Qur'an by Asghar Ali Engineer and its implications for contemporary Islamic understanding, revealing that his hermeneutic approach provides a wider interpretation space for religious texts (Nihayatun Nafi'ah, 2024). However, the analysis is still limited to methodological aspects without exploring its impact on the Islamic education system in a concrete way. Alif Rizky Ramadhan conducted a comparative study of liberation theology in Islam by comparing the thoughts of Asghar Ali Engineer and Hassan Hanafi (Nasution & Sutysna, 2022). The research succeeded in identifying similarities and differences in the approaches of the two in understanding the concept of liberation theology, but has not explored its practical implications in the context of Indonesian Islamic education which has unique socio-cultural characteristics. Ridho analyzes the gender thinking of Engineers in the context of interpretive reformulation, but does not explore its implications for the curriculum and pedagogy of Islamic education (Ridho, 2020).

Based on the search of the previous studies, several significant research gaps were identified. First, there has been no comprehensive analysis of how the three pillars of liberation theology – monotheism, movement, and social justice – can be transformed into practical

frameworks for the development of transformative Islamic educational goals. Previous studies tend to stop at the level of conceptual descriptions without operationalizing these concepts into the design of concrete educational objectives. Second, there has been no in-depth study on the implementation of the Engineer hermeneutic methodology – especially the distinction between normative and contextual elements of the Qur'an – in the reconstruction of the Islamic education curriculum with a liberal approach. In fact, this hermeneutic methodology has great potential to produce a curriculum that is responsive to contemporary social realities without losing the fundamental values of Islam. Third, there has been no research that specifically examines how liberation values such as justice, equality, anti-discrimination, and freedom of critical thinking can be integrated in the learning process of Islamic education through concrete pedagogical methodologies.

The urgency of this research is getting stronger considering that the contemporary challenges faced by Indonesian Islamic education are increasingly complex and serious. The phenomenon of radicalization that abuses the literal interpretation of religious texts shows the failure of Islamic education in developing critical and contextual interpretation skills of the Qur'an. Social inequality is widening with Indonesia's Gini coefficient reaching 0.381 in 2024, showing that Islamic education has not succeeded in instilling the values of distributive justice and concern for the weak. The gender discrimination that still colors Islamic educational practices, ranging from segregation of classrooms to restrictions on women's access to leadership positions, reflects a partial understanding of the principle of equality in Islam. The weak analytical ability of students towards social problems shows that the learning process emphasizes memorization and ritual obedience more than the development of critical awareness.

Engineer liberation theology offers a paradigmatic alternative that can answer these challenges through an understanding of Islam as a liberating, not oppressive, religion. This paradigm emphasizes that Islamic education should be an integral practice of liberation that not only frees the mind from dogmatism, but also frees society from oppressive structures. Thus, Islam is no longer understood as a static and apologetic belief system, but rather as a transformative force that drives social change towards justice and equality.

Based on the above context, this study aims to. (1) Comprehensively analyze Ali Asghar Engineer's thoughts on liberation theology, especially its three fundamental pillars (monotheism, movement, and social justice) and its hermeneutic methodology in understanding the Qur'an. (2) Exploring the relevance of the concept of liberation theology to the transformation of Islamic educational goals from ritualistic to transformative-liberating. (3) Analyze the implications of the Engineer's hermeneutic methodology on the reconstruction of the Islamic education curriculum with a liberative approach that integrates critical analysis of social reality. (4) Examine the implementation of liberating values (justice, equality, anti-discrimination, and freedom of critical thinking) in the learning process of Islamic education through concrete pedagogical methodologies.

The significance of this research can be seen from three dimensions. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of *liberation* theology discourse in the Islamic tradition with a special focus on its educational applications – an area that is still rarely explored in the academic literature. This research enriches the treasures of Islamic educational thought by providing a paradigmatic framework that integrates theology, hermeneutics, and pedagogy in a coherent whole. Practically, this study provides a *blueprint* for the development of an Islamic education learning curriculum and methodology that is responsive to contemporary social realities. The resulting framework can be a reference for education policymakers, curriculum developers, and Islamic education practitioners in designing a more liberative and transformative education system. Contextually, this research provides a paradigmatic alternative to understanding Islam as a liberating, not oppressive, religion – a perspective that is urgently needed in the context of Indonesia facing challenges of radicalization, intolerance, and social injustice.

Thus, this research not only fills an academic gap in the study of Islamic liberation theology and education, but also offers practical solutions to the crises facing contemporary

Islamic education. Through an in-depth exploration of Engineer's thought, this study seeks to show that the Islamic tradition has rich intellectual and spiritual resources to develop an educational system that not only produces ritually pious individuals, but is also committed to social justice and the liberation of the oppressed.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a philosophical-analytical and historical approach to library research. A philosophical-analytical approach is used to examine in depth Ali Asghar Engineer's thoughts on liberation theology and analyze its implications for the development of contemporary Islamic education. A historical approach is used to understand how Engineer's social, cultural, and intellectual background shaped his liberation theology concept (W. Darmalaksana, 2020).

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Ali Asghar Engineer's original works such as *Islam and Liberation Theology: Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam* (1990), *The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society* (2003), *The Right of Women in Islam* (1992), *Islam and Liberation Theology* (2006), as well as relevant articles. Secondary sources include literature discussing Engineer's thought, Islamic liberation theology, and Islamic education from various authors such as Nuryatno (2001), Abror (2006), Muhaimin (2009), and Ramayulis (2005). These sources are obtained through searching digital databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda Portal, *Research Gate*, and university libraries.

The data collection technique is carried out through documentation studies with steps: identification of sources through browsing library catalogs and academic databases, data inventory by creating a complete list of sources along with bibliographic information, classification of data by theme category, data extraction through in-depth reading and recording of relevant citations and paraphrasing, and verification of data through triangulation of sources to ensure accuracy and validity.

This study uses three complementary data analysis techniques. First, descriptive-philosophical analysis to comprehensively describe Engineer's thinking and explore the underlying philosophical assumptions. Second, hermeneutic analysis to understand the profound meaning of Engineer's texts by considering the socio-historical context and horizon of the author's thought. Third, content analysis to identify the main themes, argumentation patterns, and frequency of the appearance of certain concepts in Engineer's works.

The research was carried out through five systematic stages: data collection, data reduction by selecting and focusing relevant information, displaying data in the form of conceptual matrix and descriptive narrative, data interpretation using all three analysis techniques, and drawing conclusions and verification. The quality of research is maintained through triangulation of sources and theories, member checking by referring back to the original text, systematic documentation, and thick descriptions to ensure the transferability of findings. With this systematic methodology, the research is expected to produce a valid analysis and make a significant contribution to the development of liberating and transformative Islamic education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Liberation Theological Thoughts of Ali Asghar Engineer

Asghar Ali Engineer was born on March 10, 1939 in Salumbar, Rajasthan, India, and died on May 14, 2013 in Mumbai, India, at the age of 74. As one of the most influential contemporary Muslim intellectuals, Engineer leaves behind a legacy of profound thought on Islamic reform, liberation theology, and social justice issues.

The study of Engineer's thought is inseparable from his intellectual background as a contemporary Muslim thinker who came from the Daudi Bohras community, one of the Ismailiyid Shia sects in India (Abror, 2006). Engineer was born into a family that has a strong

Islamic scientific tradition, where his father Sheikh Qurban Husain was a scholar as well as a leader of the Daudi Bohras sect which tended to be liberal and inclusive (A. Nuryatno, 2001).

Although the Daudi Bohras community is known for its extreme and conservative character, his father has a liberal, inclusive and open mindset. Since childhood, Engineer has gained insight into religious pluralism from his father because he often sees his father in dialogue with religious leaders who are not from Islam. This exposure to the diversity of religious thought formed his intellectual characteristics that were open and dialogical. Later, he was introduced to the religious sciences and history of traditional and contemporary Islamic civilization (Ridho, 2020).

Engineers start their education from elementary to high school with modern lessons. Later, his father advised him to continue his education in Health or engineering. Finally in 1956 he continued his education at Vikram University, India and was interested in studying at the Faculty of Engineering (Muhammad Adress Prawira Negara & Juliani, 2022). After completing his education and obtaining a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, Engineer worked for 20 years as an engineer in a construction company located in the city of Bombay (now Mumbai). This work experience in the industrial world gave him a first-hand perspective on the socio-economic realities of urban Indian society, especially the conditions of the working class and economic inequality that were the main concerns in his liberation theology thought.

His anxiety as a young intellectual has made Engineer feel responsible for the social phenomena he witnesses. In 1970, at the age of 31, he made an important decision by resigning from his job as an engineer and joining a reform movement in the Bohra community (Country, 2023). This decision marked the transformation of Engineer from a technocrat to an intellectual activist committed to social change.

His involvement in the Bohra reform movement formed a deep understanding of the need for structural change in Muslim society. This experience became a practical laboratory for the development of his concept of liberation theology, where he saw firsthand how traditional power structures can oppress and how religion can be used both to liberate and oppress.

Engineer is a highly prolific writer with over 50 books and hundreds of articles written in English, Hindi, Urdu, and Gujarati. His outstanding intellectual productivity reflects his deep commitment to the dissemination of reformist and emancipatory ideas in Islam.

Engineer's main works relevant to liberation theology include: 'Islam and Liberation Theology' (1990), which is a seminal work in developing the concept of Islamic liberation theology; 'Islam and Its Relevance to Our Age', which explores the relevance of Islamic teachings in the context of modernity; 'The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society', which addresses gender issues in the perspective of progressive Islam; and 'Islamic State', which criticizes the concept of a traditional Islamic state and offers a more inclusive alternative.

Through these works, Engineer developed unique and original Islamic liberation theology thoughts. Its liberation theology differs from Latin American Christian liberation theology in terms of theological sources and socio-cultural context, but it still has the same emancipatory spirit in the struggle for social justice and the liberation of the oppressed.

Engineers are not only known as academics, but also as public intellectuals who are actively involved in various social movements and interfaith dialogues. He became the director of the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism in Mumbai, an institution that focuses on issues of pluralism, secularism, and human rights. His role as a public intellectual demonstrates his commitment to not only developing theories, but also applying them in concrete social practice.

As a sought-after speaker in various international forums, Engineer made a significant contribution to the Islamic-Western dialogue, especially in demonstrating that Islam has the potential to be a progressive and liberative force. His thinking became an important bridge between the classical Islamic tradition and the demands of modernity, as well as between spirituality and social activism (Taufik, 2020).

Engineer passed away on May 14, 2013 in Mumbai after battling the disease for a long time. His death left a huge void in the Muslim intellectual world, but the legacy of his liberating thought of Islam continues to inspire generations of Muslim academics and activists around the world. His thoughts on liberation theology, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and Islamic social reform remain relevant and continue to be studied today.

Main Pillars: Tauhid, Social Justice, Change Movement

In the thought of Asghar Ali Engineer, liberation theology is a theological paradigm designed to face the contemporary challenges of Muslims. Engineer builds his concept of liberation theology with three fundamental pillars that are interrelated and form a whole paradigmatic unity (Hasnan Nahar, 2021).

First: Tawheed as the Theological Foundation of Liberation. The concept of monotheism in Engineer's thought is not just an abstract monotheism or a speculative theological doctrine, but a concrete liberation principle that has radical socio-political implications. Tawheed, in the Engineer's understanding, means total rejection of all forms of servitude other than Allah. The logical implication of this principle is the liberation of man from human domination over man, whether in economic, political, or social form (Engineer, 1990). Engineer emphasized that if a person truly believes in monotheism, then he must reject all forms of social structures that place man as a god for other human beings. A capitalist structure that allows a few people to control economic resources and exploit the working class is a form of worship of other than God. Similarly, an authoritarian political system that concentrates power on a particular individual or group is contrary to the principle of monotheism, which teaches that only Allah is entitled to absolute obedience.

The theological foundation of the concept of monotheism as liberation has a strong justification in the Qur'an. Allah SWT says in QS. Al-Kahfi (18): 110:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُمُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ

"Say, 'I am only a man like you, who has been revealed to me that your Lord is the One God.'" (QS. Al-Kahfi [18]: 110).

This verse emphasizes that even the Prophet Muhammad PBUH who was a messenger of Allah was still an ordinary human being. If the Prophet alone cannot be glorified beyond his humanity, then no other human being is entitled to absolute servitude or submission. Thus, monotheism becomes a strong theological basis for rejecting all forms of individual cults, authoritarianism, and hierarchical structures that place humans in semi-divine positions.

Second: Movement (Praxis) as an Instrument of Change. The second pillar of Engineer liberation theology is the emphasis on movement or praxis as an instrument of social change. Engineer sharply criticizes traditional theology that focuses too much on metaphysical and ritualistic aspects without having a commitment to the transformation of social reality. For Engineer, true theology must be praxis—it must not dwell on a theoretical or spiritual contemplation, but must encourage real action to change oppressive structures (Engineer, 2006).

Engineer asserts that Islam is not a religion in the technical sense that is limited to individual rituals and beliefs, but rather a driving force of social revolution that fights oppressive structures. The basic goal of Islam is to create universal brotherhood, equality, and social justice on earth. Therefore, true faith must be manifested in an active commitment to fight for justice and against oppression (Abror, 2006).

The concept of movement in Engineer's thought is influenced by an analysis of historical materialism that emphasizes the importance of changing the material base of society, not just a change in consciousness. Engineers argue that poverty, economic inequality, and gender discrimination are not just moral or spiritual problems, but the result of unjust socio-economic structures. Therefore, the solution is not only through moral da'wah, but through a collective movement that changes the structure.

Third: Social Justice as the Ultimate Goal. The third pillar and at the same time the ultimate goal of Engineer liberation theology is the creation of comprehensive social justice. Social justice in Engineer's understanding is not only distributive justice in the economic field, but includes political, gender, and cultural justice. Engineer emphasized that a just society is

a society that is free from all forms of oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and marginalization.

The theological foundation of this concept of social justice has deep roots in the teachings of the Qur'an. Allah SWT says in QS. Al-Nisa (4): 135:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ

"O you who have believed, be true enforcers of justice, witnesses for Allah, even against yourselves, your parents, and your relatives." (QS. Al-Nisa [4]: 135).

This verse affirms that the enforcement of justice is a fundamental non-negotiable obligation, even when it is detrimental to personal or group interests. For Engineer, this verse is a strong theological justification that Islam inherently requires its people to actively fight against all forms of structural injustice and fight for social transformation towards an egalitarian society.

Engineers developed a holistic concept of social justice, including: economic justice that rejects exploitative capitalist systems and encourages a fair distribution of wealth; political justice that rejects authoritarianism and encourages democratic participation; gender justice that rejects patriarchy and fights for the equality of men and women; and cultural justice that respects diversity and rejects dominant cultural hegemony.

Aspects of the Qur'anic Hermeneutics in Engineer Thought

One of Engineer's most significant contributions to contemporary Islamic thought was the development of a contextual, humanist, and progressive Qur'anic hermeneutic methodology. His hermeneutic methodology became an important instrument in building liberation theology that was based on sacred texts but still responsive to contemporary realities.

Differentiating Normative and Contextual Elements of the Qur'an. Engineer formulated that the Qur'an has two important elements that must be carefully distinguished: the normative element and the contextual element. The normative elements are the basic principles and universal values of the Qur'an which are eternal and not bound by time, including justice (*'adl*), equality (*São Paulo*), peace (*greeting*), affection (*Rahmah*), and freedom (*hurriyah*)(Engineer, 1990). These principles are the essence of Islamic teachings that must be used as a standard in understanding all Islamic teachings.

Meanwhile, contextual elements are verses or provisions that are tied to a particular socio-historical situation when the Qur'an was revealed. Engineer emphasizes that interpretations of contextual verses can change along with changes in social, cultural, and historical contexts. Provisions relating to the customs of 7th-century Arab societies, patriarchal social structures, or certain conditions of warfare cannot be applied literally in modern times without considering the context that has changed drastically(Athmainnah, 2014).

The Influence of Social Conditions on Interpretation. Engineer explained that the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an is highly dependent on the understanding, culture, and social conditions of a mufassir(Engineer, 2003). In this case, Engineer is influenced by Schleiermacher's hermeneutics which emphasizes that one's understanding of the text is always influenced by the horizon of understanding formed by its socio-historical context(Rasuki, 2021).

The implication of this principle is that no interpretation is final and absolute. Each generation has the right and obligation to reinterpret the Qur'an according to the challenges and problems of its time. The interpretation of classical scholars produced in the context of feudal and patriarchal societies cannot be forced to be applied literally in modern societies that have very different social, economic, and political structures.

The Symbolic and Metaphorical Dimensions of the Qur'an. Engineer explained that the verses of the Qur'an have a symbolic content that is metaphorical, so that the understanding of the holy book always changes according to the development of the times(Fridiyanto, 2020). The language of the Qur'an does not always have to be understood literally, but rather must be explored for its substantive meaning which is often hidden behind symbolic expressions.

The Engineer's hermeneutic approach emphasizes the importance of understanding normative verses as a top priority in the interpretation of the Qur'an. If one wants to understand the Qur'an correctly, then one must pay attention to normative verses rather than contextual, because normative verses contain the basic principles of Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, regarding contextual verses, one must interpret seriously and look at the social conditions when the verse is revealed (M. A. Nuryatno, 2007).

Engineer's hermeneutic methodology has revolutionary implications for the understanding of Islam, especially in controversial issues such as gender, religious pluralism, and democracy. By distinguishing between normative principles and contextual applications, Engineer shows that Islam is not anti-modernity or anti-gender equality, but rather patriarchal interpretations of Islam that are contrary to the Qur'an's normative principles of justice and equality.

Engineer's Critique of Traditional Theology

Engineer developed a sharp critique of traditional theology that he considered to have failed to fulfill the emancipatory function of Islam and instead perpetuated the oppressive status quo. Engineer's critique of traditional theology can be identified in several fundamental aspects.

Criticism of Apologetic and Defensive Theology. Engineer criticized traditional theological tendencies that were apologetic and defensive, focusing more on the defense of doctrine from external attacks than on the transformation of the internal social reality of Muslims. Traditional theology, according to Engineer, has lost its prophetic characteristics that should be critical of power structures and on the side of the oppressed. Instead of being a transformative force, traditional theology has become an instrument of legitimacy for oppressive political and economic authorities.

Criticism of Metaphysical and Abstract Theology. Engineer emphasized that traditional theology dwells too much on abstract metaphysical problems and is irrelevant to the concrete problems of the people. Long debates about the attributes of God, life after death, or eschatological issues have taken away the intellectual energy of Muslims without making a significant contribution to solving the problems of poverty, injustice, and discrimination faced by the ummah (Prasetyo, 2004).

Engineer affirmed that liberation theology should be pragmatic and historical, not abstract and speculative. Theology must depart from the concrete reality of the oppression experienced by the people and develop a theological response that encourages liberation action. Thus, theology is no longer an elitist academic discourse, but an instrument of the struggle of the oppressed.

Criticism of Theological Fatalism. One of Engineer's sharpest criticisms is directed at a fatalistic theological understanding, which interprets the concept of destiny (*qadar*) in a way that paralyzes the human will to change social reality. This fatalistic understanding states that poverty, injustice, and suffering are God's will that must be accepted with resignation without resistance. Engineer strongly rejects this understanding and asserts that Islam teaches the importance of effort and active struggle to change unjust conditions.

Criticism of the Legitimacy of Patriarchal Structures. Engineer sharply criticizes how traditional theology has been used to legitimize patriarchal structures that discriminate against women. Classical interpretations of the Qur'anic verses about gender relations, according to Engineer, are strongly influenced by the patriarchal bias of male mufassir who live in a patriarchal society. As a result, the Qur'an's normative principles of equality and justice were ignored, while contextual provisions reflecting the 7th-century Arab social structure were made universal norms (Engineer, 1992).

Engineer asserts that true theology must be liberative, not legitimative of oppression. Theology must be a force that frees man from all forms of bondage, not one that adds new bonds. Thus, Engineer's critique of traditional theology does not aim to deconstruct Islam, but rather to reconstruct a more authentic understanding of Islam and in accordance with the emancipatory prophetic spirit.

Implications for Islamic Education

The Transformation of the Purpose of Islamic Education: From Formal Obedience to Social Consciousness

The liberation theology of Engineer has fundamental implications for the reconstruction of the goals of Islamic education. Engineer's criticism of contemporary Islamic education, which has so far only been oriented towards the formation of ritually obedient individuals without critical awareness of social injustice, demands a paradigmatic transformation in formulating educational goals.

From ritualistic to transformative-liberative. Engineer emphasized that Islamic education should not only aim to produce individuals who are ritually obedient and master the memorization of religious texts, but must produce individuals who have a critical awareness of social reality and are committed to the transformation of society towards justice. The purpose of Islamic education should reflect the prophetic spirit of Islam which teaches not only vertical worship of Allah, but also horizontal responsibility towards fellow human beings, especially the oppressed.

Based on the three pillars of liberation theology, the purpose of Islamic education must be reconstructed to include the following dimensions:

First, the formation of liberating monotheistic awareness. Islamic education must instill an understanding that monotheism is not just an abstract theological belief, but a principle of liberation from all forms of servitude to other than Allah. Students must be guided to understand that submission to Allah means rejection of all forms of human domination over humans, whether in the form of an exploitative economic system, authoritarian political structures, or discriminatory cultures. True monotheistic awareness will result in a critical attitude towards oppressive power structures and courage to stand up against injustice (Engineer, 1990).

Second, the development of critical awareness of social injustice. Islamic education must be able to open students' eyes to the reality of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination that occur in society. Students should not be left naïve or apathetic to the problems of structural poverty, economic inequality, gender discrimination, or marginalization of minority groups. Education must develop students' ability to identify the root causes of social problems, analyze the structures that perpetuate injustice, and formulate transformative alternative solutions.

Third, the formation of a commitment to be actively involved in the social change movement. The goal of education should not stop at the level of awareness or knowledge, but rather should encourage real action to change social reality. Students should be guided not only to understand theories of social justice, but also to engage in concrete practices of liberation, such as pro-people public policy advocacy, empowerment of marginalized communities, or social movements that fight for the rights of the oppressed.

Fourth, balanced and integral personality development. Engineer emphasizes that education must achieve the growth of a holistic balance of human personality, through the exercise of the soul, intellect, ratio, feelings and appreciation. Education must prepare for human growth in all its aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific and linguistic, both individually and collectively. But what distinguishes it from the conventional concept of holistic education is that all aspects are directed towards the ultimate goal of realizing devotion to God and universal humanity (Achmadi., 2010).

This transformation of educational goals requires a fundamental change in the way we view educational success. The indicator of the success of Islamic education is no longer only measured by the ability to memorize the Qur'an, master fiqh, or obedience to perform ritual worship, but also from social sensitivity, critical thinking ability, courage against injustice, and real contribution to the liberation of the oppressed.

Curriculum Reconstruction: A Liberative and Contextual Approach

Engineer liberation theology demands a radical reconstruction of the Islamic educational curriculum. The curriculum should not only contain traditional normative-doctrinal materials without integration with critical analysis of contemporary social realities. Engineer's hermeneutic methodology that distinguishes between normative and contextual

elements of the Qur'an is key in designing a curriculum that is liberative but still rooted in Islamic traditions.

Based on Engineer's thoughts, a liberative Islamic education curriculum should be built on the following principles:

First, the integration of normative values with contextual analysis. Each learning material must integrate Islamic normative principles (justice, equality, peace, compassion) with a critical analysis of contemporary issues. For example, in studying zakat, students not only learn the laws of fiqh about nisab and zakat levels, but also analyze how the zakat system can be an instrument of wealth redistribution to overcome structural economic inequality.

Second, a contextual hermeneutic approach. The curriculum must teach students to understand religious texts with a hermeneutic approach that pays attention to the socio-historical context, not with a literal-textual approach. Students must be trained to distinguish between universal normative principles and contextual provisions that can change with the times (Athmainnah, 2014).

Third, inclusion of diverse perspectives. The curriculum should include a wide range of perspectives on Islamic interpretation, not just mainstream or orthodox perspectives. Students should be introduced to progressive and reformist ideas in Islam, including thoughts on gender equality, religious pluralism, and democracy, so that they have broad insights and are not trapped in narrow and exclusive understandings.

Fourth, relevance to contemporary issues. Learning materials must be relevant to the actual problems faced by society, such as poverty, economic inequality, gender discrimination, radicalization, intolerance, and ecological crises. The curriculum must equip students with the ability to analyze these problems from a progressive Islamic perspective and formulate constructive solutions.

Through the analysis of historical materialism, Engineer believes that Islam has a very rich source of teachings and history and the potential to be developed into liberating and revolutionary teachings. The scope of the Islamic education curriculum in schools, which has so far consisted of aspects of the Qur'an and Hadith, faith or aqidah, morals, fiqh (Islamic law), and the aspect of Tarikh (history) must be transformed with the following liberative approach:

Aspects of the Qur'an and Hadith: Taught with an Engineer hermeneutic approach that distinguishes normative and contextual elements. Students are not only trained to read and memorize the Qur'an, but also to understand the socio-historical context of the revelation of verses (asbabun nuzul), identify universal normative principles, and apply these principles in contemporary contexts. The material should cover a variety of interpretive methodologies, including contextual interpretation, feminist interpretation, and social justice-oriented interpretation. Students are invited to analyze how verses about social justice are relevant to issues such as economic inequality, gender discrimination, or the marginalization of minority groups (Muhaimin., 2009).

Aspects of Aqidah: It is not only taught as a doctrine that must be accepted without question, but as a theological foundation for the liberation of human beings from all forms of oppression. The concept of monotheism must be understood in its liberative dimension – as a rejection of all forms of servitude to other than Allah, which also means a rejection of exploitative economic systems, authoritarian political structures, and discriminatory cultures. The material of the aqidah must integrate a discussion of how true faith should encourage a commitment to social justice and the liberation of the oppressed.

Moral Aspect: Taught not only as an individual ethic that focuses on personal piety, but as a social ethic that demands a commitment to collective justice and the liberation of the oppressed. Moral material must include values such as empathy for the weak, courage against injustice, integrity in the face of corruption, and solidarity with marginalized groups. Students must be guided to understand that noble morals are not only about personal manners or honesty, but also about moral courage to fight for justice even when it is detrimental to personal or group interests.

Fiqh Aspect: Taught with a critical and contextual approach, not dogmatic. Students must be trained to understand that Islamic law (*fiqh*) is a product of human ijtihad that is

bound by a socio-historical context, not God's sacred and immutable law. Fiqh material should integrate discussions of the methodology of legal *istinbath*, differences of opinion between schools, and the relevance of classical laws in the modern context. Students must be guided not only to memorize the laws of fiqh, but also to understand the philosophy and purpose (*maqashid*) behind these laws, as well as the ability to contextualize the law in accordance with the principles of contemporary justice and welfare.

Historical Aspect (Date): Taught with emphasis on the struggle of Muslims in upholding justice and fighting oppression throughout history. Historical material should not contain only glorification of the past or apologetic heroic narratives, but should include a critical analysis of various periods of Islamic history, including those marked by injustice, exploitation, or discrimination. Students should be introduced to reformist figures and progressive thinkers in Islamic history who fought for social justice, gender equality, and pluralism. The historical material must also integrate the history of liberation movements in Muslim communities in various parts of the world, such as the anti-colonialism movement, the civil rights movement, or the Islamic feminism movement.

The liberative curriculum also demands the integration of religious subjects with general subjects in a coherent perspective. Subjects such as sociology, economics, history, or citizenship must be integrated with liberal Islamic values. For example, in studying economics, students not only study conventional economic theories, but also analyze them from the perspective of Engineer's critique of exploitative capitalism and the concept of equitable Islamic economics. In studying sociology, learners must be equipped with the ability to analyze the social structures that perpetuate injustice and design transformative social interventions.

Participatory, Diabolical, and Critical Awareness-Based Learning Process

The transformation of the goals and curriculum of Islamic education must be followed by the transformation of learning methodology. Engineer emphasized that the learning process should not be authoritarian with the teacher as the sole authority who dictates knowledge to passive students. On the contrary, learning must be dialogical, democratic, and emancipatory in nature.

The Application of the Liberation Pedagogy of Paulo Freire

Although Engineer does not explicitly refer to Paulo Freire, his concept of liberation theology has a strong affinity with Freire's liberation pedagogy. Freire criticized the "bank" learning model (*banking education*) where the teacher deposits knowledge into the student's head which is considered an empty container. This model perpetuates a culture of silence (*culture of silence*) where students do not have a voice and critical power (Maruaapey, 2023).

Alternatively, Freire offers a liberation pedagogy based on dialogue, critical consciousness, and praxis. Learning must start from the concrete reality that students experience, then through critical dialogue, students are guided to analyze the structures that perpetuate oppression and formulate actions to change those realities. This concept is very much in line with Engineer's thought who emphasized that Islamic education must generate critical awareness and encourage social change movements.

Implementation of Dialogical-Democratic Methodology

Based on the integration of Engineer and Freire thinking, the learning methodology of a liberative Islamic education should apply the following principles:

First, learning based on dialogue and discussion. The one-way lecture method should be minimized and replaced with more dialogical methods such as group discussions, seminars, debates, or problem-based learning (*problem-based learning*). Teachers are not positioned as the only source of knowledge, but rather as facilitators who guide students to explore knowledge independently and collectively. In discussions, all votes should be respected and no opinion should be disqualified without strong arguments (Leonard et al., 2019).

Second, learning that values the student's experience and context. The learning material must be relevant to the student's life experience and the social realities they face. Teachers must start learning from the concrete problems experienced by their students or their

society, then relate them to theological concepts or Islamic values. This approach makes learning more meaningful and encourages students to see the relevance of Islamic teachings to their real lives.

Third, the development of critical thinking skills. Students must be trained not to passively receive information, but to actively question, analyze, and evaluate every information received. Students should be given the freedom to ask questions, even if they challenge the teacher's authority or mainstream views. Teachers must create a safe learning environment (*safe learning environment*) where students feel comfortable expressing doubts, criticisms, or alternative views without fear of being judged or punished (Amananti, 2024).

Fourth, social *problem-based learning*. Learning materials must be organized around actual and relevant social problems, such as poverty, economic inequality, gender discrimination, radicalization, or intolerance. Students are guided to analyze the root of the problem from various perspectives, including the perspective of Islamic liberation theology, and then formulate constructive and transformative solutions. This approach not only develops students' analytical abilities, but also fosters social concern and commitment to engage in social change.

Fifth, integration of reflection and action (*praxis*). Learning should not stop at the level of cognitive understanding, but rather should encourage students to take real action. After critically analyzing social issues, students should be guided to design and implement social action projects, such as community empowerment programs, policy advocacy campaigns, or solidarity movements against marginalized groups. Through this action experience, students not only learn about social justice, but also experience the process of becoming agents of social change.

The Relevance of Liberation Theology in Shaping a Humanist and Emancipatory Islamic Education

The theology of Engineer liberation has proven to have significant relevance in answering the contemporary challenges faced by Indonesian Islamic education. In a context where Islamic education faces the threat of radicalization, widening social inequality, and persistent gender discrimination, liberation theology offers a transformative alternative paradigm.

The phenomenon of radicalization that misuses the literal interpretation of religious texts shows the failure of Islamic education in developing critical and contextual interpretation skills of the Qur'an. Engineer's hermeneutic methodology that distinguishes normative and contextual elements provides an effective instrument to address this problem. By understanding that not all verses of the Qur'an have to be understood literally and that the socio-historical context is very important in interpretation, learners will avoid the simplistic and extreme understandings that form the basis of radical ideologies (Nihayatun Nafi'ah, 2024).

The widening social inequality with Indonesia's Gini coefficient reaching 0.381 in 2024 shows that Islamic education has not succeeded in instilling the values of distributive justice and concern for the weak. The liberation theology of Engineer, which emphasizes social justice as a fundamental goal of Islam, provides a strong theological foundation to develop social concern in students. By understanding that true faith must be manifested in a commitment to social justice, students will be motivated to be actively involved in efforts to overcome poverty and inequality.

The gender discrimination that still colors Islamic educational practices, ranging from segregation of classrooms to restrictions on women's access to leadership positions, reflects a partial understanding of the principle of equality in Islam. Engineer's thinking on gender equality based on the normative principles of the Qur'an provides a strong theological justification for fighting for equality in education. By understanding that gender discrimination is contrary to the principles of justice and equality that are Islamic normative values, Islamic educational institutions can develop more egalitarian policies and practices (Engineer, 1992).

Ultimately, the integration of the liberation theology of the Engineer in Islamic education will result in graduates who are not only ritually pious, but also have a humanist

and emancipatory character. The humanist character is manifested in deep concern for fellow human beings, especially those who are oppressed and marginalized. Emancipatory character is manifested in the commitment to free oneself and others from all forms of oppression, both structural and cultural.

Islamic education based on liberation theology will produce a generation of Muslims who have a strong but non-exclusive religious identity, who are committed to Islamic values but are not dogmatic, who are devout but not ritualistic, and who have a deep spirituality but remain actively involved in social transformation. This generation is what is needed to answer the complex challenges of the 21st century and realize Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for all nature).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Ali Asghar Engineer successfully formulated an Islamic theology of liberation built upon three fundamental pillars: tawhid as the theological foundation that rejects all forms of subjugation aside from God, social action as a practical instrument of change, and social justice as the ultimate goal. His hermeneutical methodology, which distinguishes between the normative and contextual elements of the Qur'an, offers a powerful framework for developing an authentic yet contextually responsive understanding of Islam. The implications of Engineer's theology of liberation for Islamic education encompass transformative shifts in educational aims, curriculum reconstruction, and pedagogical practice – moving from ritualistic objectives toward liberative and transformative goals that foster critical awareness, integrating critical social analysis with normative Islamic principles of justice and equality, and applying dialogical, democratic, and critically conscious learning methods inspired by Paulo Freire. As a contemporary paradigm, Engineer's liberative theology proves highly relevant in addressing issues such as religious radicalization, widening social inequality, and persistent gender discrimination by presenting Islam as a religion of liberation rather than oppression. This research highlights the significance of Engineer's framework for shaping a more humanistic, emancipatory, and socially responsive model of Islamic education, while opening avenues for future studies on its practical implementation in learning models, curriculum design, and assessment grounded in liberative principles.

REFERENCES

- Abror, R. H. (2006). *Gugatan Epistemologis-Liberatif Asghar Ali Engineer*. Ar-Ruzz.
- Achmadi. (2010). *Ideologi Pendidikan Islam (Paradigma Humanisasi Teosentris)*. ((2nd ed.)). Pustaka Belajar.
- Amananti, W. (2024). *Kompetensi pedagogik dan profesional guru dalam pelaksanaan evaluasi pembelajaran pendidikan agama islam pada SMA di wilayah Kabupaten Aceh Barat*. 4(02), 7823–7830.
- Athmainnah, S. (2014). Hermeneutika Asghar Ali Engineer : Menyingkap Mega Skandal Tafsir Patrilineal. *As-Salam Jurnal Studi Hukum Islam & Pendidikan*, 3(1), 25.
- Engineer, A. A. (1990). *Islam and Liberation Theology; Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam*. Sterling Publishers Limited.
- Engineer, A. A. (1992). *The Right of Woman in Islam*. Vanguard Books.
- Engineer, A. A. (2003). *The Qur'an Women and Modern Society* (A. Nuryatno, Ed.. Lkis Pelangi Aksara.
- Engineer, A. A. (2006). *Islam dan Teologi Pembebasan*. (4th ed). Pustaka Belajar.
- Fridiyanto, F. (2020). Dinamika Sosial Pesantren di Indonesia. *Al Mashaadir : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*.
- Hasnan Nahar, M. (2021). Re-Thinking Q.S An-Nisa Ayat 11 (Pendekatan Hermeneutika Asghar Ali Engineer). *Al-Mufasir*, 3(1), 33–4.
- Leonard, Wibawa, B., & Suriani. (2019). Model Dan Metode Pembelajaran Di Kelas. In *Penerbit: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat – Universitas Indraprasta PGRI*.
- Maruapey, N. (2023). Paulo Freire: Pendidikan yang Membebaskan. *LSF Discourse*.

Muhaimin. (2009). *Rekonstruksi Pendidikan Islam*. Rajawali Press.

Muhammad Adress Prawira Negara, A., & Juliani, A. (2022). Discourse on Women's Leadership in Islam: Asghar Ali Engineer's Thought Analysis Study. *An-Nisa Jurnal Kajian Perempuan Dan Keislaman*, 15(2), 137-152. <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v15i2.88>

Mutmainnah, Maliki, W. D. (2016). *Hermeneutika Sebagai Tawaran Baru Metodologi Tafsir (Studi Atas Pemikiran Farid Esack & Hasan Hanafi)*.

Nasution, A. A., & Sutysna, H. (2022). Pengaruh Menghafal Al-Qur'an Dengan Metode One Day One Ayat Terhadap Kecerdasan Intelektual Pada Mahasiswa Fakultas Kedokteran Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. *Scientific Proceedings of Islamic and Complementary Medicine*, 1(1), 9-14. <https://doi.org/10.55116/spicm.v1i1.2>

Negara, A. M. P. (2023). Pembaharuan Diskursus Teologi Islam: Studi Atas Pemikiran Asghar Ali Engineer. *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, 3(1), 52-69. <https://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/jpiHalaman:52-69>

Nihayatun Nafi'ah, Z. (2024). Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an dan Keadilan (Telaah Pemikiran Farid Esack dan Asghar Ali Engineer). *Rayah Al-Islam*, 8(4), 1984-2003. <https://doi.org/10.37274/rais.v8i4.1141>

Nuryatno, A. (2001). *Islam, Teologi Pembebasan dan Kesetaraan Gender : Studi atas Pemikiran Asghar Ali Engineer*. UII Press.

Nuryatno, M. A. (2007). Examining Asghar Ali Engineer's Qur'anic Interpretation of Women in Islam. *Al-Jami'ah*, 45(2), 389.

Ramayulis. (2005). *Metodologi Pendidikan Agama Islam*. Kalam Mulia.

Rasuki. (2021). Mengenal Hermeneutical Theory. *Kariman*, 9(1), 103-114.

Ridho, R. A. (2020). Reformulasi Tafsir: Studi Pemikiran Gender Asghar Ali Engineer. *JSophist : Jurnal Sosial Politik Kajian Islam Dan Tafsir*, 2(2), 218-.

Taufik, M. (2020). *Paradigma Pendidikan Islam Kontekstual* (Issue July).

W. Darmalaksana. (2020). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka dan Studi Lapangan*. Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.