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ROLE-PLAYING AS AN EMANCIPATORY SPACE FOR EXPRESSIVE FREEDOM AND EMBODIED COGNITION IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Agama (PA) masih menghadapi tantangan berupa dominasi pedagogi transmisif yang berorientasi pada penguasaan pengetahuan kognitif, sehingga belum sepenuhnya menghubungkan pemahaman agama dengan tindakan moral dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Penelitian tentang bermain peran dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) selama ini lebih banyak menekankan pencapaian kognitif dan motivasi belajar, sedangkan perannya dalam membangun kebebasan ekspresif dan menegosiasikan batas-batas teologis normatif belum banyak dikaji. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana kebebasan ekspresif diwujudkan, difasilitasi, dan diinternalisasi melalui pembelajaran bermain peran. Penelitian menggunakan desain studi kasus intrinsik kualitatif di MAN 3 Pontianak, Indonesia, dengan melibatkan tiga guru dan sembilan siswa sebagai informan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan pasif, wawancara semi-terstruktur, serta analisis semiotik-naratif terhadap dokumen kurikulum dan film pendek karya siswa berjudul *Dua Pintu Surga*. Data dianalisis menggunakan NVivo 14 dengan mengikuti model Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga modalitas ekspresif dalam pembelajaran, yaitu sosiodrama langsung, bermain peran digital, dan penulisan naskah kolaboratif berbasis *peer-casting*. Guru mengelola dilema etis melalui *single-gender casting*, koreksi normatif tertunda, dan karakter *moral proxy*, sehingga siswa dapat berekspresi secara kreatif dalam batas nilai-nilai Islam. Batas syariat berfungsi sebagai perancah pembelajaran yang mendukung refleksi, pengambilan keputusan moral, dan pembelajaran vikarius. Penelitian ini menghasilkan kerangka *Emancipatory Islamic Pedagogy through Role-Playing* (EIP-RP) serta mengidentifikasi adanya ketidaksesuaian antara praktik pembelajaran afektif-psikomotorik dan penilaian yang masih berorientasi kognitif. Bermain peran dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam dapat menjadi ruang pembelajaran yang reflektif, partisipatif, dan kontekstual ketika kebebasan berekspresi dikelola melalui prinsip *structured open-endedness*. Kerangka EIP-RP menawarkan perspektif pedagogis yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam dengan pedagogi kritis-humanistik untuk mendukung pengembangan pembelajaran moral yang lebih bermakna.

Kata Kunci: *Bermain peran, kebebasan ekspresif, Pendidikan agama Islam.*

ABSTRACT

Religious Education (RE) continues to face the challenge of transmissive pedagogies that prioritise cognitive knowledge acquisition, often failing to connect religious understanding with lived moral action. Previous studies on role-playing in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) have primarily focused on cognitive achievement and learning motivation, while its potential to foster expressive freedom and negotiate normative theological boundaries remains underexplored. This study aims to examine how expressive freedom is enacted, facilitated, and

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internalised through role-playing pedagogy. An intrinsic qualitative case study was conducted at MAN 3 Pontianak, Indonesia, involving three teachers and nine students as informants. Data were collected through passive participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and semiotic-narrative analysis of curricular documents and a student-produced short film entitled *Dua Pintu Surga*. The data were analysed using NVivo 14, following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model. The findings identified three expressive modalities in the learning process: live sociodrama, digital role-playing, and collaborative scriptwriting based on *peer-casting*. Teachers managed ethical dilemmas through *single-gender casting*, *delayed normative correction*, and the use of *moral proxy* characters, enabling students to express themselves creatively within Islamic normative boundaries. Rather than merely restricting creativity, Islamic principles functioned as a learning scaffold that supported reflection, moral decision-making, and vicarious learning. The study also developed the *Emancipatory Islamic Pedagogy through Role-Playing* (EIP-RP) framework and identified a mismatch between affective-psychomotor learning practices and assessment indicators that remain predominantly cognitive-oriented. Role-playing in Islamic Religious Education can serve as a reflective, participatory, and contextual learning space when freedom of expression is facilitated through *structured open-endedness*. The EIP-RP framework offers a pedagogical perspective that integrates Islamic values with critical-humanistic pedagogy to promote more meaningful moral learning.
Keywords: *Expressive freedom; Islamic religious education; role-playing.*

INTRODUCTION

Religious Education (RE) continues to face significant pedagogical challenges in responding to contemporary educational demands. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the emphasis on 21st-century competencies, including critical thinking, empathy, and moral collaboration, highlight the importance of developing learners who can connect knowledge with responsible social and ethical action (Edwin et al., 2025; Jihan Nurhamidah et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2021). Nevertheless, RE in many educational contexts remains influenced by conventional teacher-centered approaches that prioritize the transmission of religious knowledge. This condition reflects Freire's (2020) critique of the banking concept of education, in which students are positioned primarily as passive recipients of predetermined knowledge. Such transmissive approaches may limit intellectual engagement and create a gap between declarative moral knowledge and the affective and spiritual capacities required to respond to complex social and ethical situations (Halstead, 2007; Jackson, 2018). As a result, students may demonstrate an understanding of religious doctrines without necessarily developing the moral imagination and socio-emotional competencies needed to translate these principles into everyday conduct (Nussbaum, 2000).

These challenges are particularly relevant to Islamic Religious Education (IRE/PAI), where the relationship between religious authority, normative values, and student autonomy requires careful pedagogical consideration. The internalization of Islamic values is sometimes approached through instructional practices that emphasize obedience, cognitive conformity, and limited opportunities for student expression. However, such practices do not fully reflect the broader epistemological foundations of Islamic intellectual tradition. Islamic education also recognizes the importance of *hurriyah* (intellectual freedom from blind imitation or *taqlid a'ma*), *tadabbur* (deep contemplation of religious texts and contexts), and *ijtihad* (independent critical reasoning) as dimensions of intellectual and spiritual engagement (Kamali, 2008; Saeed, 2006). These principles indicate that religious commitment need not be separated from critical inquiry. Rather, they provide a foundation for developing critical piety, understood in this study

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as the capacity to maintain spiritual commitment while engaging in reflective, analytical, and ethical examination of religious teachings and lived realities (Abou El Fadl, 2014; Rahman, 1982). From this perspective, expressive freedom in IRE should not be understood as a rejection of religious norms but as a pedagogical opportunity for students to engage with, interpret, and internalize Islamic values through meaningful learning experiences.

One pedagogical approach that may facilitate this process is role-playing. Grounded in social constructivist perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978) and experiential learning principles (Kolbe, 1984), role-playing enables students to explore social situations, assume different perspectives, and engage with moral dilemmas through simulated experiences. In this context, the classroom can function as a social and psychological learning environment in which students examine the consequences of actions, negotiate different viewpoints, and develop moral understanding through interaction and reflection. Such activities potentially support the development of moral agency by allowing learners to move beyond the memorization of normative principles toward their contextual interpretation and practical application. Nevertheless, the pedagogical potential of role-playing in IRE requires further investigation, particularly regarding how students exercise expressive freedom within an educational environment governed by religious and ethical norms.

A review of existing studies indicates that research on role-playing in IRE has predominantly examined measurable learning outcomes, including improvements in cognitive achievement (Rofiq & Mashuri, 2021; Sururin et al., 2025), student motivation (Nasution et al., 2025; Nurjanah et al., 2025; Sriwahyuni et al., 2025), and communication skills (Lailiyah et al., 2025). Some recent studies have also considered affective dimensions, particularly tolerance (Salsabila et al., 2025) and self-confidence (Khadafi et al., 2025). Although these findings demonstrate the educational value of role-playing, the existing literature remains largely oriented toward learning outcomes rather than the pedagogical processes through which students construct and express moral understanding. In particular, role-playing has rarely been examined as an epistemic space in which expressive freedom emerges through the interaction of cognitive-verbal inquiry, affective-emotional engagement, and psychomotor-kinesthetic embodiment.

Another important gap concerns the relationship between expressive freedom and normative theological boundaries. Unlike role-playing in general educational settings, its implementation in IRE involves pedagogical considerations related to religious representation, ethical appropriateness, and the interpretation of Islamic norms. Teachers therefore face the challenge of providing sufficient space for creativity and student agency while ensuring that classroom activities remain consistent with the ethical and theological principles of Islamic education. How teachers negotiate these competing considerations, including the strategies they employ to facilitate expression without compromising interpersonal safety and religious integrity, remains insufficiently explored. This issue is particularly important because normative boundaries may function not only as restrictions but also as pedagogical structures that guide students in exploring moral dilemmas and developing responsible forms of expression.

Addressing these gaps, the present study examines role-playing not merely as an instructional technique for improving learning outcomes but as an epistemic and pedagogical space in which expressive freedom is enacted, facilitated, and internalized within the normative framework of Islamic education. Conducted at MAN 3 Pontianak, Indonesia, this study focuses on three interconnected dimensions. First, it identifies the forms and manifestations of expressive freedom emerging through role-playing activities, particularly across cognitive-

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verbal, affective-emotional, and psychomotor-kinesthetic dimensions. Second, it examines how teachers navigate ethical-pedagogical dilemmas by balancing opportunities for creative expression and student agency with the maintenance of normative theological boundaries. Third, it explores the theoretical implications of these pedagogical practices for students' moral development, particularly in relation to Moral Self-Efficacy and Critical Piety. By bringing Islamic epistemological concepts into dialogue with critical-humanistic pedagogy, this study develops a framework for understanding how expressive freedom and normative religious structures can operate as mutually supportive dimensions of moral education.

The study contributes to the broader discourse on moral pedagogy and religious education by proposing a perspective in which intellectual freedom and normative religious structures are mutually constitutive rather than opposing educational principles. Through this perspective, role-playing is conceptualized as a structured pedagogical space that enables students to engage in reflective inquiry, simulated moral decision-making, and the internalization of religious values while remaining attentive to the ethical and theological foundations of Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHOD

To systematically investigate the manifestation and management of expressive freedom within Islamic Religious Education (IRE), this study employed a qualitative research design. Aligning with the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) guidelines, this section details the methodological rigor, contextual boundaries, and ethical considerations underpinning the study.

This study utilized an intrinsic qualitative case study design coupled with a phenomenological-interpretive approach. An intrinsic case study was selected because the primary objective was to achieve a deep, contextualized understanding of a unique, bounded system specifically, the implementation of role-playing at MAN 3 Pontianak, rather than to generate statistical generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). The phenomenological interpretive lens was applied to uncover the subjective meanings, lived experiences, and micro-interactional processes through which students and teachers co-construct moral understanding within an epistemic space. This design is particularly suited for exploring complex socio emotional and spiritual phenomena that cannot be captured through positivist, outcome oriented metrics.

The research was conducted at MAN 3 Pontianak, a public Islamic senior high school in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. This context was purposively selected due to its unique intersection of three critical dimensions:

1. Curricular Innovation: The active implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Emancipated Curriculum), which mandates student-centered, project-based learning and provides the structural flexibility necessary for experiential methods like role-playing.
2. Socio-Cultural Dynamics: The school is situated in an urban Malay-Pontianak context, where students navigate the intersection of contemporary youth culture (e.g., digital gaming, local vernacular) and traditional Islamic values.
3. Institutional Commitment: A strong institutional vision that integrates academic excellence with Islamic character building (Akhlak al-Karimah), creating a fertile ground for examining the synthesis of critical pedagogy and Islamic epistemology.

Participants comprised 3 IRE teachers (coded as Guru-M, Guru-W, and Guru-UF) and 9 students (5 from Grade X and 4 from Grade XI). Participant selection utilized purposive

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sampling to ensure "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2014), specifically targeting students who demonstrated varying levels of participation (from highly active actors to introverted digital producers and reflective audience members). Snowball sampling was subsequently employed, wherein initial participants recommended peers who had unique experiences or perspectives regarding the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the role-playing activities.

To ensure construct validity and depth, data were collected through the triangulation of sources and methods, encompassing three primary techniques:

1. Passive Participant Observation: The researcher conducted non-intrusive observations during multiple cycles of live sociodrama. The focus was strictly on the micro-dynamics of expressive freedom, capturing kinesthetic movements, proxemics, spontaneous linguistic improvisations (e.g., the use of local Pontianak dialect), and the emotional resonance between actors and the audience. Detailed, reflective field notes were generated immediately post-observation.
2. Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews: Interviews were conducted with the 3 teachers and 9 selected students. The interview guides were designed to explore the psychological and theological dimensions of the experience. For teachers, probes focused on pedagogical scaffolding, navigation of ethical dilemmas (e.g., non-mahram boundaries), and the creation of psychological safety. For students, probes explored their subjective feelings of expressive freedom, experiences of constructive doubt, emotional embodiment, and personal moral reflection.
3. Document and Digital Artifact Analysis: This involved the analysis of pedagogical documents (Teaching Modules, Student Worksheets/LKPD, and lesson plans) to understand the structural scaffolding. Crucially, the study incorporated the semiotic and narrative analysis of digital artifacts, specifically the student-produced short film "Dua Pintu Surga" (Two Gates of Heaven). This digital role-playing artifact was treated as rich empirical data, allowing for the analysis of how students autonomously constructed moral narratives, integrated religious texts organically, and utilized digital editing to express emotional depth without the pressure of live performance.

Data analysis was facilitated by NVivo 14 (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) to ensure systematic management and traceability. The analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of three concurrent flows of activity:

1. Open Coding: Data (transcripts, field notes, and digital artifact narratives) were read line-by-line to identify initial units of meaning. In-vivo codes were heavily utilized to preserve the participants' authentic voices (e.g., coding local vernacular expressions of defiance or empathy).
2. Axial Coding: Open codes were clustered into broader conceptual categories. This phase yielded five parent nodes: a) Typologies of Expressive Freedom, b) Teacher Scaffolding Strategies, c) Ethical-Pedagogical Dilemmas, d) Embodied and Affective Impacts, and e) Structural Curriculum Tensions.
3. Selective Coding: The core categories were integrated to formulate the overarching themes that directly answer the research questions, ultimately leading to the conceptualization of the Emancipatory Islamic Pedagogy through Role-Playing (EIP-RP) framework.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, multiple strategies were deployed:

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1. Triangulation: Methodological triangulation (observations, interviews, documents) and source triangulation (teachers, students, digital artifacts) were used to cross-verify findings. Matrix coding queries in NVivo were utilized to compare reference densities across different data sources.
2. Member Checking: Preliminary interpretations and thematic summaries were returned to the participants to verify that the researcher's representations aligned with their lived experiences.
3. Peer Debriefing and Audit Trail: The research process was subjected to peer debriefing with colleagues in the field of Islamic education and qualitative methodology. A comprehensive audit trail, including raw transcripts, NVivo project files (.nvpx), and analytical memos, was maintained to allow for external auditing of the interpretive process.

Given that the research explored the affective-spiritual domain of Religious Education, standard ethical protocols (informed consent, anonymity, and the right to withdraw) were strictly adhered to. However, this study introduced a specialized ethical framework termed theological sensitivity. Because students were encouraged to explore "constructive doubt" and enact roles involving moral transgression (e.g., portraying a disobedient child in "Dua Pintu Surga"), there was an inherent risk of emotional or spiritual vulnerability. To mitigate this, the researcher and participating teachers operated under the principle of unconditional positive regard (Rogers & Freiberg, 1970). The classroom was explicitly framed as a space of theological safety, ensuring that students' explorations of moral ambiguity or emotional expressions were never met with religious judgment, dogmatic condemnation, or interpersonal ridicule. The separation of the "character's actions" from the "student's spiritual identity" was continuously reinforced during the debriefing sessions to protect the psychological and spiritual well-being of all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Typology of Expressive Spaces in Islamic Religious Education

The implementation of role-playing at MAN 3 Pontianak did not manifest as a monolithic activity but rather unfolded across three distinct yet complementary typologies of expressive spaces, each offering unique pedagogical affordances for moral exploration.

The primary modality observed was the live sociodrama, a real-time simulation of moral and social conflicts executed directly in front of the class. This space was characterized by high spontaneity and a fluid boundary between actors and the audience. Field notes revealed that during the climax of a simulated conflict regarding birrul walidain (filial piety), the audience's emotional resonance was palpable; students who were not performing were observed "laughing, getting emotionally involved, and mimicking the actors." The live stage served as a micro-laboratory where linguistic and cultural improvisation flourished, allowing students to translate abstract normative concepts into the authentic vernacular of urban Pontianak youth in real-time.

To accommodate students with varying levels of social anxiety, a second modality emerged: digital role-playing through short film production. The creation of the five-minute film "Dua Pintu Surga" (Two Gates of Heaven) exemplified this space. Unlike the live stage, the digital medium significantly reduced stage fright, offering students the "psychological luxury" of multiple takes to refine their emotional expressions. Furthermore, this space expanded creative autonomy beyond acting; students assumed multi-layered roles as scriptwriters, directors, and editors. Crucially, the digital format produced a permanent

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reflective artifact. Students could repeatedly watch their own performances, transforming a fleeting classroom activity into a persistent medium for moral reflection.

Both live and digital modalities were preceded by a highly expressive pre-production phase. Rather than receiving pre-written scripts, students were granted thematic and structural autonomy to construct their own narratives. Document analysis of the student worksheets (LKPD) and scripts revealed that students collaboratively designed contrasting characters (e.g., the selfish 'Ica' versus the empathetic 'Kea') and integrated religious texts organically into the dialogue. Additionally, role allocation was driven by peer-casting, where students recommended each other for specific roles based on group dynamics and individual comfort levels, fostering a collaborative ownership of the moral narrative before the actual performance began.

Manifestations of Multidimensional Expressive Freedom

Within these typologies, students' expressive freedom manifested across four intersecting dimensions, moving beyond mere cognitive recall to holistic moral embodiment. Students exercised profound freedom in adapting religious concepts into their lived linguistic reality. In "Dua Pintu Surga", the actor playing the rebellious daughter spontaneously used the local Pontianak dialect and contemporary gaming terminology, exclaiming, "Ibu bising amat sih!" (Mother is so noisy/annoying!) and "Faris lagi gameplay penting sama teman-teman, nih!" (Faris is busy gaming with friends!). This linguistic improvisation represents a form of micro-level ijtihad (independent reasoning), where students translate rigid normative texts into the authentic, contextualized vernacular of their peer group without losing the core moral essence.

Expressive freedom was deeply physical. Students utilized their bodies, gestures, and spatial proximity (proxemics) to convey moral tension. The student-designed stage directions in the script included nuanced physical cues such as (Winced while holding her waist) to depict the mother's physical pain, and (Without looking at Mother, still focused on the phone) to illustrate apathy. Observations noted that as the performance progressed, initial physical awkwardness dissolved into spontaneous somatic reactions, demonstrating that the body was not merely illustrating the text, but actively processing and embodying the moral conflict.

The classroom became a safe container for complex emotional resonance. Students reported experiencing a spectrum of emotions, from initial awkwardness and suppressed laughter to deep empathy, sadness, and disappointment when witnessing the simulated mistreatment of the parent character. More importantly, the space allowed for constructive doubt—the freedom to grapple with the tension between ideal religious texts and messy empirical realities. Students were permitted to express the frustration of the rebellious character and the exhaustion of the parent, processing these conflicting emotions authentically rather than performing sanitized, dogmatically "correct" responses.

Students demonstrated high levels of moral imagination by autonomously designing narrative arcs and resolutions. Instead of merely reciting rules, they constructed dramatic scenarios where moral principles were tested. The organic integration of the Hadith of Tirmidhi into the dramatic dialogue, where the empathetic sister admonishes her rebellious sibling, "Aren't you afraid our life's journey will be made difficult just for hurting mother's heart?" showcased their ability to creatively synthesize theological authority with dramatic emotional expression, moving from abstract doctrine to lived moral reasoning.

Teacher Navigation Strategies for Ethical-Pedagogical Dilemmas

Facilitating expressive freedom in a religious context inevitably generates ethical-pedagogical dilemmas, particularly when dramatic expression borders on or simulates

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normative transgressions. Teachers at MAN 3 Pontianak employed three innovative strategies to navigate these tensions without stifling student agency.

When a script required physical expressions of affection, such as a mother hugging her child, teachers faced a dilemma regarding non-mahram (unrelated opposite gender) physical contact. Rather than censoring the scene and damaging the narrative's emotional integrity, Guru-M employed single-gender casting. By restructuring the cast so that female students played all female roles and male students played male roles, the teacher preserved the dramatic necessity of physical touch while strictly adhering to Sharia boundaries.

In a lesson on the etiquette of adornment, Guru-UF observed students simulating the use of prohibited cosmetics and excessive makeup. Instead of interrupting the performance, which would rupture the psychological safety and expressive flow—the teacher allowed the students to complete their exploration of these "incorrect" habits. The normative correction based on Sharia was deliberately postponed until the post-performance reflection session. This delayed normative correction allowed students to fully experience and express the behavior first, making the subsequent theological correction more impactful as it was grounded in their lived simulation.

A significant dilemma arose when students creatively portrayed highly rebellious behavior, such as a child screaming at a sick parent. To ensure this dramatic exploration of deviance was not misinterpreted as behavioral normalization by the audience, teachers relied on the narrative structure itself. In "Dua Pintu Surga", the character of the empathetic sister (Kea) functioned as a moral proxy. By having this character organically quote religious texts to admonish the rebellious sibling, the narrative itself provided the normative boundary. This allowed the class to safely explore the "dark side" of human behavior while the moral proxy ensured the theological and ethical compass remained firmly pointed toward the normative ideal.

Psychological and Moral Impacts

The culmination of these expressive spaces and navigational strategies resulted in profound psychological and moral transformations among the students. Students demonstrated a marked increase in moral self-efficacy the belief in their capacity to execute moral actions in complex situations. The willingness of students to take on challenging, "negative" roles (such as the rebellious daughter) without fear of social or theological stigma indicated a high level of psychological safety and moral confidence. Teachers noted that students who initially exhibited stage fright gradually took the initiative to volunteer for subsequent performances, indicating a sustained growth in interpersonal and moral confidence.

The most profound impact observed was the mechanism of self-confrontation. Students who played the roles of disobedient children reported that the simulation felt like "being reprimanded by themselves" *(merasa seperti ditegur oleh diri sendiri)*. By physically and emotionally embodying the transgressor, they experienced the somatic and affective weight of their actions. This simulated self-confrontation triggered deep personal introspection, with several students admitting to past real-life transgressions against their parents and expressing a genuine, internally motivated desire to change their behavior, moving beyond mere cognitive compliance to authentic moral transformation.

The moral impact extended far beyond the actors. Through structured peer-feedback mechanisms and the emotional contagion of the live performances, the audience engaged in deep vicarious learning. Students watching the sociodrama were not passive observers; they were actively emotionally involved and later tasked with providing constructive moral evaluations of the performance. This dual process of emotional resonance and cognitive

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evaluation allowed the audience to internalize the moral lessons vicariously, effectively transforming the entire classroom into a community of moral co-constructors.

Discussion

The empirical findings from MAN 3 Pontianak reveal that role-playing in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) transcends its conventional status as a mere instructional technique. Instead, it operates as a complex, multi-layered epistemic space. This section dialogues these empirical manifestations with grand theories in critical pedagogy, Islamic epistemology, and cognitive psychology to articulate four novel theoretical contributions to the global discourse on Moral Pedagogy and Religious Education.

Deconstructing the False Dichotomy

Global literature on Religious Education (RE) frequently traps itself in a false dichotomy: either RE is viewed as an exercise in dogmatic indoctrination (what Freire, 2020, critiques as the banking concept), or it is assumed that fostering critical thinking requires adopting a secular liberal framework that sidelines religious epistemology. The findings from this study fundamentally dismantle this dichotomy by demonstrating how Islamic epistemology and Western critical pedagogy can be synthetically integrated.

In the MAN 3 Pontianak context, students' expressive freedom manifested through linguistic improvisation (e.g., using the Pontianak dialect "Ibu bising amat sih!" or gaming terminology) and the organic integration of Hadith into dramatic dialogue should not be misread as secular rebellion or a departure from orthodoxy. Rather, viewed through the lens of Islamic epistemology, this represents a micro-level Ijtihad (independent reasoning) and Tadabbur (deep contemplation). Students are actively translating rigid normative texts into their lived, empirical reality without losing the moral essence (Kamali, 2008; Saeed, 2006).

This process facilitates what Abou El Fadl (2014) and Rahman (1982) conceptualize as Critical Piety the capacity to maintain profound spiritual devotion while simultaneously exercising sharp analytical reflection upon religious traditions. By allowing students to explore the "dark side" of human behavior (e.g., portraying a rebellious child) within a safe space, role-playing shifts the pedagogical paradigm from mere socialization (conforming to norms) to what Biesta, (2010); Priestley et al. (2015) terms subjectification. Students emerge not as passive receptacles of dogma, but as autonomous moral subjects.

Consequently, this study proposes a novel theoretical framework: Emancipatory Islamic Pedagogy through Role-Playing (EIP-RP). The EIP-RP framework posits that playing role is not a recreational ice-breaker, but an epistemic space of moral subjectification. It bridges the emancipatory goals of Freirean problem-posing education with the Islamic imperative of Hurriyah (intellectual freedom from blind imitation), proving that authentic religious internalization requires the very expressive freedom that dogmatic paradigms seek to suppress.

The Paradox of Structure and Freedom

A prevailing assumption in Western progressive pedagogy is that normative boundaries and structural rules inherently stifle creativity and expressive freedom (Kuhn, 2020). The findings from this study present a compelling paradox that challenges this assumption: in the context of IRE, normative boundaries (Sharia) do not act as a "cage" that restricts expression, but rather as a "fence" that makes the exploration of moral gray areas psychologically safe and possible.

When students were tasked with simulating moral dilemmas, teachers employed innovative navigational strategies that preserved both dramatic integrity and theological boundaries. For instance, the use of Single Gender Casting allowed the emotional necessity of physical touch (e.g., a mother comforting a child) to be preserved without violating non-

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mahram rules. Similarly, the strategy of Delayed Normative Correction, where a teacher allowed students to fully enact prohibited behaviors (like excessive adornment) before providing theological correction during the reflection phase demonstrates a profound pedagogical trust in the students' reflective capacity, aligning with Rogers & Freiberg's (1970) concept of unconditional positive regard. Furthermore, the narrative use of a Moral Proxy (the empathetic sister character in "Dua Pintu Surga" who organically quotes religious texts to admonish the rebellious sibling) ensured that the exploration of deviance was framed by an ethical compass, preventing the normalization of bad behavior.

These empirical strategies lead to the conceptualization of Theological Safety, an expansion of Edmondson's (1999) psychological safety. In secular contexts, psychological safety merely means freedom from interpersonal mockery. In IRE, it encompasses a dual-layered safety: interpersonal safety and theological safety, the assurance that students will not be religiously condemned or labeled "sinful" when exploring constructive doubt or moral ambiguity. The Sharia, therefore, functions as Structured Scaffolding (Daniels, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). By clearly defining the theological "fence," the teacher removes the students' anxiety about crossing invisible red lines, thereby paradoxically liberating them to engage in deeper, more authentic moral imagination (Nussbaum, 2000).

Embodied Cognition and Modality-Specific Embodied Learning

Traditional RE has long suffered from a mind-body dualism, treating religious knowledge as purely cognitive and declarative. The findings from this study strongly align with Shapiro's (2019) theory of Embodied Cognition, demonstrating that in IRE, the body is not merely an instrument for expressing thought, but the very medium through which moral cognition occurs. When students physically enacted the mother's pain (winced waist) or the daughter's apathy (staring at the phone), abstract theological concepts of birrul walidain (filial piety) were transformed into somatic memories and muscle memory, facilitating a deep somatic resonance (Winchester, 2025).

However, this study advances the literature by introducing the concept of Modality-Specific Embodied Learning, highlighting that the medium of role playing fundamentally alters the quality of embodied cognition. Live Sociodrama offers high-intensity collective embodied experience. The physical co-presence generates powerful emotional contagion and spontaneous kinesthetic responses. However, it is often hindered by stage fright, which can suppress authentic expression for introverted students. Digital Role-Playing (e.g., the production of "Dua Pintu Surga") reduces stage anxiety and expands creative autonomy (allowing multiple takes and editing). Crucially, it introduces a unique cognitive mechanism that this study conceptualizes as Delayed Self-Confrontation. Unlike the fleeting nature of a live performance, the digital artifact allows students to repeatedly watch themselves enact moral transgression (e.g., watching oneself play the rebellious "Ica").

This persistent, delayed confrontation with one's own simulated "deviance" triggers a profound, long-lasting moral reflection that live performance cannot achieve. By mapping these modalities against Kolb's (2014) Experiential Learning Theory, this study proves that digital and live modalities are not substitutes, but complementary pathways that process embodied learning differently, offering educators a nuanced toolkit for diverse psychological profiles.

Structural Dissonance

While the classroom practices at MAN 3 Pontianak successfully actualized the EIP-RP framework, the document analysis revealed a profound structural dissonance between the transformative reality of the classroom (das Sein) and the formal curriculum instruments (das Sollen).

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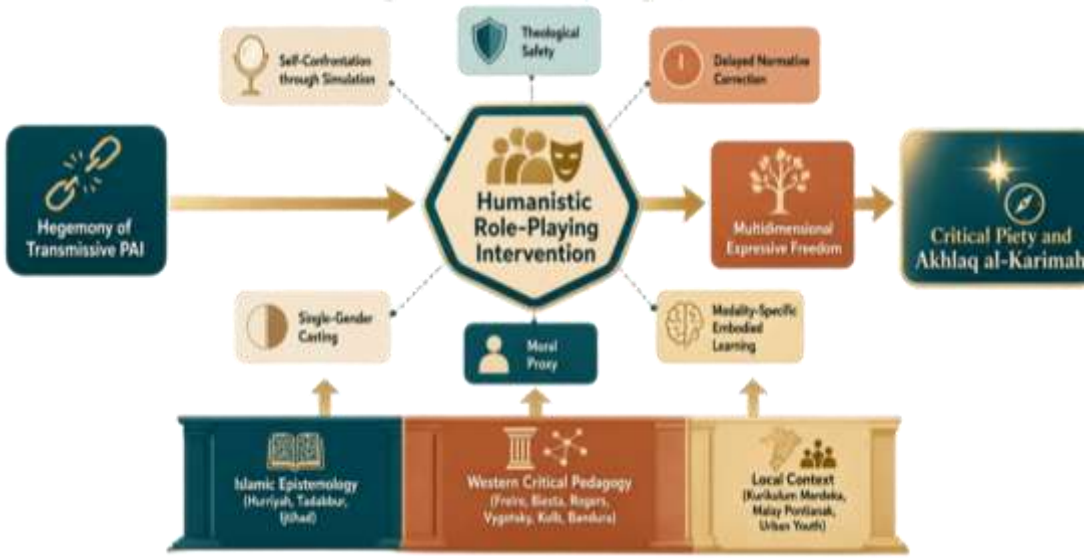


Figure 1. Emancipatory Islamic Pedagogy through Role-Playing (EIP-RP)

The paramount theoretical contribution of this study to the global discourse on Religious Education (RE) and Moral Pedagogy is the proposition of the Emancipatory Islamic Pedagogy through Role-Playing (EIP-RP) framework. This framework successfully deconstructs the false dichotomy between dogmatic indoctrination and secular-liberal emancipation. By synthesizing Islamic epistemology (Hurriyah, Tadabbur, Ijtihad) with Western critical and humanistic pedagogy (Freire, Biesta, Rogers, Vygotsky, Kolb, Bandura), the EIP-RP framework proves that intellectual freedom and normative religious structure are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are mutually constitutive in the formation of Critical Piety.

Furthermore, this study advances six interconnected theoretical concepts that extend the understanding of expressive freedom in religious education. The first is Theological Safety, an extension of psychological safety that incorporates students' assurance that exploring moral ambiguity and expressing critical perspectives will not automatically result in religious condemnation. This concept highlights the importance of creating a learning environment in which students can engage with complex moral questions while maintaining respect for religious values and theological principles. Within this environment, teachers employ Moral Proxy, a narrative strategy in which a designated character voices normative ethical boundaries during simulated situations. By assigning moral objections or corrective perspectives to specific characters, teachers enable students to examine ethically problematic actions without presenting such actions as acceptable or normal, while simultaneously facilitating vicarious moral learning.

These concepts are further complemented by Delayed Normative Correction, which refers to the intentional postponement of theological or normative correction until the post-performance reflection stage. Rather than interrupting students' expressive processes during the simulation, teachers provide opportunities for the exploration of different perspectives before guiding students toward normative evaluation. This strategy helps preserve psychological safety, maintain expressive continuity, and encourage reflective engagement with moral consequences. Another concept, Single-Gender Casting, describes a pedagogical strategy through which teachers accommodate dramatic and emotional requirements, including the representation of physical affection such as parental care, by assigning roles to students of the same gender. This arrangement allows students to explore emotionally meaningful social

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situations while observing Islamic boundaries concerning physical interaction between non-mahram individuals.

Beyond these interpersonal and normative considerations, the study introduces Modality-Specific Embodied Learning to explain how different expressive media shape students' embodied moral engagement. The distinction between live performance and digital role-playing is not merely technical; each modality provides different opportunities for physical enactment, emotional involvement, observation, and reflection. Live sociodrama emphasizes immediate bodily interaction and collective emotional responses, whereas digital production allows students to revisit, evaluate, and reinterpret their performances through recorded representations. This distinction is closely related to Delayed Self-Confrontation, a concept describing the reflective process through which students encounter their own simulated moral actions by rewatching recorded performances. The opportunity to observe oneself from an external perspective may generate sustained self-reflection and a deeper reconsideration of personal moral judgments, particularly when the simulated actions involve ethical tensions or questionable decisions.

Taken together, these six concepts provide an integrated theoretical perspective on how expressive freedom can be facilitated without disregarding normative religious commitments. They demonstrate that theological boundaries, teacher mediation, narrative representation, and the selection of expressive modalities can operate as complementary pedagogical mechanisms in the development of moral reflection. By conceptualizing these processes, the study extends the discourse on religious education beyond cognitive achievement and motivational outcomes toward a more comprehensive understanding of expressive agency, embodied moral learning, and reflective religious engagement. These contributions also provide a conceptual foundation for the proposed Emancipatory Islamic Pedagogy through Role-Playing (EIP-RP) framework.

Despite the highly affective and psychomotor nature of the role-playing activities, the formal learning achievement indicators (IKTP/ATP) remained overwhelmingly dominated by cognitive operational verbs (e.g., "analyze," "identify"). Furthermore, while the student worksheets (LKPD) allowed thematic autonomy, they contained closed-ended normative instructions (e.g., "the conflict must be resolved with a good attitude according to Islam"). This structural tension threatens to reduce the emancipatory potential of role-playing to a mere "fun activity" devoid of serious evaluative weight, implicitly forcing teachers back into the banking concept when it comes to grading.

To resolve this dissonance and truly foster Biesta's (2015) domain of subjectification, this study proposes the concept of Structured Open-Endedness for future curriculum and evaluation design. Instead of mandating a single, normatively "correct" resolution to a moral dilemma, curriculum designers should provide a structured normative framework (the Islamic values) but leave the resolution open ended. This forces students to genuinely exercise their moral imagination and ijtihad to navigate complex ethical trade-offs before arriving at a moral decision. By aligning the evaluative instruments (IKTP) with affective and psychomotor verbs (e.g., "demonstrate," "reflect," "negotiate"), the curriculum can validate the profound moral transformations occurring in the classroom, bridging the gap between emancipatory practice and institutional structure

CONCULUSION

This study demonstrates that role-playing in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) provides an epistemic space for expressive freedom through live sociodrama, digital role-playing, and collaborative scriptwriting. These modalities enable students to engage in verbal, affective,

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kinesthetic, and creative expressions while exploring moral situations through simulation and reflection. Teachers facilitate this process by employing single-gender casting, delayed normative correction, and moral proxy characters to balance student agency with Islamic ethical and theological boundaries. The findings further indicate that these boundaries do not necessarily restrict creativity; rather, when pedagogically mediated, they function as structured scaffolding for moral reflection, self-confrontation, and vicarious learning. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Emancipatory Islamic Pedagogy through Role-Playing (EIP-RP) framework, which positions expressive freedom and normative Islamic values as complementary foundations for moral learning. This framework also extends the conceptual understanding of religious education through six interconnected constructs: Theological Safety, Moral Proxy, Delayed Normative Correction, Single-Gender Casting, Modality-Specific Embodied Learning, and Delayed Self-Confrontation.

The findings have practical implications for curriculum development and teacher professional learning. Learning achievement indicators should incorporate affective and psychomotor dimensions to recognize moral reflection and expressive engagement alongside cognitive achievement. Teachers also need pedagogical preparation to facilitate open expression while maintaining theological and interpersonal safety. However, because this study is limited to an intrinsic qualitative case study in the socio-cultural context of MAN 3 Pontianak, its findings should be interpreted contextually. Future research should examine the application of the EIP-RP framework across different cultural and religious educational settings and employ longitudinal approaches to investigate the sustainability of students' moral reflection and moral self-efficacy.

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