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Building an Alternative School Based on Critical Consciousness: A Phenomenological Study of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo

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ABSTRACT

Alternative education provides a learning space in which educational processes can take place beyond formal structures, positioning learners as active subjects in constructing knowledge and understanding social realities. PMII Rayon Suromenggolo offers a non-formal learning environment through cadre development, intellectual discussions, academic study forums, and social activities oriented toward the formation of critical consciousness. This study aims to analyze the concept and practice of alternative education grounded in critical consciousness, the process through which it develops through cadre development activities, and its implications for cadres' ways of thinking and social awareness. The study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, with data collected through participant observation, interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, and the formulation of final conclusions. The findings show that the distinctive character of alternative education within PMII lies not merely in its occurrence outside formal education, but primarily in egalitarian, dialogical learning relationships that remain open to differences of opinion. These processes encourage cadres to broaden their knowledge, question information, consider multiple perspectives, analyze issues, and connect intellectual reflection with social engagement. Alternative education within PMII thus functions as a space for developing critical consciousness through the interconnected processes of intellectual inquiry, experience, reflection, and social action.

ABSTRAK

Sekolah alternatif menjadi ruang pembelajaran yang memungkinkan proses pendidikan berlangsung di luar struktur formal dengan menempatkan peserta didik sebagai subjek aktif dalam membangun pengetahuan dan memahami realitas sosial. PMII Rayon Suromenggolo menghadirkan ruang belajar nonformal melalui kaderisasi, diskusi intelektual, kajian akademik, dan kegiatan sosial yang berorientasi pada pembentukan kesadaran kritis. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konsep dan praktik pendidikan alternatif berbasis

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kesadaran kritis, proses pembentukannya melalui aktivitas kaderisasi, serta implikasinya terhadap pola berpikir dan kesadaran sosial kader. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Data dianalisis melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan, serta perumusan kesimpulan akhir. Hasil penelitian memperlihatkan bahwa karakter pendidikan alternatif di PMII tidak hanya terletak pada keberlangsungannya di luar pendidikan formal, tetapi terutama pada pola relasi dan proses pembelajaran yang egaliter, dialogis, serta terbuka terhadap perbedaan pendapat. Proses tersebut mendorong kader untuk memperluas penguasaan pengetahuan, mempertanyakan informasi, mempertimbangkan berbagai perspektif, menganalisis persoalan, dan menghubungkan refleksi intelektual dengan keterlibatan sosial. Pendidikan alternatif di PMII dengan demikian berfungsi sebagai ruang pembentukan kesadaran kritis melalui keterhubungan antara proses intelektual, pengalaman, refleksi, dan tindakan sosial.

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A. Introduction

Higher education aims not only to transmit knowledge but also to develop students' abilities to analyze information, evaluate arguments, question assumptions, and connect knowledge with social realities. This view is consistent with (Freire, 2005), who understands education as a dialogical process through which people read reality and develop social consciousness, rather than as a mere transfer of knowledge.

However, this ideal is not always reflected in learning practices. (Suryani et al., 2025) associates limited methodological variety and the dominance of conventional approaches with obstacles to critical thinking. (Farcis, 2019) highlights students' weaknesses in analyzing scholarly articles. while (Farida, 2022) demonstrates the relationship between critical thinking and academic literacy. On a broader scale, (López-Ruiz et al., 2021) review research on the development of students' critical thinking, while (Tiruneh et al., 2014) emphasize the roles of teaching approaches, learning strategies, and learning environments. Taken together, these studies suggest that the development of critical reasoning depends not only on individual ability but

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also on the availability of spaces in which learners can ask questions, engage in dialogue, test ideas, and reflect.

Preliminary observations at UIN Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo indicate that students' engagement in critical and analytical discussions remains less than optimal; some students also tend to prioritize quick results over in-depth understanding. This situation should be interpreted cautiously, particularly amid the use of technology and artificial intelligence, which can support learning but may also replace the thinking process if not accompanied by literacy and critical reflection. (Nazilah & Kurniawan, 2020) emphasize the importance of pedagogical approaches that preserve the critical dimension of digital learning. Accordingly, the issue to be examined concerns not only students' capacities but also the characteristics of learning spaces that enable dialogue, experience, and reflection. This issue opens up an opportunity to examine alternative education, understood here as learning beyond formal structures that may take place in more flexible, contextual, and participatory ways.

The idea of alternative education is connected to Illich's critique of the institutionalization of education. In Deschooling Society, (Illich, 1971) introduces the concept of "learning webs", or social networks that enable individuals to learn from various sources outside formal institutions. (Bartlett & Schugurensky, 2020) revisit the relevance of this idea to learning beyond schooling and to the expansion of freedom and participation. This perspective shifts attention away from the location of learning toward how knowledge is exchanged, questioned, and connected to lived experience.

Illich's perspective can be brought into dialogue with Freire's critical pedagogy, which positions learners as active subjects and connects dialogue with lived experience. For (Freire, 2005), critical consciousness involves the ability to understand reality, recognize problems, and identify possibilities for change. (Pandie et al., 2023) demonstrate the relevance of contextual learning grounded in Freire's thought to the development of critical consciousness in communities. (Jemal, 2017) links critical consciousness to recognizing structural injustice and efforts to transform it. While

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(Khandekar, 2021) discusses “problem-posing education” and critical consciousness in learning and collective action. Conceptually, Illich helps explain the possibilities for learning spaces outside institutions, while Freire helps examine the dialogical and reflective processes that may take place within them.

(Eka et al., 2026) position dialogue and reflection as elements of social-democratic participation, while (Jeyaraj, 2020) examines university students’ acceptance of critical pedagogy in higher education. These studies reinforce the view that critical reasoning is associated with dialogue, reflection, and the interpretation of social reality, rather than merely with the delivery of content. However, these principles do not sufficiently explain how learning processes unfold and are understood within student organizations. Therefore, learning mechanisms in organizational spaces, including how cadres exchange ideas and connect their experiences with social issues need to be examined empirically.

Alternative education among university students does not necessarily require the establishment of a new institution; student organizations may serve as non-formal learning spaces when their members exchange ideas, test their understanding, and reflect on social issues. At PMII Rayon Suromenggolo, discussions, scholarly forums, cadre training, and intellectual activities provide a context in which this possibility can be examined. (Tamara & Sapriya, 2021) show that student-organization activities can support critical thinking, responsibility, and a scientific attitude. (Decius et al., 2024) also develop a model of informal learning in higher education that treats informal and self-directed activities as part of the learning process. These findings support the relevance of organizations as learning contexts, but they do not mean that every organizational activity automatically fosters critical consciousness. Therefore, patterns of interaction and knowledge formation need to be examined, rather than merely noting the existence of organizational activities.

Previous research on PMII has examined cadre development, value internalization, and political education. In their study of cadre-development management at the PMII Sunan Giri Ponorogo Commissariat, (Matofani et al., 2020)

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identify formal, non-formal, and informal forms of cadre development, as well as the role of discussions and training in fostering prophetic consciousness. (Ulya et al., 2021) examine the internalization of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah values among PMII cadres at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, particularly through regular study sessions and discussion forums intended to instill tolerance, moderation, balance, and justice. Meanwhile, (Aini et al., 2020) discuss political education, cadre development, and leadership at PMII Rayon Al-Fanani, Universitas Islam Malang. Taken together, these studies demonstrate PMII's role in learning and value formation, but they do not specifically explain how cadres interpret their everyday learning experiences as a process of developing critical consciousness.

PMII Rayon Suromenggolo at UIN Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo was selected because its cadre-development activities, scholarly discussions, and social activities are relevant to the focus of this research. This context makes it possible to examine alternative education through practices and experiences within organizational life. Access to organizational leaders and cadres, as well as opportunities for sustained observation, supports data collection; nevertheless, the primary rationale for selecting this site is its suitability for examining the relationship between non-formal learning and the ways critical consciousness is understood.

At a broader level, research on alternative education and critical thinking has largely examined learning strategies or effectiveness within formal education. The systematic review by (Andreucci-Annunziata et al., 2023) maps conceptualizations of critical thinking and strategies for developing it in higher education, but it does not fully explain how student organizations may function as spaces for alternative education grounded in critical consciousness. When considered alongside studies of PMII, two interrelated limits in existing knowledge become apparent: research on critical thinking does not adequately explain learning experiences within organizations, while PMII research places greater emphasis on cadre development, values, and political education than on how the process of developing critical consciousness is understood.

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In response to this gap, the present study adopts a phenomenological approach to examine how cadres of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo experience and interpret learning through dialogue, disagreement, the interpretation of social reality, reflection, and social engagement. The intended contribution is not to claim that organizations automatically produce critical cadres, but to develop a context-specific understanding of how organizational learning practices are interpreted and of the conditions that, in cadres' experiences, support or constrain critical reflection. In this way, the study brings research on alternative education into conversation with critical pedagogy through concrete learning experiences within a student organization.

This study aims to analyze the concept and practice of alternative education grounded in critical consciousness at PMII Rayon Suromenggolo, understand its processes through cadre development and non-formal learning, and examine how cadres interpret its relationship with their ways of thinking and social consciousness. A qualitative phenomenological approach is used to understand participants' experiences, rather than presupposing that organizational activities necessarily foster critical consciousness.

Data are collected through participant observation, interviews, and documentation to examine cadres' experiences and interpretations of the educational process at PMII Rayon Suromenggolo. Details of the data-collection and analysis procedures are presented in the Methods section.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological research design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study was not intended to measure relationships between variables, but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of the educational processes they experienced within the organization. In this context, the approach was used to examine how PMII Rayon Suromenggolo implements alternative educational practices and how these experiences relate to the development of cadres' critical consciousness

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and reasoning. Creswell explains that qualitative research is used to understand the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to social or human problems (Creswell, 2013). Meanwhile, phenomenology was employed because the study sought to understand individuals' lived experiences of a particular phenomenon and identify the meanings underlying those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, this study examined not only the forms of educational activities conducted by PMII but also how cadres experienced and interpreted these processes in their intellectual and social lives.

The study was conducted at the Indonesian Islamic Student Movement (Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia, PMII), Rayon Suromenggolo, under the UIN Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo Commissariat. The site was purposively selected because the activities of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo corresponded to the research focus, particularly its discussion sessions, cadre development activities, intellectual forums, and social reflection conducted outside the university's formal learning environment. These spaces provided an important context for examining how a student organization can function as an alternative learning environment. The study was conducted over approximately six months, from late May to November 2026. This period allowed the researcher to observe organizational activities, interview informants, collect documents, and analyze the data progressively.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from individuals involved in educational activities within PMII Rayon Suromenggolo. The study involved five informants: three officers of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo and two active cadres who participated in various organizational activities. The informants were selected based on their involvement and experience in cadre development and educational activities within the organization. Secondary data served as supporting evidence and were obtained from organizational documents, including cadre development guidelines, activity records, documentation of organizational activities, and literature relevant to alternative education and critical pedagogy. The use of both types of data sources was intended to provide a more

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comprehensive understanding of alternative educational practices and the development of critical consciousness within the organization.

Data were collected through participant observation, interviews, and documentation. Participant observation involved attending and directly observing various PMII activities, particularly discussions, cadre development, intellectual forums, and other activities related to alternative educational processes. Through this involvement, the researcher observed interaction patterns, dialogical processes, the expression of ideas, responses to differences of opinion, and forms of reflection emerging during organizational activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with organizational officers and active cadres to obtain information about their experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of educational processes within PMII. This technique was particularly important in phenomenological research because informants' subjective experiences constituted a central component of the research data. Documentation complemented the other two techniques through the examination of cadre development guidelines, activity records, photographs, and other organizational documents. These three techniques complemented one another, allowing the phenomenon to be understood not only through informants' statements but also through direct observations of practices and the available documentary evidence.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. In this study, the analysis involved four stages: data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, and the formulation of final conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing information relevant to the research focus. Data from observations, interviews, and documentation were then categorized into relevant themes, including the concept of alternative education, forms of educational practice, dialogue and cadre development processes, the formation of critical consciousness, and changes in cadres' ways of thinking and social awareness. The next stage involved presenting the data in narrative form, enabling the researcher to identify relationships and patterns across the findings. Once these patterns had been identified, conclusions

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were drawn and verified through continuous comparison between emerging findings and field data. Final conclusions were formulated after the data were considered adequate and had undergone repeated examination. Coding was also used to organize the data into themes corresponding to the research focus.

Data trustworthiness was established through triangulation and persistent observation. The triangulation process involved methodological, source, and temporal triangulation. Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. Source triangulation involved comparing information provided by organizational officers and cadres with different experiences of organizational activities. Temporal triangulation was carried out by collecting data at different times to examine the consistency of the information and understand the dynamics of organizational activities. In addition to triangulation, the researcher engaged in persistent observation by examining organizational activities and interactions in greater depth and on repeated occasions. These procedures were intended to ensure that the researcher did not merely capture surface-level phenomena but also developed a more consistent understanding of the patterns emerging from alternative educational processes within PMII.

C. Results and Discussion

1. PMII as an Alternative Learning Space

Educational practices within PMII Rayon Suromenggolo demonstrate the existence of a learning space that develops beyond the formal learning structures of higher education. Cadre development, intellectual discussions, academic study forums, and social activities are not merely organizational agendas; rather, they form a series of experiences through which university students acquire, examine, and develop knowledge through direct interaction with their social environment. Thus, PMII should not be viewed solely in terms of its organizational function as a forum for cadre development, but also in terms of the pedagogical function embedded in its various activities.

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Wahyu Dafiq Saputra, the Intellectual Affairs Coordinator of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo for the 2025/2026 period, views PMII as a space for individuals who are willing to learn and develop their thinking. He considers such a space necessary because learning in higher education is still perceived as tending toward conventional practices, with a certain degree of distance between lecturers and students. In contrast, learning within PMII takes place in a more open atmosphere, allowing cadres to express their opinions, ask questions, and test arguments. This perspective is important when education is understood as more than the delivery of subject matter. Educational concerns also involve how relationships between learners and sources of knowledge are established. In overly hierarchical learning relationships, students may tend to occupy the position of information recipients. Conversely, when a learning space allows participants to shape the direction of discussions, ask questions, and challenge particular ideas, the learning process moves toward a more participatory form.

Alya Nur Aisyah's experience illustrates this condition from the participant's perspective. She explains that interaction among participants, committee members, and facilitators takes place intensively during cadre development activities. Voluntary participation also contributes to an active learning atmosphere. In this setting, participants do not merely receive material; they also gain experience in discussing issues and expressing opinions, which subsequently relates to the development of their thinking and their confidence in articulating ideas. Accordingly, PMII's alternative character does not simply lie in the fact that learning takes place outside the classroom. Its distinctiveness lies in the learning methods and relationships with knowledge that it cultivates. Cadres engage with learning materials while also encountering questions, counterarguments, differing perspectives, and concrete problems that cannot always be resolved through a single answer.

Ivan Illich's perspective on deschooling society provides a conceptual foundation for interpreting this condition. Illich questions the tendency of modern education to identify learning too closely with school institutions. For him, learning can take place through broader networks of social relationships and experiences beyond the formal

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classroom (Illich, 1971). This perspective opens up the possibility that organizations, communities, and particular social spaces can serve as educational environments when they facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience. Applied to the context of PMII, this idea does not require the organization to be positioned as a replacement for higher education. Instead, PMII complements formal educational experiences by providing a learning space with different characteristics. Universities provide academic structures and formal learning systems, whereas PMII offers a more flexible learning experience through discussions, cadre development, social interaction, and organizational experience. The relationship between the two, therefore, need not be understood in oppositional terms; rather, they can be regarded as two educational spaces with distinct characteristics.

However, the existence of an alternative learning space does not, in itself, guarantee the development of critical thinking. A space that allows freedom will amount to little more than a gathering place if it is not accompanied by pedagogical processes that encourage participants to question knowledge. Therefore, the more fundamental issue is not merely whether PMII provides a learning space outside the classroom, but how that space is used to shape students' relationships with knowledge, experience, and social reality.

2. Dialogue as a Mechanism for Developing Critical Reasoning

Dialogue is one of the key mechanisms in the educational process at PMII Rayon Suromenggolo. Alya explained that participants are given opportunities to ask questions, engage in dialogue, respond, and express differing opinions, provided that they offer clear arguments and continue to respect others' views. Participants are also encouraged not to accept material uncritically, but to question it through discussion. This practice shows that differences of opinion are not treated as disruptions to learning. Rather, they provide an opportunity to test ideas. When someone expresses an opinion and receives a response from others, they must reconsider the basis of their argument. Participants therefore need more than confidence in a particular view; they must also explain why that view can be justified.

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Observations of several discussion forums organized by PMII Rayon Suromenggolo reinforce this account. Most participants appeared active in exchanging ideas, while some others also contributed opinions, although less frequently. Dialogue took place through questions, arguments, and responses to ideas raised by presenters and fellow participants. Notably, arguments in these forums were not based entirely on subjective experience. Participants drew on the ideas of Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, Antonio Gramsci, and John Dewey to examine the educational issues under discussion. In other words, dialogue brought together two elements: participants' experiences and conceptual knowledge. Experience supplied issues close to participants' lives, while theory provided tools for examining those issues more systematically.

At this point, discussion acquired a deeper pedagogical function. It did not merely produce an exchange of opinions; it created a situation in which individuals had to account for their ways of thinking. Differences of opinion became tools for testing assumptions, while theory provided a means of broadening perspectives.

Paulo Freire regards dialogue as an essential part of liberating education. According to Freire, knowledge does not emerge from passively receiving information; rather, it develops through inquiry, reflection, and human relationships with the world and with other people (Freire, 2005). Learners should therefore not be treated as containers that simply receive knowledge from educators. Freire's framework helps explain the character of PMII forums. Facilitators still play a role in guiding discussion, but their authority does not entirely close off opportunities for participants to develop their own arguments. Participants may agree with, question, or even criticize an idea, provided that they can give reasons. This is where egalitarian relationships acquire pedagogical significance. Egalitarianism does not mean that all opinions automatically carry equal weight. Instead, an egalitarian space provides relatively equal opportunities to speak, while the quality of ideas continues to be tested through argumentation. Freedom and intellectual responsibility thus operate together.

This process can be understood through the relationship between reflective thinking and critical-thinking ability. (Ghanizadeh, 2017) indicates that reflective

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thinking and critical reflection are positively associated with students' critical-thinking ability. In the context of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo, this perspective helps explain the importance of dialogic interaction in discussion activities. When cadres are encouraged to respond to differing opinions, examine arguments, and explain the reasons underlying their views, discussion creates opportunities for them to reconsider assumptions previously taken for granted. Critical thinking is therefore demonstrated not merely by the courage to disagree, but also by a willingness to examine the basis of an argument and consider its validity. Nevertheless, the existence of such a dialogic space is more appropriately understood as a condition that supports the development of reflective thinking, rather than proof that every participant has attained the same level of critical-thinking ability.

This condition differs from a learning pattern that positions students only as recipients of information. Freire criticizes such a model through the concept of banking education, in which knowledge is treated as something transferred to learners. In this model, learners' capacity to question reality may weaken because learning success is measured largely by their ability to receive and retain information. PMII forums, by contrast, point in a different direction. Participants are encouraged to ask questions and respond. Learning therefore moves not only from presenter to participant, but also among participants themselves. Knowledge becomes something that is continually examined and developed through interaction.

3. Knowledge as an Instrument for Understanding Social Reality

Dialogue cannot develop critical reasoning unless it is supported by the ability to understand knowledge. For this reason, study forums and the reading of theoretical works occupy an important position in PMII's learning culture. The subjects discussed are not limited to organizational matters, but also encompass philosophy, education, sociology, and social issues emerging within society. Wahyu explains that discussion forums employ flexible methods, including brainstorming, discussion, and problem-based learning, depending on the topic being addressed. This flexibility indicates that

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methods are not treated as ends in themselves. Instead, they are selected according to learning needs and the characteristics of the issues under discussion.

Observations of a philosophy week forum organized by PMII Rayon Suromenggolo demonstrate how knowledge is used to examine concrete issues. Participants discussed the concept of truth and then connected it to the tendency of people in society to believe information on social media simply because it has gone viral. This use of theory has important implications. Theory does not remain an abstract concept that must merely be mastered; it becomes an instrument for questioning things that were previously taken for granted. Issues surrounding information on social media, for example, are no longer viewed merely as problems of technology use, but can also be examined in terms of how people determine truth, assess sources, and form beliefs.

Critical thinking, therefore, cannot be reduced to the courage to criticize. Criticism that is not supported by an adequate understanding of an issue can turn into spontaneous rejection. Robert Hugh Ennis views critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thought aimed at deciding what to believe or do (Ennis, 1996). This emphasis on rational judgment and reflection is important because it demonstrates that critical thinking is not simply an oppositional attitude, but a process of evaluation.

Ahmad Wildan Wachid's experience illustrates a change in how information is approached. He explains that, after becoming active in PMII, he became more open to differing perspectives and more critical when understanding issues. He connects this experience to discussions, cadre development, study forums, and interactions with people from diverse backgrounds and with differing viewpoints. Wildan also notes that he has become accustomed to discussing, examining, and analyzing issues before reaching conclusions. When making decisions, he considers values, knowledge, and deliberation rather than relying solely on his personal opinion. This change is more appropriately understood as a shift in how knowledge is approached. Knowledge is no longer accepted as something definitive, but as something that requires examination. Information requires sources, opinions require reasons, and decisions require careful consideration

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Peter A. Facione identifies interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as core critical-thinking skills (Facione, 2015). Several of these elements can be observed in PMII discussion activities when participants interpret issues, analyze arguments, evaluate information, and formulate conclusions based on the available information. Nevertheless, this does not mean that any single method automatically develops these abilities. The field data instead reveal the use of various methods. Brainstorming can be used when participants need to generate initial ideas, discussion can be used to test perspectives, and problem-based learning can be used when concrete issues serve as the starting point for learning. Thus, the more decisive factor is not the presence of one particular method, but a learning culture that repeatedly requires participants to think, question, compare, and take responsibility for their views.

4. From Reflection to Social Consciousness

Critical reasoning acquires a broader dimension when knowledge begins to be used to interpret social reality. The community social-action practice organized through the Sahasra Maghandi activity illustrates this relationship more concretely. Before a program is implemented, cadres observe community conditions, identify local potentials and problems, and then formulate a program based on what they find in the field. This sequence is significant. Programs are not designed solely from ideas generated within the organization and then imposed on the community. Cadres first encounter reality, develop an understanding of the issues, and use that understanding to determine an appropriate form of action. In other words, the community is not positioned merely as a recipient of programs, but also as a source of learning experience. Cadres learn through interaction with concrete social conditions. Issues that may previously have been understood only through discussion take tangible form when encountered in people's everyday lives.

The resulting programs also address a variety of concerns. Social-service activities and assistance for orphans take place alongside religious activities, reforestation, and

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advocacy on ecological issues in collaboration with the Environmental Agency. This diversity shows that social consciousness is not developed through a single theme. Cadres encounter issues involving welfare, religion, the environment, and other social concerns. Such experiences broaden their horizons because social problems cannot be understood from only one perspective. At this stage, it is important to distinguish critical thinking from critical consciousness. Critical thinking concerns the ability to examine and evaluate issues, whereas critical consciousness extends this process toward awareness of one's position within social reality. The questions do not stop at "What is happening?" but develop into "Why is this condition occurring?", "Who is affected?", and "What might be done?"

The relationship among dialogue, reflection, and social engagement can be further understood through (Bosio & Waghid, 2023) discussion of critical consciousness, which positions reflective dialogue and praxis as important elements of education. This perspective is relevant to the experiences of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo cadres, whose learning does not stop at intellectual discussion but also relates to responses to social and environmental issues. Freire connects this process with praxis, understood as the relationship between reflection and action (Freire, 2005). People do not merely understand the world; through reflection on the world, they gain possibilities for action. Critical education therefore does not end when participants understand a concept. Knowledge acquires meaning when it is used to interpret reality and determine action. Wildan's experience illustrates this direction of development. He stated that PMII activities had made him more sensitive to social issues and more aware of the importance of students' role as agents of change. He also began to see education not merely as academic achievement, but as a process of developing social consciousness and concern for the environment.

This change shows that intellectual and social processes do not occur in separate spaces. When students learn to interpret reality, community issues become part of their knowledge formation. Conversely, when students engage with social issues, those

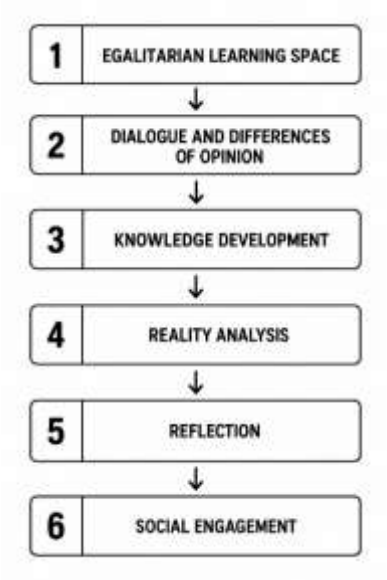
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experiences can become material for reflection that enriches their understanding of theory.

5. Learning Culture and the Formation of a Critical Habitus

When these practices are considered as an interconnected sequence, PMII's strength as an alternative school does not lie in any single activity. Rather, its strength is better understood through a learning culture that connects dialogue, knowledge, reflection, and action. Dialogue creates space for ideas to be exchanged and tested. Study forums provide a conceptual foundation so that arguments do not remain mere opinions. Analysis brings theory into contact with concrete problems. Reflection allows cadres to reassess their perspectives, while social activities provide opportunities to test knowledge through real-life experiences.

Figure 1. The Sequence of Learning Practices in the Formation of a Critical Habitus



This relationship is important because it demonstrates that critical education does not emerge from a single moment. It develops through repeated practices. A cadre does not become critical simply by attending one discussion or reading one book. Such abilities develop when asking questions, reading, discussing, criticizing, listening, evaluating, and reconsidering are practiced continuously.

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Alya describes changes she experienced after participating in cadre development, including greater confidence in expressing opinions, openness to differing perspectives, and heightened sensitivity to community issues. Wildan likewise describes changes in how he understands problems, receives information, and makes decisions following his experiences in discussions, study forums, cadre development, and interactions within the organization. These changes are therefore better understood as the formation of intellectual habits. Such habits are not synonymous with academic ability alone. They include a tendency not to accept information immediately, a willingness to listen to other perspectives, the ability to question the basis of an opinion, and a readiness to revise one's views when stronger reasons are presented.

The role of facilitators is an important part of this learning culture. Observations indicate that facilitators serve as catalysts for ideas while also facilitating communication so that participants can reach a consensus. This position demonstrates that facilitators are not merely responsible for delivering material; they also manage the conditions that allow participants to engage in the thinking process. Their role therefore differs from that of a teacher who serves as the sole center of knowledge. Facilitators retain pedagogical authority, but use it to stimulate dialogue. Participants continue to have opportunities to question learning materials and express their views.

Here, the egalitarian character of the learning environment acquires a more concrete meaning. Egalitarianism in education does not mean eliminating the educator's role, but changing how the authority associated with knowledge is exercised. Facilitators guide the process without monopolizing the conclusions. Participants follow the learning process while retaining the space to develop their own arguments.

6. Alternative Education as a Praxis of Critical Consciousness

The Sahasra Maghandi program demonstrates a concrete relationship between knowledge and action in the educational process at PMII Rayon Suromenggolo. Cadres observe conditions in the field, identify problems, formulate programs, and implement them based on the circumstances they encounter. This process shows that learning does not end in discussion forums or with the mastery of learning materials; it continues

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when cadres engage directly with social reality. At this stage, knowledge acquires practical consequences because it is used to understand problems and determine relevant actions. Conversely, field experiences provide cadres with opportunities to reassess the understanding they have previously developed through discussions and study forums. Thus, learning and social experience are connected through a reciprocal relationship that prevents knowledge from remaining merely conceptual.

This pattern can be observed in the reforestation and ecological advocacy activities undertaken by cadres. They do not stop at recognizing that environmental issues deserve attention. Instead, they identify local conditions, establish communication with relevant authorities, and develop forms of engagement based on the problems they encounter. The movement from recognizing a problem to taking a position on it demonstrates that knowledge serves a broader purpose than simply expanding information. It becomes a basis for considering problems, determining positions, and taking action. From Freire's perspective, the relationship between reflection and action constitutes an essential element of praxis because education cannot be separated from the effort to understand and transform the reality people encounter (Freire, 2005).

On this basis, PMII's social activities should not be regarded as supplementary activities that take place only after the educational process has been completed. Rather, social engagement forms part of the educational process because it gives cadres opportunities to test their knowledge in real-life situations. Social analysis developed through discussion forums and study activities can thus be confronted with the complexities of community life. At the same time, field experiences can generate new questions that are subsequently brought back into the learning process. The relationship between knowledge and action is therefore dynamic: knowledge is used to interpret reality, while reality provides experiences that can enrich and correct previous understandings.

These interconnected practices demonstrate that alternative education at PMII Rayon Suromenggolo is not established through a single activity or a particular teaching

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method. Its distinctive character emerges from the relationship between a relatively egalitarian learning environment, dialogue and differences of opinion, the development of knowledge, the analysis of reality, reflection, and social engagement. The learning environment gives cadres opportunities to speak and express ideas; dialogue brings those ideas into contact with different perspectives; academic study strengthens the knowledge used to construct arguments; that knowledge is then employed to interpret reality; this process creates opportunities for reflection; and social engagement enables cadres to translate their learning into action.

Figure 2. Research Findings Map: PMII Rayon Suromenggolo as an Alternative Education Ecosystem Based on Critical Consciousness

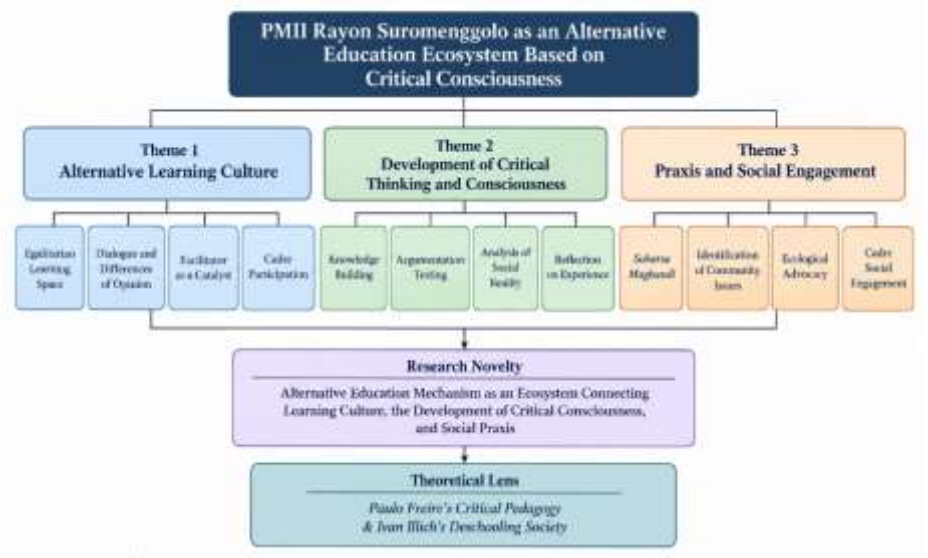


Figure 2 summarizes the mechanism of alternative education identified in the practices of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo. A relatively egalitarian learning environment provides the initial conditions for cadres to participate actively in the learning process. From this environment, dialogue and differences of opinion emerge, encouraging cadres not only to express their views but also to justify their arguments. The need to construct arguments subsequently encourages the development of knowledge through study and learning activities. This knowledge is then used to interpret and analyze reality, ensuring that learning remains connected to issues encountered in social life. Analysis creates

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opportunities to reflect on experiences and perspectives, while social engagement provides a space in which the understanding acquired can be tested and applied.

This pattern demonstrates that the development of critical consciousness takes place through interconnected processes rather than isolated activities. Dialogue without sufficient knowledge may remain at the level of exchanging opinions, while knowledge disconnected from reality may amount to little more than conceptual mastery. Similarly, analysis without reflection risks reducing social problems to objects of observation, whereas reflection without social engagement lacks opportunities to be tested through real-life experience. The strength of alternative education within PMII therefore lies in the relationship among these components. Learning moves from intellectual engagement toward the interpretation of reality, returns to reflection, and acquires practical consequences through social involvement.

This interconnected process constitutes an important contribution to understanding PMII Rayon Suromenggolo as an alternative school grounded in critical consciousness. The novelty does not lie merely in the claim that student organizations can make students more critical. Rather, it lies in identifying the pedagogical mechanism that connects learning culture with the development of critical consciousness. In this context, organizational membership does not automatically produce changes in thinking. Instead, membership provides cadres with access to a learning culture that repeatedly brings together dialogue, knowledge, analysis, reflection, and action. What matters, therefore, is not simply the existence of an organization as a place where students gather, but the educational practices that take place within it.

This contribution also clarifies the meaning of an alternative school in the context of this study. Alternative education is not defined primarily by the fact that learning takes place outside the formal classroom, but by how knowledge is produced, exchanged, questioned, and connected to social reality. Within PMII Rayon Suromenggolo, cadres are not positioned merely as recipients of knowledge. They are given opportunities to express opinions, encounter differing perspectives, test

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arguments, examine social problems, and reflect on their experiences. The alternative character of this educational process thus lies in a transformation of learning relationships: from a process primarily oriented toward the delivery of knowledge to one that enables students to become active subjects in understanding and interpreting reality.

This pattern resonates with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which positions dialogue as an essential component of education and regards learners as subjects in the learning process. Within PMII Rayon Suromenggolo, cadres' position as active subjects is reflected in their involvement in expressing opinions, questioning ideas, testing arguments, and connecting knowledge with social issues. Dialogue therefore functions not merely as a communication technique in discussion forums, but as part of a process through which cadres develop the capacity to question and evaluate reality more reflectively (Freire, 2005).

These findings can also be interpreted through Ivan Illich's critique of education that depends excessively on formal school institutions. For Illich, learning should not be restricted by school structures or by relationships that position institutions as the primary centers of knowledge production (Illich, 1971). The practices of PMII Rayon Suromenggolo demonstrate that learning can take place through social spaces developed by interactions among cadres, academic study forums, organizational experiences, and community engagement. Facilitators are not positioned entirely as the sole authorities on knowledge, while cadres' experiences and ideas are given room within the learning process. This illustrates how alternative education can emerge through a learning culture that enables knowledge to be acquired and examined through diverse social experiences.

Within this context, the development of critical reasoning among cadres cannot be understood solely in terms of their ability to speak or express criticism. Its more substantive dimensions are evident in how they approach information, consider different perspectives, seek reasons before making decisions, and connect particular issues with broader social contexts. Critical reasoning and social consciousness are not two separate outcomes. The ability to analyze helps cadres understand problems more deeply, while

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social experiences provide the context that gives such analysis practical consequences. This relationship demonstrates that the educational process cultivates learners who not only acquire knowledge but are also encouraged to question, evaluate, reflect on, and use that knowledge to interpret reality.

Ultimately, PMII Rayon Suromenggolo demonstrates that alternative education can operate through an organizational culture when activities do more than increase the number of programs and instead build interconnected learning experiences. Its educational value lies not primarily in the number of discussions, study forums, or social activities, but in the extent to which these activities cultivate intellectual habits and sensitivity to social reality. Education becomes a space in which learners can question what was previously taken for granted, examine problems from different perspectives, test their understanding through experience, and connect knowledge with social responsibility.

PMII Rayon Suromenggolo can therefore be understood as an alternative educational ecosystem grounded in critical consciousness. It does not replace formal education, but expands educational experiences through dialogue, the development of knowledge, the interpretation of reality, reflection, and social engagement. Its most significant contribution is not simply making students "more critical," but establishing conditions that enable students to learn how to think critically: questioning information, testing arguments, understanding differences, interpreting reality, reflecting on experiences, and taking positions based on defensible reasoning. At this point, alternative education refers not merely to a learning space outside the university, but to a different way of organizing learning experiences and shaping students' relationships with knowledge and social reality.

D. Conclusion

Alternative education at PMII Rayon Suromenggolo can be understood as a non-formal learning space that does more than complement students' academic activities. It develops through a learning culture that positions cadres as subjects in the construction

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of knowledge. This character is reflected in a relatively egalitarian learning environment, openness to dialogue and differences of opinion, and opportunities for cadres to develop arguments based on their knowledge. The existence of an alternative school is therefore determined not primarily by its institutional form, but by how learning takes place and how relationships among students, knowledge, and social reality are established.

The development of critical consciousness takes place through interconnected activities. Discussions, cadre development, academic study forums, and social activities do not operate independently; together, they create learning experiences that connect dialogue, the development of knowledge, the analysis of reality, reflection, and social engagement. Dialogue allows cadres to test their views through differences of opinion, while academic study strengthens the conceptual foundations for understanding problems. This knowledge is subsequently used to interpret social reality, reflected upon through experience, and given practical consequences through cadres' involvement in community life.

The development of critical reasoning among cadres is particularly evident in changes in how they receive and approach information. They are encouraged not only to express opinions but also to consider sources, reasons, differing perspectives, and the consequences of decisions. Critical reasoning, therefore, cannot be reduced to the ability to express criticism. It is better understood as an intellectual habit of questioning, analyzing, evaluating, and taking responsibility for one's views. This dimension is connected to the development of social consciousness through cadres' experiences of observing community conditions, identifying problems, designing programs, and participating in social action through activities such as Sahasra Maghandi.

The novelty of this study lies in the finding that PMII Rayon Suromenggolo can function as an alternative educational ecosystem connecting learning culture, the development of critical consciousness, and social praxis. Alternative education does not operate through a single teaching method, but through the interconnectedness of learning experiences that enable cadres to engage in dialogue, strengthen their

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knowledge, interpret reality, reflect on their experiences, and take positions on social issues. PMII thus does more than provide a learning space outside the classroom; it offers a way of learning that positions students as active subjects in understanding knowledge and developing a reflective relationship with social reality.

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