

# Should the Modern Idea of Individual Autonomy Continue to Influence Understandings about the Goal of Education? A Critical Discussion with Reference to Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy

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Lately there has been renewed interest in the idea of individual autonomy in this ever-changeable world. The modern societies that believe in pluralist and democratic life influence economic and social life by considering individual autonomy. This means giving freedom of choices to children and considering their abilities to choose and follow their conception of life that they hope to be suitable for themselves in 'flourishing conditions' Kant (1784). This perspective has not only been the view of liberal societies but many conservative societies as well. For societies that do not consider individual autonomy, it will be hard to continue towards their desire of reaching flourishing conditions. Dearden believes education is the key to ensure individuals gain individual autonomy. Thus, the modern idea of individual autonomy in the enlightenment time of Immanuel Kant until the present time influences several societies and especially education. A much-debated question is whether it should be applied in the education system. In this paper, I will argue that people can have autonomy yet additionally they need a critical realisation to request and alter exploitive conditions. I will discuss that a critical pedagogy as defined by Freire (1972) and modernised by Giroux (2004), is what is needed within modern education. I start by defining Freire's (1972) proposal of critical pedagogy as a mean for social alteration and equality in education by giving an alternative to the 'banking concept' of education and will relate it to my professional context as an English speaker for other languages (ESOL) teacher from Iraq.

**Key words:** *Individual Autonomy, Critical pedagogy, Banking Education, oppression and liberation.*

## **Introduction**

I agree with the idea of autonomy to compose self-governed determinations surrounding crucial areas of our lives and especially in education. This guided me in my determination in acquiring a profession as a teacher to broaden my knowledge and occupation for holding a stance whereby I might aid others in emerging their autonomy and critical insights. The personal development of autonomy inspired me to reflect on my education so far, profoundly shifting my identification, where my views and morals have altered. This guided me to shape my relationships both in my personal and my professional life and to take a professional stance whereby I may encourage others to progress their autonomy and critical reasoning. (Appendix 1 outlines my development of autonomy)

Research into autonomy has a long history; as said by Kant (1784, p.1), “Enlightenment is a man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity” and this means immature people need to exercise reason and to think freely for themselves. Besides, people need to stop asking authority what they should do, what to decide and what is true or false and so on. Kant started a long conversation which has been picked up by many groups of people in creating their perspectives. Examination of the model of autonomy also shapes the central disputes within education and affects more general views on topics such as its aims, strategies, morals, different rightful freedoms, and rights, as well as political schemes more generally. However, in recent years, theorists of communitarianism perspectives such as Friedman (1989), Etzioni (1995), Smith (2001) and others have progressively attempted to shape this concept to sever its ties with this brand of individualism, and this I can connect in Islamic principles in Iraq.

As discussed above, Dearden (1975) expresses that the position of human beings in education is distinctly modern. He tries to focus on the individual human beings and named this individual (the self) reflecting on what it is to be human in this era and what it takes to educate people to be this kind of human being. Dearden’s line of reasoning taken from Kant (1784) for autonomy as a fundamental aim of education is one of acceptance. However, one major drawback of Dearden’s approach is that he does not account for current social, economic, policy influences, and they are significant in extending and upholding the existing unfair and unbalanced societal harmony, explicitly via the education system.

## **Education as Oppression or Liberation?**

I think how closely tied education is about politics, to beliefs about society and societal problems. It is not just about teaching people in school. It has huge ramifications for our ideas of who people are and how they should live their lives in general. I believe Freire (1972) takes on some big issues, partly because he is committed to liberating education and especially looking at those who he called ‘underprivileged’ or on ‘the margins of society’.

Thus, there is a lack of opportunity and a false system of education was deliberate and has taught them to stay in their place and not to strive for anything more for themselves. Freire tries to give people the education that would not only help them get better jobs but help them to change their worlds to be equal. In the banking concept of education, the teacher teaches and students are taught. Teaching is one-way action, comes from the teacher to the students. A teacher has all the power and he or she chooses what will be read, how the materials will be delivered and what students will be tested over. In this method, students passively say 'OK'. Moreover, the teacher knows the whole thing and students know nothing and thus see students as empty vessels that need to be filled. As an educator, I want to point out this perspective is not a just misconception of teachers thinking they know everything and students know nothing. It is often the misconception of students too. I think it is interesting that Freire (1972) points out that this concept is not necessarily conscious on the part of teachers, and that whilst they are doing this 'they are innumerable, well-intentioned bankers', teachers who do not realise that they are serving only to dehumanise. In my point of view, this is not just due to format. I think there are ways of lecturing whereby students are not passive and there are ways of discussing things, which are very oppressive in terms of telling students what to think and shutting down different opinions. Thus, it is not only about the format but also about the philosophy behind what is going on in the classroom.

### **The Banking System of Education**

The System can cover the following bullet points in a brief:

1. Teachers teach students
2. Teacher direct, students comply
3. Teacher select content, students adapt to it
4. The teacher knows everything, students know nothing
5. The teacher is active, students are passive
6. Focus on memorisation and regurgitation

As an experienced adult educator from Iraq, I can state that the educational system in my country can be titled as teacher-centred or as Freire's (1972) named it banking education system. A vivid example from my experience, in teaching English language grammar subjects, the teacher dominates and makes choices on how the lesson will go. The objects, or students, in this Iraqi context, are patient, listening and accepting the orders from the subject; this is exactly what Freire (1972) argues. In his work, he tries to liberate the kind of education that still exists in parts of the world such as Iraq.

As was pointed out in the introduction of this paper, Giroux (2004) updated Freire's view of liberal education and the economic system as exclusionary. Giroux (2004) refers to unfair economic biases, sex, and racial discriminations, in expressing that political dialogue

“appears to be overwhelmed by market discourses”, and as such “democracy has now been reduced to a metaphor for the alleged free’ market” (2004, p.35). Freire’s critical pedagogy (1972) has long been a question of great interest in a wide range of fields. He creates the model of oppression by which he states that teaching has characterised and its feature is the particular sort of narrative that goes in a particular direction. According to Freire’s (1972) argument, the teacher is narrating the subject and the students are patiently listening. In Freire’s lens, the term oppression is the reference to the relationship between the teacher and students and in this case, the students are the objects and the teacher is the subject and does something to the object. Also, he states that the object has been treated like a “sickness”. At this point, the teacher should be aware of the sickness of the students as objects and the teacher should do something to the object (students) to make them better. This is characterised greatly within the education platform, as teachers are not giving the students their autonomy to think and mutually take part in the learning process or even participate in creating the curriculum according to their needs. Nevertheless, the teachers also lack autonomy, apart from the schools as they have been taught to deliver such kind of curricula forced by the policymakers or communities in which they belong.

The crucial point to consider is that Freire (1972) interprets autonomy to be just as deep as that of Dearden (1975, p.343), as vital as that of conscientizacao, and it is at this point the two perspectives untie and proceed. Freire (1972) claims that authority should be with the flank of freedom and thus teachers and students in discourse and “teach each other mediated by the world” rather than students being divided by the world and tamed by the ‘fear of freedom’. Freire (1972) clarifies that within such discourse teachers will convert to teacher-students and students to student-teachers, and will together proceed with the learning process in communication and collaboration with one another. Thus, both parties develop into critical co-thinkers and investigators holding equivalent possession, developing the arguments of their learning process. Freire’s key answer to a generative banking education is a critical pedagogy that is “constantly unveiling reality” and “strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (1972, p.68). This critical pedagogy as “practice of freedom” (1972, p.69) realises individuals as existing surrounded by the experience of their domain, linked to others concerning the domain. Hence, students are no longer covered from the paradigm in traditional education in which Freire (1972, p.63) states, “The educated individuals are the adapted person as she or he is ‘better’ fit for the world”. Linking Freire’s view to the origin of autonomy which can be traced back to Kant (1784), referring to guardians and I can apply this to teachers in Freire’s model to keep the immaturity. As freedom and democracy in education is concerned, Enslin (1994) also states the necessity for free education atmosphere which is far from false beliefs; “Education for the democratic model of life must comprise guiding pupils’ concentration to the subjecting of false beliefs, particularly the myth which, the commercial and political entrepreneur would have them embrace” (p.32). Overall, these cases support the view of Freire’s critical

pedagogy model about his worries of the teacher working as if the teacher works as the depositor and the students as a depository, and if this model is been realised and characterised in education, then for Freire that is the pedagogy of oppressed and it is problematic. Thus, Freire wants to change the education from a banking education to a liberating model in which the oppressed are liberated and even the oppressor could be liberated upon dialogue within education. Describing ‘oppressed people’ in the sense of poor people, but which kind of poor people we are talking about and does the definition of the oppressed that Freire gave a few decades ago match with the definition of the oppressed today? As an educator, my answer to this question is structure still does the same only it has become even more efficient in terms of oppression. However, what might have changed and that is a superficial level is exactly who are the oppressed.

### **What is Wrong with Banking Education?**

Education is the way much of education has been delivered worldwide for quite a long time. Freire (1972) has a series of reasons to oppose it. Firstly, one is that one of the ways that this banking concept is oppressive is that it teaches people to conform. There is a norm that you make yourself fit. There is a ‘status quo’ that you find your way of being part of and that is what good education is. I think this sounds suspiciously close to Menand’s second theory. Menand (2010) does not include Freire’s theory but he was trying to bring people in to conform to the mainstream and be exposed to ideas that they have not been exposed to before. As an educator, Menand’s view is clear to me, that if I am not teaching in problem-solving mode then I am simply creating more oppression by teaching people to accept the oppressive system. I can state that this goes with the Freire (1972) idea of maintaining the ‘status quo’ that does not allow for changes but encouraging just knowing things as they are and accepting them because it inhabits creative power by teaching ‘necrophily’ (the love of death objects). This can be connected to Whitehead’s (1929) inert ideas, which he states ideas are not good if they are not used. This is exactly my argument here, in that Freire is stating that instead of producing this knowledge of life, banking education promotes just accepting a status quo, which is a type of death. It means everything is turned into an object. Thus in the style of the banking concept and of course to put something in the bank, it is going to be an object. Instead of being something living, growing and changing, that thing cannot be pinned down. Thus, students will put them in their mental suitcase and pack them away and therefore they cannot change the world and this will lead them not to build a sustainable education (Wurjaningrum, 2020). This brings to dividing things down to black and white, good and bad ‘dichotomises everything’ (Freire, 1972). It is worth mentioning here that Freire’s banking concept is not only about students being oppressed and those who are not been allowed to think for themselves, but it is also about the teacher being not allowed to think for himself or herself either in this model. As I outlined above, my stance is about one gaining freedom and independence in my views, and about working mutually with my students in problem solving

and dialogue for them to be able to think critically and change the world. Since one of the big problems with banking education is that it does not teach critical thinking and in this case, it does not allow students to digest what they learned. Besides, on a much more important level, it causes people to suffer because it does not allow them to be 'truly human' but turn them into 'automatons' (Freire, 1972). Again, I believe in a liberating education system as Freire refers to it because it will make students think critically rather than becoming robots. Sadly, I can state this is currently the case in Iraq.

### **What is an Alternative to Banking Education?**

Alternative as Freire concluded is what he called problem-posing or liberating education. First, I believe that the liberating education must be based on problem solving as Freire outlined and it must be connected to the real world. It must be lateral, which is a liberating education the teacher and the students learn from each other. Thus, the teachers become students and students become teachers, and mutually learn from each other and even students learn from students. To reach this level, I think it requires a big shift in the teaching mentality, where the teacher does what Whitehead (1929) argues, which is the teacher stand there in the middle of their ignorance and not trying to figure out a solution.

Freire (1972) describes that problem-posing education shatters the characteristics of the vertical patterns of banking education. By this mode the teacher is no longer, simply the one who teaches but one who is himself or herself taught in dialogue with students who 'I am being taught, also teach'. In my point of view, Freire's (1972) ideas were much more revolutionary, he wants transformation of the world as he saw the ultimate goal of human beings was to transform this unjust world. Besides, he was very optimistic about his belief that when students are shared opportunities to deal with the real domain they would rise to the trial. As an educator, I think if students are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves and with the world, they will feel progressively more challenged and obliged to respond to those challenges. To carry this on is not easy for the teacher or the students, but they are doing this together as teamwork through engaging in dialogue with each other and thus they all are being liberated. Moreover, they are thinking critically, communicating with written and oral communication skills and working together as teamwork. Therefore, I must become revolutionary in my teaching and allow my students to talk, think and act even though it may lead to things becoming much more chaotic and difficult. Nevertheless, that is what happens during the world's learning processes. Therefore, it seems that individual autonomy can be an appropriate aim for an education system. In a society of equality, it is not society's responsibility to instruct people in what kind of life they ought to adopt. Populations have rights that cannot be disregarded; one of the most significant rights is deciding what kind of life they should practice. These rights should force the stakeholders in Iraqi governments to allow people to state their aims and make choices about and within their

education. It follows that the education system must at least not ban autonomy as an educational aim. Though if one of the foremost aims of education is to permit young people to create knowledgeable choices thenceforth schools can barely prevent indicating that there is a broader series of choices obtainable than those permitted by the labour market. Recognition of rights of people and social equalities emerges the equal social orders, for this reason, it is required that the education system should embrace autonomy as an aim. Arise of this case, outcomes from a misreading of the hypothesis that individuals have firm rights to choose what kind of life they should practice. This norm must be a matter of certain limitations if it is not to interval into incoherence. Given that fact, individual rights have associations for the rights of others. Nevertheless, there should be a distinction between the UK and Iraq because Iraq is a very complex site given the conflict that exists. Whilst I advocate individual autonomy, applying in Iraq needs to be done sensitively.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I can state that the idea of Freire is essentially about liberating individuals and empowering them and emphasises the importance of changing learning from a banking education to a liberal one. By empowering both teachers and students, this will create a learning process that does not reproduce the class divide and social inequality as Giroux (2004) outlined. As an adult educator, I support individual autonomy idea for reaching the ultimate personal development autonomy. On the other hand, I recognise this concern over stance like great stance but in reality how to treat the conflict more sensitively as a middle ground in respect of the community and religion. I have set a descriptive figure of my personal development of autonomy that has a five level of perception in order to attain the autonomous environment. The five levels can be explained in below points; besides a learning environment from a teacher's autonomous perspective in below figure:

1. **Freedom:** with my students to choose mutually the material in class. Proposing students selections about their education is unique of the supreme influential techniques educators be able to progress student learning. Besides, it helps the growth of an intrinsic inspiration and affects student learning as part of daily teaching.
2. **Independence:** to exercise the personal view about the methods of teaching with considering the students' needs. While students convert to active learners, thus they acquire that there might be further correct answers to one question. Fortunately, there are countless methods for teachers to support students advance autonomous thoughtful talents. Independent rational abilities are at the lead of learning environment. Such abilities demonstrate our learners how to brand logic of the world constructed by personal familiarity and remark, and to mark critical knowledgeable choices in the equal means. Equally, the students' advantage in self-confidence and the capability to acquire from

mistakes by a way they shape prosperous and productive lives. There could be counted in different effective ways such as:

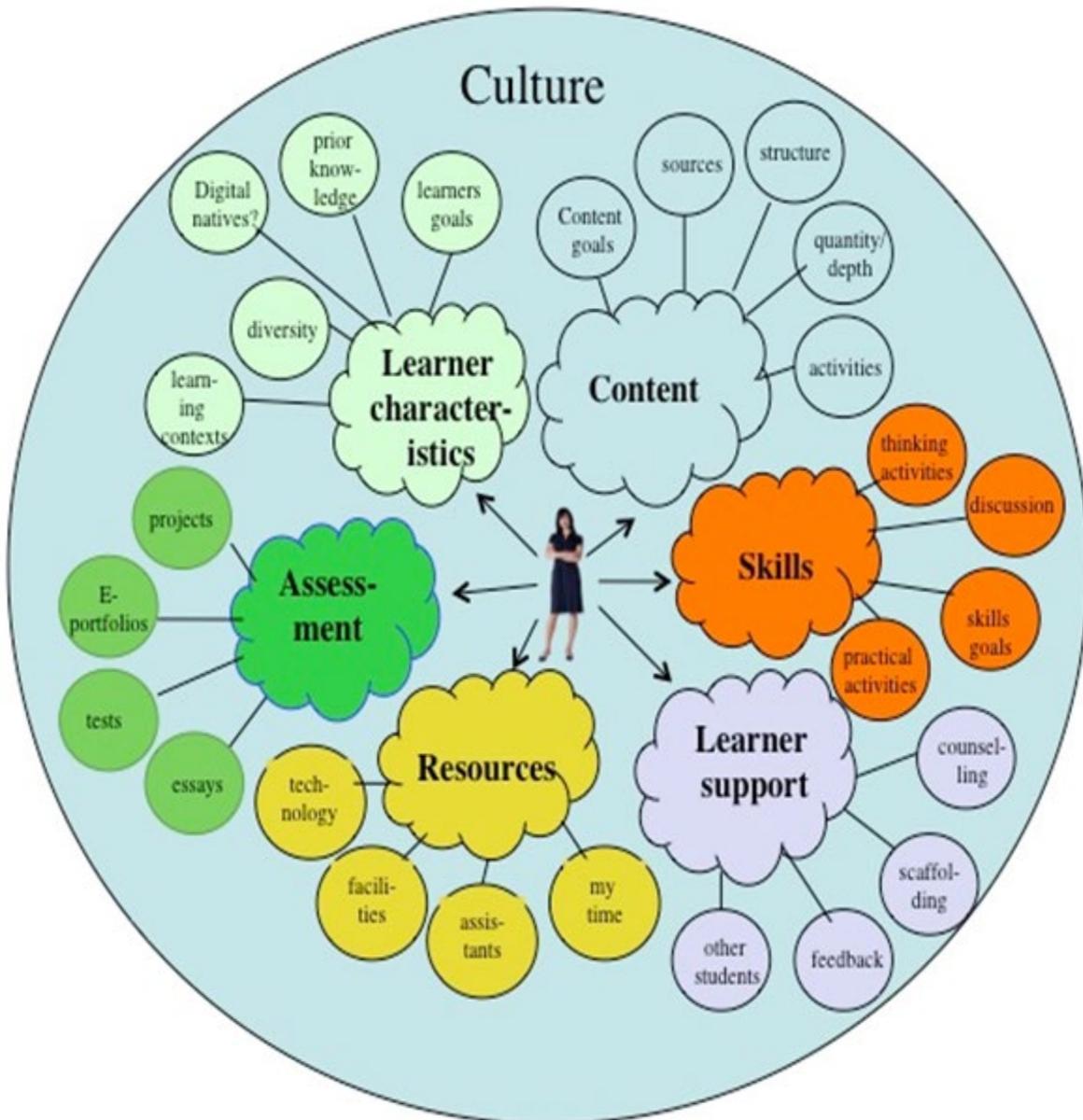
- Lease the Students Pretend
  - Reassure Dissenting Interpretations
  - Create an Open Environment
  - Prize Initiative
  - Analyse Self-determining Work
  - Allocate Research Projects
  - Boost Brainstorming
  - Question Open-Ended Questions
  - Emphasis on the Positive
3. **Reason:** new understanding and knowledge allow to critically considering the current beliefs and views about teaching and learning.
  4. **Problem solving and critical thinking:** to endorse self-focused thought that harvests novel and advanced concepts and answers difficulties for the purpose of reproducing critically on learning experiences and processes and making effective conclusions.
  5. **Autonomy:** a state that learners are thoroughly accountable for completing conclusions apprehensive with learning and the application of those judgements. Same when teachers fortified with autonomy, their students are inclined to be uninterested, to their feelings of self-efficacy and also to understand their tasks as having intrinsic value.



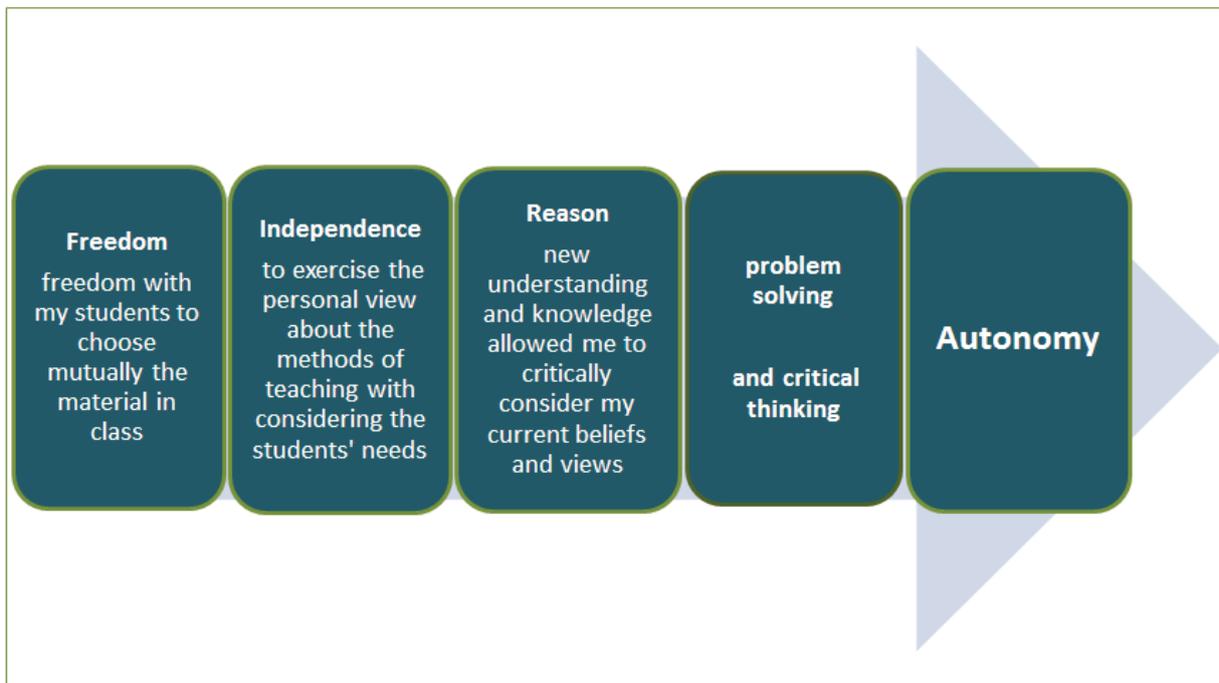
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**Appendix 1:** A learning environment from a teacher's autonomous perspective



**Appendix 2:** A descriptive figure of my personal development of autonomy



I think the teacher must have a continuously specialised skill and be ethically committed to society. Some features must be considered in this concern; the essential feature handles the methods performed with the students in particular conditions. The second feature is about the way that teacher expresses feelings, ideas and by considering students' views and feelings at the same time. Lastly, the obligation with the society for building the right decisions to influence students in a confident approach. In addition, I can state that the role of a teacher should be more as a guide and as a facilitator in the class rather than dominating the class and ignoring the students, as the students can learn best if they gain their freedom in the class. The friendly relationship between the teacher and students can facilitate the learning process as the heart and the mind of the students will be engaged in the class. The above points are massive promises since it indicates to influence others' life reliant on a teacher's maturity as an individual within a society. For a teacher like myself, there should be great care taken if I want to adopt the idea of individual autonomy because it is very much a western concept and it can only work within certain boundaries in a country such as Iraq.