

# Critical Education Perspective the Story of Abraham (Study of Q.S. Al-An'am 75-79)

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**Abstract:** Critical education is the most important part of learning in the era of disruption. The values of critical education can be studied in the sources of Islamic education, namely the Qur'an and hadith. This study aims to: first explain the concept of critical education. Second, explain the comparative interpretation of the sequel to Abraham's story about dialogue with natural phenomena, namely Q.S. al-an-'am 75–79. Third, explaining the reconstruction of critical education based on Q.S. al-An'am 75–79 The research is library research. The primary sources are Tafsir Jalain, Tafsir Al-Misbah by Quraish Shihab, translation, and Tafsir Al-Furqan by A. Hassan, translation, and Tafsir Al-Qur'an Karim by Mahmud Yunus. The research results are as follows: The critical education contained in the sequel to the story of Ibrahim consists of three stages of awareness, namely reflective, critical, and transformative awareness.

**Keywords:** Critical education, Story, and Abraham.

## Introduction

Positivistic paradigms and binary opposition are a major part of the modern way of thinking. The positivistic paradigm is a form of domination of scientific knowledge across all fields of study. Positivism has a positive impact on scientific fields, but on the other hand, it causes barrenness in the development of humanities and religious studies. Humanities, which focus on the *verstehen* (understanding) way of thinking, are required to adopt the *erklären* (explaining) way of thinking. This results in humanistic issues being reduced to two poles: right-wrong, good-bad, and so on.

This is also internalized within Indonesian educational institutions. Education in Indonesia prioritizes the sciences over the social sciences. This prioritization can be reviewed based on several studies, including: First, among a number of countries worldwide, Indonesia was once ranked 102nd in 1996, rising to 99th position in 1997, then dropping to 105th in 1998, and declining further to 109th in 1999. One tangible evidence of the decline

in Indonesian education can be seen in the rampant brawls among students, from high schoolers to university level. These fights, often triggered by trivial issues, have significant repercussions. Through print and electronic media, the international community can witness the chaos (or disarray) of the educational condition in Indonesia. (Kadi & Awwaliyah, 2017)

Second, Globalisation and its impact on the world of education, as previously described, directly or indirectly influence the school environment as part of the social system. Various activities and dynamics that emerge as a consequence of globalisation have caused the school atmosphere to become less conducive to the learning process. From a mindset perspective, schools and universities are no longer fully viewed as centres for the pursuit of knowledge and academic activities, but rather as an arena for young people to express their social status. Education is even considered incapable of providing real solutions to daily problems. This view is further reinforced by electronic media broadcasts,

especially soap operas (sinetron), which often depict success without going through formal education, or conversely, illustrate failure despite completing a certain level of education which is clearly different from the reality of the majority of society. (Tholani, 2013)

Third, research concerning critical education and entrepreneurship highlights the need for a transformative Sustainable Entrepreneurship Education (SEE), given the limited studies in this area. The author offers a framework that integrates Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (dialogue, critical consciousness, praxis), John Shotter's withinness thinking approach (understanding through direct experience with practitioners), and the Head, Hands, and Heart model (integration of knowledge, skills, and values). With five pedagogical propositions learner transformation, dialogical educator–learner relations, problem-based learning, emphasis on meaning, and connection to real-world practice this article asserts that SEE must be interdisciplinary, applicable, and capable of transforming individuals, organizations, and society towards a more just and sustainable development (Klapper & Alain, 2023).

Fourth, another study reviews the implementation of Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP) in online learning within academic libraries through an analysis of 285 publications, from which 13 articles were selected. The review findings reveal three main themes teaching, instructional design, and Open Educational Resources (OER) all closely linked to the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. In this context, CDP encourages collaborative, participatory learning that is oriented towards social justice, both by involving students as knowledge creators and by designing inclusive and flexible learning experiences. Furthermore, OER is deemed important for increasing access, reducing cost barriers, and supporting a more open and sustainable educational model. Overall, the article asserts that CDP strengthens the role of librarians as educators and designers, while simultaneously presenting online learning practices that are more humanistic, critical, and relevant for higher education (Peuler & Harlow, 2025).

In addition to these points, a research study explains and highlights the role of critical pedagogy as an educational approach rooted in the ideas of Paulo Freire, namely making education a means of liberation and social change. Through equal dialogue between teacher and student, learners are invited to reflect on their experiences, critically understand social reality, and engage in transformative action. Thus, critical pedagogy does not only function as a theory of instruction, but also as a social practice that empowers students to become agents of change toward a more just and democratic society. (Hackett et al., 2025)

In addition to these issues, the quality of graduates produced by education is highly dependent on the process that takes place within the learning interaction. All stages and methods of education are structured in accordance with the intended goals. Meanwhile, the direction and objectives of education themselves are determined by the paradigm used as the foundation for educational delivery. (Martin, 1998, p. 12) Henry Giroux and Aronowitz divide educational paradigms into three main streams. First, The Conservative Paradigm, this perspective on education focuses on the preservation and inheritance of established social orders and traditions. This paradigm tends to shape a magical consciousness. Second, The Liberal Paradigm. This paradigm emphasizes the formation of effective personal behavior, focusing on the achievement of individualistic success. This model generally gives rise to a naive and pragmatic consciousness. Third, The Critical Paradigm This is a paradigm that views education as a means for critical reflection on social systems and structures that generate inequality. This approach is oriented toward the formation of a critical consciousness that is transformative..

Based on this division of paradigms and various educational problems, education implemented in Indonesia for the most part still tends to use the conservative and liberal paradigms. These paradigms, however, are less suitable for the digital era of education, which prioritizes the formation of students' critical awareness. Furthermore, the development of Islamic education studies regarding critical education has not yet collaborated between the philosophy of critical education and the

contextualization of Qur'anic verses about the spirit of critical education. Qur'anic verses tend to be understood textually, making them unable to present a religious understanding capable of overcoming the community's problems. This research is one such study integrating the philosophy of Islamic education with the contextualization of Qur'anic verses. The objectives of this research are as follows: First, to explain the concept of critical education. Second, to explain the comparative sequential interpretation of the story of Abraham regarding his dialogue with natural phenomena, namely Q.S. al-An'am 75-79. Third, to explain the reconstruction of critical education based on Q.S. al-An'am 75-79.

### Materials and Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. The focus of the study is the Qur'anic verses along with the interpretations of the mufassirin (exegetes). The technique utilized is interpretive analysis of the stories (qisas) in the Qur'an through the tafsir maudu'i method. The maudu'i approach itself is a model of Qur'anic interpretation that starts from a specific theme, then gathers the related verses or surahs (chapters), and subsequently analyzes them in depth to elaborate on the concept of that theme. (Nasution, 2012)

The research sources consist of primary data and secondary data. The primary data for this research is the Qur'an, specifically the verses detailing the sequential story of Abraham (Ibrahim), namely his dialogue with natural phenomena. To aid understanding, the researcher uses the exegesis works (kitab tafsir) such as Tafsir al-Jalalain, Tafsir al-Misbah, the translation and exegesis of al-Furqan, and the translation and exegesis of al-Quran al-Karim. The secondary data is taken from various literature related to the stories of Abraham. This includes books, magazines, journals, mass media, and internet sources pertaining to critical education and the story of Abraham.

First, determining the issue or problem to be researched. Second, gathering the verses relevant to the problem, then examining the relationship or munasabah (coherence) between the verses and the

surah (chapter) in which they are located. Third, compiling a systematic and focused discussion framework according to the study's findings, ensuring it does not include matters outside the scope of the problem. Fourth, formulating the research conclusion that serves as the answer to the issue under investigation. From this process, it is concluded that critical education in the story of Prophet Abraham is evident through his dialogue with natural phenomena, which is then qualitatively analyzed using the concept of critical education. This analysis aims to reveal the contribution of critical education within the Qur'an.

## Results and Discussion

### The Concept of Critical Education

Critical education is a learning process that fosters critical-transformative consciousness in students. Critical-transformative consciousness represents the highest level of awareness. Criticality is a concept of continuous thinking that involves reviewing and analyzing everything that is objective-empirical. This critical consciousness impacts an integrative-holistic worldview. The integrative-holistic paradigm is a perspective used to examine every problem and environment fully and comprehensively. This can provide flexibility and tolerance in thinking. This flexibility and tolerance are ways to reduce the binary opposition mindset. According to Paulo Freire, the critical education paradigm has key characteristics, primarily an orientation toward problem-solving that is relevant to the context of its time. Critical education encourages students to dare to discuss problems occurring in their environment and to be directly involved in efforts to resolve them. Liberating education is not education that subjects the intellect to the decisions of others, but rather education that awakens critical consciousness so that humans are able to recognize the dangers and problems they face and develop self-confidence to overcome them appropriately. In Freire's view, critical education functions to replace the societal consciousness that has been trapped in magical or naive thought patterns which makes them dominated by power and resigned to reality. The

goal is to cultivate critical consciousness so that society is no longer trapped in the currents of history or easily influenced by irrational things, but rather becomes an active and critical subject in determining the direction of their own lives.

Furthermore, Freire asserted that critical education must be founded on love and courage. He emphasized that education is an act of love as well as an act of bravery. Therefore, education should not cause fear in individuals who wish to analyze reality. Critical education, instead, fosters the courage of students to conduct in-depth analysis, but it must be integrated with deep affection (or love/compassion). Thus, the struggle of praxis in the process of social transformation is not carried out emotionally or anarchically, but through a rational, judicious, and constructive approach, thereby giving rise to meaningful social change. (Freire, 1978, p. 23)

### Comparative Interpretation of Q.S. Al-An'am 75-79

The story of Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) is found in several verses across the Qur'an. Abraham's story is featured in 186 verses and 25 surahs (chapters). The focus on the story of Abraham is concentrated within 155 verses and 13 surahs. The story of Luqman is featured in 8 verses and 1 surah. In this section, the researcher attempts to interpret the verses in the stories of Abraham and Luqman with the aid of the exegesis book (kitab tafsir) al-Misbah, authored by Quraish Shihab.

Abraham's Reflection on Natural Phenomena constitutes the third part of the narrative sequence of Abraham's story. This is explained in the Qur'an, Surah Al-An'ām (The Cattle) [6]: verses 75–79.

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ ٧٥  
فَلَمَّا جَنَّ عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَىٰ كَوْكَبًا ۖ قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّيَ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَا أُجِبُ الْآفِلِينَ ٧٦  
فَلَمَّا رَأَىٰ الْقَمَرَ بَازِعًا قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّيَ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَئِن لَّمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ  
مِنَ الْفٰقِمِ الضَّالِّينَ ٧٧ فَلَمَّا رَأَىٰ الشَّمْسَ بَازِعَةً قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّي هَٰذَا أَكْبَرُ  
فَلَمَّا أَفَلَتْ قَالَ يُقَوْمِ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ ٧٨ إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي  
فَطَرَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ٧٩

In Surah al-An'ām, verses 75–79 explain God's continuous guidance, through inspiration (ilham) and revelation (wahyu), imparted to Abraham via his mind and heart day after day throughout time. This Divine guidance is demonstrated by presenting several signs of His power. And Abraham was among those whose faith (yaqin) in Allah SWT was

firm. God's instruction for Abraham's process of reflection on natural phenomena originates from several of his critical attitudes, including: First, when the night covered him, becoming extremely dark, encompassing all totality, Abraham directed his gaze to the sky, whereupon he saw a shining star. Abraham considered it to be God. Second, Abraham's second thought process occurred when he saw the moon rising at the beginning of its time, like something cleaving the darkness of the night.

Third, the thought process of Abraham peace be upon him (as) was when he saw with his own eyes the sun rising in the morning. However, all three possessed a weakness because they disappeared with the succession of day and night. And he said: "O my people, indeed I am free from the worship of the moon, the star, and the sun, and whatever you associate with the One True God. Indeed, I have turned my face that is, my entire soul and body in totality—toward the One who created the heavens and the earth with all their contents, including all celestial bodies. I have turned my face in a state of hanifan, inclining toward the true religion. I am not among those who associate partners with God nor adhere to what his people follow." (Shihab, 2002)

According to Mahmud Yunus, God says: "Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth so that he might be among those who are certain." This certainty is strengthened by the process of searching for God using critical reasoning toward natural phenomena. The natural phenomena questioned regarding the concept of divinity were the star, the moon, and the sun. The critical inquiry into these three objects yielded the following answers: First, "I do not love those that disappear." Second, "If my Lord had not guided me, I would surely have been among the straying people." Third, "O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate [with God]." Abraham's critical statements found a clear answer as follows: "Indeed, I have turned my heart toward the One who created the heavens and the earth." (Yunus, 1985)

A. Hassan also explains in his tarjamah and tafsir that thus we showed Ibrahim the kingdom of heaven and earth, so that he would be among those who believe. He questioned the three objects that exist in the universe, namely the stars, moon and sun. Ibrahim's understanding of these three things

presents three statements, including: first, I don't like anything that is lost. Second, if my God does not guide me, I will surely be among those who are astray. Third, O my people, I am truly independent of what you associate with me. At the end of this search, Ibrahim obtained the answer expressed in the following statement: Indeed, I face myself to the One who made the heavens and the earth. (Hassan, 2021)

Regarding Tafsir al-Azhar by Buya Hamka, he explains concerning Q.S. al-An'ām verse 75 that God showed Prophet Abraham the Malakut (Kingdom or Sovereignty) of the heavens and the earth. According to Ikrimah, the term Malakut originates from the Nabataean language, a descendant of the ancient Arab nation. Qatadah interprets Malakut as all of God's creation, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the seas. The mufassirin (exegetes) explain that through both his outer and inner vision, Abraham realized the magnificent Divine arrangement behind all creation. From this realization grew the certainty that the universe did not happen by itself or without purpose. According to Raaghib, certainty (yaqin) is a firm and definite knowledge, higher than mere ordinary knowledge. Therefore, Abraham achieved a synthesis between knowledge resulting from contemplation and Ilmu Ladunni (knowledge bestowed directly) from God. From a Sufi perspective, through his spiritual earnestness, Abraham attained a high spiritual station (muraad), and was then granted direct knowledge from Allah Ta'ala. (Amrullah, 2015)

The interpretation of Surah al-An'ām, verse 76 explains that when the night began to darken and stars appeared, Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) gazed at the sky with deep attention. He noticed a star, according to Ibn Abbas, it was the planet Mushtari (Jupiter), while according to Qatadah, it was the star Zuhrah (Venus). The Chaldeans (Kaldani), Abraham's people, were indeed known at that time as star-worshippers. Therefore, Abraham questioned inwardly: "Is this my Lord?" This question was not a form of conviction, but an attempt to seek the truth. However, when the star disappeared, Abraham realized that something that can vanish is unfit to be worshipped as God. How could humans pin their hopes on something that

only appears occasionally, blocked by clouds, mountains, or the Earth's rotation? From this point, Abraham asserted that he does not love anything that disappears when needed. This statement simultaneously serves as an important lesson for his people not to place their love upon anything other than God, because everything besides Him is surely mortal, while only God is eternal and worthy of worship. (Amrullah, 2015)

The interpretation of Surah al-An'ām, verse 77 explains that the moon's light is much brighter and more widespread than the stars. When the moon rises, the starlight begins to dim. It is highly probable that Prophet Abraham witnessed this change on the 16th or 17th night of the Lunar month (Qamariyah), when the full moon appeared on the eastern horizon and its light dominated the sky, replacing the stars' glimmer. The charm of the full moon often captivates people, making them willing to sit for a long time enjoying it. Since ancient times, various folktales have been born from the beauty of the moon, such as the story of the "inverted banyan tree" or the "weaving princess," which later developed into primitive beliefs among many nations, including the Chaldeans. However, just like the star, the moon is also not eternal; it will shift, disappear beyond the horizon, and gradually wane after its fullness.

The interpretation of Surah al-An'ām, verse 78 explains that when the sun rises, the starlight fades and the moon is no longer luminous. All light is overcome by the brilliance of the sun, which brings new life, heralded by the crowing of roosters, the chirping of birds, and human gratitude. Due to its vital role, primitive nations in the past regarded the sun as God. However, Prophet Abraham realized that even though it is larger and intensely bright, the sun also sets and is replaced by darkness. If its light can disappear and is unable to illuminate all the time, then it cannot be God. The true God must be greater than the sun, unconstrained by rising and setting, and unconquered by darkness.

The interpretation of Surah al-An'ām, verse 79 explains that through deep contemplation, Prophet Abraham's intellect led him to the certain conviction (yaqin) of God's existence, as mentioned in verse 75. He realized that the outer eye (mata lahir) is merely

a tool, while the essence of seeing God lies in the inner eye (mata batin).

Abraham observed the star, the moon, and the sun, each with its own light. Although they differed in size, all of them equally rose and shone, then finally dimmed and disappeared. The star was eclipsed by the moon, the moon by the sun, and the sun eventually set. From this, it is clear that all celestial bodies are merely limited creations. Although humans at that time did not yet know that the moon is much smaller than the stars or that the sun is only one of millions of stars, Abraham's intellect still arrived at the conclusion: there must be a Great Power that arranges everything. The star, the moon, the sun, and even the entire universe are only small parts of His creation. By realizing this change and limitation, Abraham's inner eye saw the existence of one absolute power that is the source and regulator of everything.

Regarding the exegesis Qur'anul Majid an-Nuur by Hasbi as-Shidiqie, Q.S. al-An'ām verse 75 explains that "We showed Abraham how his father and his people had gone astray by worshipping idols. Then, We showed him the Sovereignty (Malakut) in the heavens and the earth." This made Abraham understand the secrets of creation and the hidden matters in nature. "We showed him the stars, the earth, and the heavens, so that he might see the tangible evidence of God's Oneness (Tauhid)." The primary objective was for Abraham to grasp the truth, the laws of nature, and God's wisdom. This also served as preparation for him to oppose the polytheists (mushrikin) and attain an unshakeable conviction. (Shiddieqy, 1961)

The interpretation of Surah al-An'ām, verse 76 explains that when God showed him the greatness of His creation, Abraham saw a large star named Mustari (Jupiter) in the night sky. This star was considered the supreme deity by his people, as well as by the ancient Greeks and Romans. To begin his argument, Abraham said, "This is my Lord." However, when the star set, he realized that something that appears and then disappears cannot be God. This story simultaneously serves as an indictment (or satire) of his people's belief in idol worship.

The interpretation of Surah al-An'ām, verse 77 explains that after witnessing the star set, Abraham

discovered the moon, which was shining much brighter. He then said again, "This is my Lord, it is greater than the star." However, the moon also disappeared after reaching its setting time. Abraham subsequently realized that the true God would not vanish. He said, "If my Lord had not guided me, I would surely have been among the straying people." This statement is a sharp indictment (or rebuke) against his people who were misguided because they worshipped stars and idols.

The interpretation of Surah al-An'ām, verse 78 explains that after witnessing the moon set, Abraham saw the sun rise. He considered the sun to be the largest because of its strong light and great benefit. Thus, Abraham said again, "This is my Lord, this is greater than the moon and the star." However, when the sun set, he realized that God would not vanish. He then said to his people, "I will no longer follow your beliefs." At this point, Abraham explained his true conviction, which is Tauhid (Monotheism) or belief in only one God.

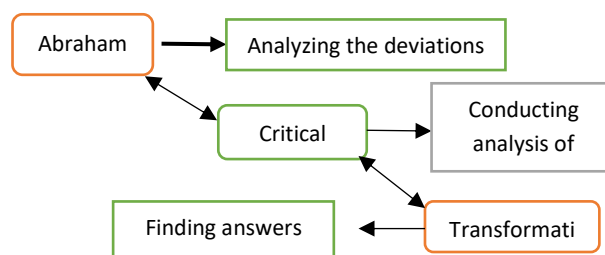
The interpretation of Surah al-An'ām, verse 79 explains that after Abraham demonstrated the weakness of the celestial bodies, proving them unworthy of worship, he affirmed his belief in Tauhid (Monotheism) by saying, "Indeed, I have submitted myself sincerely to God who created the universe, animals, stars, and everything." This action demonstrates Abraham's intelligent way of preaching (dakwah). He did not immediately impose his conviction but instead invited his people to think step-by-step until they realized the error of idol worship. After successfully dismantling his people's polytheistic beliefs (shirk), only then did Abraham explain the foundation of the faith (aqidah) he adhered to. Abraham is the ancestor of the prophets after Noah. He was the tenth generation descendant of Shem and was born in Ur, in the region of Halab (Syria). The name Abraham itself means "father of nations." He lived contemporaneously with Hammurabi and is known as the figure who placed his son, Ishmael (Ismail), and his wife, Hagar (Hajar), in Mecca with the Jurhum tribe.

### Reconstruction of Critical Education Based on Q.S. al-An'am 75-79

Critical education, which is implied in the Qur'an, can be studied in one sequence of the story of Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) regarding his search for God. This quest for God was conducted within the framework of a critical-transformative consciousness towards the reality of King Nimrod's behavior, who imposed an absolutism of truth and religion. This absolutism was reinforced by the power he possessed. Prophet Abraham began to conduct a critical study of that reality. This reality, which was strengthened by power, brought forth various deviations and human deterioration. The people were required to worship idols that they had created through King Nimrod's system of policy normalization.

This system of normalized deviation was criticized by Abraham using a reflective-critical consciousness. This reflective-critical consciousness enabled Abraham to analyze reality outside the scope of Nimrod's power. Abraham's analysis concerning divinity was carried out by observing the surrounding nature. The celestial objects that Abraham observed and analyzed included the moon, the star, and the sun. These objects were analyzed in depth, leading Abraham to the conclusion that none of the three could be the God he sought.

Abraham conducted observation and analysis, leading him to find a single answer regarding divinity with the statement: "Indeed, I have turned my face toward the One who created the heavens and the earth." This expression is the peak of the formation of transformative consciousness. The transformative consciousness referred to in the context of Abraham's story is that Abraham began to possess a mission to undertake the reformation of the ruler's actions. The basis for the formation of critical education in the story of Abraham can be illustrated as follows:



**Figure 1.** The basis for the formation of critical education

### Conclusions

The critical education implied in Q.S. al-An'am verses 75–79 is part of the sequential story of Prophet Abraham (As.). The sequence in question is Abraham's dialogue with natural phenomena. This dialogue represents a critical action against the societal deviations that were occurring. This story sequence provides three stages in critical education, namely: the stage of forming reflective consciousness, the stage of forming critical consciousness, and the stage of forming transformative consciousness. These three levels of consciousness constitute the basis for critical education that can be continuously implemented in learning.

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