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Paulo Freire and George Bernard Shaw: Literature, Dialogue and Critical Consciousness

A Comparative Thematic Study on Education as Liberation and Social Transformation

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Abstract-- This study explores the educational and social philosophies of Paulo Freire and George Bernard Shaw through a comparative thematic analysis of literature, dialogue, and critical consciousness. Although Freire worked primarily within educational theory and Shaw within dramatic literature, both viewed education as a transformative force capable of challenging oppression and promoting social reform. The study examines how their ideas contribute to understanding education as liberation and as a means of developing socially responsible citizens.

The paper analyses Freire's concept of critical pedagogy, particularly his rejection of the "banking model" of education and his emphasis on dialogue, conscientization, and praxis. Freire argues that education should encourage learners to critically examine social realities and participate actively in transforming unjust structures. In comparison, Shaw's plays such as *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara* are examined as literary tools for exposing class inequality, gender discrimination, moral hypocrisy, and institutional power. Through satire, irony, and dramatic dialogue, Shaw encourages audiences to question accepted norms and develop independent thought.

The study further highlights the role of dialogue in both thinkers' works. While Freire employs dialogue as a pedagogical process that fosters democratic participation and critical awareness, Shaw uses dramatic conversation to stimulate reflection and social criticism. Despite differences in approach, both thinkers emphasize the importance of intellectual freedom, ethical awareness, and active engagement with society.

The paper also discusses the continuing relevance of Freire and Shaw in contemporary education, particularly in relation to inclusive education, critical pedagogy, decolonized curricula, and student-centered learning. At the same time, it addresses criticisms concerning the practical implementation and ideological dimensions of their ideas. Overall, the study concludes that both Freire and Shaw continue to provide valuable insights into the relationship between education, literature, critical consciousness, and social transformation in modern society.

Keywords—Critical Pedagogy, Critical Consciousness, Dialogue, Social Transformation, Liberation Education, Literature and Society, Paulo Freire and George Bernard Shaw.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education as liberation and social change

Learning has long stood as a path out of limitation, opening doors to change in both self and society. Not just about gathering facts or mastering techniques, it helps people see deeper patterns in the world around them. Through teaching and reflection, one begins to question unfair structures instead of accepting them. Today's thinking leans into this idea - schools and classrooms can spark involvement, not just repetition. Instead of sitting quietly while being told what to think, students might begin shaping ideas together. As Freire pointed out back in 1970, real learning happens when people face their conditions honestly. He believed lessons should stir courage among those pushed aside by power. His vision treated education like breathing space under pressure - room to speak, act, be.

These days, school helps tackle unfairness, bias, lack of money, and people being left out. Schools must do more than teach facts; they shape how students think deeply, act fairly, plus understand their place in community life (Giroux, 2020). With the world growing more tangled and linked across borders, learning that changes minds while answering real-life struggles matters now like never prior.

Literature Shapes How People Think About Themselves and Society

Stories open minds by showing different lives, struggles, and choices. Because of this, people begin to think more deeply about what they see around them. Narratives using irony or hidden meanings push against common beliefs quietly but firmly.



Readers start noticing unfair patterns when characters face hard truths. A novel might reveal inequality just by telling one person's day. This kind of learning happens without lectures or rules being stated outright. Empathy grows when someone walks alongside a character through hardship. Thoughtful writing makes space for doubt, which is where change often begins.

Reading stories shapes how people think about right and wrong, while building awareness of others' lives. Because it stretches empathy, fiction helps students notice unfair systems woven into everyday life. When readers connect with characters unlike themselves, they begin questioning taken-for-granted norms. This kind of thinking opens space for reimagining what justice might look like. As a result, classrooms using novels often become places where dialogue grows naturally out of emotional truth.

Paulo Freire Meets George Bernard Shaw in Modern Education

Paulo Freire along with George Bernard Shaw stood out when it comes to seeing school as a path to freedom. Talking about teaching, Freire laid it out clearly in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where conversation matters most - alongside questioning what you're taught and waking up to injustice. Information being poured into quiet students? That idea - he tore right through it. What he pushed instead was back-and-forth exchange, sparking awareness so people could rethink society's shape and step into changing it themselves (Freire, 1970).

Awakening minds was part of what drew Shaw to stories and theater. Plays like *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara* peeled back layers on class gaps, sexism, because power often hides behind rules. Instead of cheering systems as they are, his characters pushed watchers to doubt why things stay unchanged. Learning, he figured, must grow personal judgment plus ethical awareness - obedience without thought had little value.

Still today, Freire's thoughts echo alongside Shaw's when classrooms face unfairness, rigid instruction, or passive thinking. Conversations about power, voice, awareness, change, and learning that liberates keep pushing debates forward - especially where inclusion and shared knowledge matter most.

Purpose of the Study

Looking at Freire and Shaw side by side reveals a common thread - both value conversation as a path to freedom. Where one uses classrooms, the other uses plays, yet each pushes awareness that questions power. Instead of accepting norms, they invite people to think deeper about injustice.

Through teaching or theater, learning becomes more than facts - it turns into action. Though their tools differ, the goal stays similar: shake up thought, spark change. What emerges is not just theory but lived possibility. Their work shows meaning grows when minds engage, challenge, reshape.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: EDUCATION AS LIBERATION

2.1 Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy

Liberation sits at the heart of Paulo Freire's widely respected view on teaching. His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* took aim at school methods that see students simply absorbing facts like empty vessels. Instead of active thinking, those systems drop lessons into young minds - what he called a "banking concept" - with little room for debate or reflection (Freire, 1970). When classrooms become one-way streets, power stays unchallenged. Because people grow used to swallowing ideas whole, they rarely push back against norms handed down from above.

Out of step with tradition, Freire shaped "problem-posing education" - a way where teacher and learner move together through ideas. While thinking deeply about real life, people begin seeing patterns in what they've known firsthand. Rather than repeat answers without thought, students start building understanding themselves. Shaped by experience, the classroom turns into space for questioning. Change becomes possible when learning digs into unfair systems.

One key part of Freire's teaching method is open exchange. Not just talking - this kind of interaction builds on equal regard, thoughtful questioning, because it links growth with connection. When educators and students speak together like this, awareness grows about community struggles while answers emerge through joint effort. Real back-and-forth lifts people up, he said, yet top-down instruction strips dignity away, locking some into silence (Giroux, 2020).

Out of silence rises awareness - Freire named it conscientization - a sharp lens on injustice woven into daily life. Not just noticing, but questioning power gaps shapes how people see schools, laws, wages. When learning stirs thought like this, classrooms shift from routines to spaces where change begins. Marginalized groups gain clarity about control systems once seen as natural. This kind of teaching refuses passive reception; instead, it fuels movement toward fairness. Action follows insight, not as theory, but lived response. Freedom grows when knowledge is reclaimed, not handed down. A person stands taller having named what held them low.



2.2 George Bernard Shaw on Education

Education, for Shaw just as much as for Freire, opened paths out of mental confinement into broader societal change. Institutions stood in his crosshairs - clumsy, unyielding structures stomping down originality and free thought. His plays peeled back layers on how standard schooling favored fitting in over questioning deeply held beliefs.

Out of sharp wit and serious storytelling grew a way to make people think. Take *Pygmalion* or *Major Barbara* - those works poked at ranks, roles, who gets heard. Lines spoken on stage pushed listeners to doubt what they'd always been told. Instead of just laughs, he handed lessons through scenes that unsettled comfort. Stories, for him, had weight - they showed unfairness, then asked why it stayed.

Shaw made clear his belief that schools must free the mind, letting people think for themselves. Obedience without question? He rejected that flat out, favoring curiosity guided by reason instead. His writings pushed hard on one point - learning ought to shape citizens aware of injustice, ready to act. Talking openly, using stories and essays, he insisted growth comes when minds engage with society's flaws. Freire saw it much the same way: knowledge wakes people up, helps them challenge control, step into shaping a different world.

III. LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CRITIQUE

Stories and school texts have often acted like mirrors, showing unfair power patterns while pushing readers to question common beliefs. Not through teaching alone but also plays does criticism open doors to seeing more clearly, feeling stronger, taking change seriously. From this angle come voices - Paulo Freire, George Bernard Shaw - their words cut deep, shaking up control systems, sparking sharper thinking (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2020).

3.1 Freire's Educational Writings as Social Criticism

From the start, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* challenges how standard schooling often keeps people down by relying on strict control in classrooms. Instead of dialogue, knowledge gets deposited like money into empty accounts - students just sit, listen, absorb (Freire, 1970). This method, he says, locks teachers into authority roles while learners stay silent, shaped not to challenge but obey. Because of this pattern, schools begin reflecting wider social setups where those pushed aside learn to live within limits they're never meant to cross.

Out of silence, Freire pulls forward stories long ignored, placing them at the heart of how people learn. Because real teaching starts where students live, especially when society pushes them aside.

Their truths matter - when schools honor these, knowledge lifts lives instead of shaping obedience. So it happens: reading and writing shift, becoming acts charged with meaning, shaped by struggle and clarity (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

Reading, in Freire's view, opens doors to power structures hiding behind words. It goes beyond letters on paper - instead it pulls back the curtain on how society works. One begins to see what shapes jobs, laws, even beliefs. When people learn this kind of reading, they start noticing unfair patterns others ignore. Their classrooms turn into spaces where change takes root slowly. Education then becomes less about rules and more about freedom. Behind every lesson lies a chance to reshape life (Giroux, 2020).

3.2 Shaw's Drama as Social Commentary

George Bernard Shaw turns stories on stage into sharp looks at how unfair the world can be. Instead of just entertaining, his theater pieces open spaces for tough questions about who holds control, what is right, and why some stay left behind. People watching his work face ideas they might rather ignore - truths built into rules everyone follows without thinking.

What stands out in Shaw's plays is his focus on unequal social ranks. Through stories like *Pygmalion*, he questions Britain's fixed class structure - pointing at speech and behavior as tools that keep people in place (Shaw, 1913). Characters shift between layers of society, exposing how made-up these barriers really are.

Women in Shaw's plays often push back against old rules shaped by male control. Strong minds show up in characters who refuse to stay quiet just because society expects it. Instead of fitting in, they step outside lines drawn long ago. Moral masks slip when churches talk high but act low. Power dressed as faith gets called out across his stories. Freedom for thought and life choices rises through voices not meant to be ignored.

Money and fairness sit uneasy together, a pattern often shown in Shaw's work. Not just in background but front and center - think *Major Barbara* - where getting rich bumps against doing right (Shaw, 1905). Behind sharp jokes lies a closer look at who wins, who loses, why it keeps going that way. Laughing does not hide the cracks; instead, humor digs into them. Values shift depending on bank balance, a twist he draws out slowly. What seems solid bends when profit enters the room.

Comparative Insight

Awakening consciousness sits at the center of what drives both Freire and Shaw, though they work in separate lanes - one through classroom ideas, the other via theater.



Education, shaped by control - that is where Freire turns his lens, questioning who decides what gets taught. Meanwhile, Shaw pokes holes in society's mask using characters who reveal hidden class cracks. Their methods differ sharply yet point in a similar direction: learning, whether from books or plays, must spark recognition of deeper injustices (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2020).

Looking closely at things helps people grow. Freire finds this in conversations and reading lessons. Shaw spots it in bold plays full of sharp wit. One leads to awareness by talking, the other stirs thought with irony. Each path pushes learning that opens eyes to unfairness. Doing something about wrongs becomes part of the process then. Change grows when minds wake up.

IV. DIALOGUE AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Words strung between people do more than chat - they ignite thought, especially in classrooms or pages that aim to shift how we see the world. Thinkers like Paulo Freire and George Bernard Shaw saw talk not as idle sound, yet as a tool sharp enough to cut through lies built into society. Where silence accepts, speech questions - it pokes at power, stirs minds awake. Instead of just filling air, conversations become actions, small rebellions shaped by listening plus responding. One speaks, another answers, truth shifts slightly each turn. Learning hides inside these moments when voices meet without fear.

4.1 Dialogue in Freire's Pedagogy

Meaningful learning stands on conversation, within the ideas laid out in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Teachers ruling the room while learners sit silent - that kind of top-down instruction gets set aside by Freire. A different path opens up when educator and learner walk it together, building insight hand in hand. Respect flows both ways there, mixed with modesty, tied to a joint aim: seeing how society actually works (Freire, 1970).

Learning becomes shared when everyone's voice matters. Not passive receivers, students enter with stories shaped by where they're from. Power shifts happen quietly - knowledge stops being handed down like orders. Together people rethink what seems normal, digging into why things are the way they are. Truths get examined instead of swallowed whole.

One result of Freire's teaching through conversation is praxis - thinking deeply while also doing. Out of talk, people examine their own lives, question unfair patterns in society, yet move to reshape what they see around them. This loop, where thought meets effort, grows awareness that names injustice clearly.

Now able to spot control when it hides in routines, persons push back, shift ground. So speaking together turns into education that changes things, lets learners step forward as change makers (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2020).

4.2 Dialogue in Shaw's Plays

Unlike Freire's educational approach through conversation, Shaw crafts dialogue to reveal societal flaws while sparking thought. Through works like *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara*, tension unfolds in exchanges - clever, biting, layered. Characters question rigid class ideas not by preaching but by clashing in talk that stings. The words cut deeper than actions ever could. Ideas shift where voices meet head on.

Out of sharp words comes a kind of thinking, loud and clear - characters push against one another, testing beliefs about money, power, who leads, who follows. Because they argue so openly, listeners start noticing patterns they once ignored: gaps between what people claim and how they act. Behind polite titles and proper clothes, something stumbles - a mismatch, quiet but real, between rank and rightness.

Onstage, Shaw populates his plays with figures who embody clashing worldviews. Because they speak in ways that expose fault lines - old values versus new ideas, privilege against hardship, control contrasted with freedom - their words pull audiences into deeper thought. As those conflicts play out, people watching start questioning what they once took for granted. With sharp irony woven throughout, plus a satirical edge, he nudges them toward personal reflection. Assumptions waver when laughter carries truth (Innes, 2002).

Comparative Discussion

Though one shapes classrooms and the other scripts, both place conversation at the heart - not as ornament but engine. Where Freire builds lessons through shared speech, treating talk as equal ground for discovery, Shaw sculpts debates that crack open society's tensions. One leans on back-and-forth to awaken thought in students; the other engineers it to unsettle audiences. In classrooms or plays, exchange becomes a mirror held up not to nature - but power.

One way doesn't match the other, yet each builds sharper thinking and deeper personal insight. Through Freire, learning becomes a space where students challenge unfair systems and reshape their world. Shaw uses theater so viewers see injustice clearly and wrestle with ethical conflicts. Starting from different places, they arrive at the same idea - conversation can awaken awareness. Power shifts when people talk meaningfully about what matters.



V. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Change often walks hand in hand with learning, especially when life feels unfair or weighed down by power. Not just classrooms but stories on stage also show ways people break free and grow stronger together. Thinkers like Paulo Freire mixed teaching with awakening while George Bernard Shaw used sharp dialogue to question the status quo. Their ideas do not match perfectly yet they echo each other in surprising places. Learning becomes more than facts when it helps someone stand taller.

5.1 Freire's Vision of Transformative Education

Though Freire outlines a radical approach in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, he sees teaching not as control but as awakening power within people. When schools act like banks depositing facts into silent minds, they deepen inequality instead - this is what he warns against. Yet when learning becomes dialogue, students begin seeing their world clearly, then changing it. From this view, growth happens through reflection mixed with action, never just obedience (Freire, 1970).

Starting from Freire's view, education that empowers people helps them see how unfairness is built into society's structures. Because of this understanding - called conscientization - they begin noticing the hidden ways politics, money, and power shape daily life. When someone grasps these patterns, new possibilities open up: changing what once seemed fixed becomes thinkable. Such insight prepares a person to act, not just react, within movements reshaping the world around them.

Starting fresh, Freire sees freedom from injustice as something people reach together, never on their own. Because of this, learning should grow mutual support, joint effort, tied accountability between those involved. Out of conversation paired with action comes change shaped by many hands at once. Learning then becomes less about rising alone, more about lifting each other toward fairness. What emerges is schooling that helps form fairer, truly participatory communities.

5.2 Shaw's Vision of Social Reform

George Bernard Shaw saw change unfolding differently - through stories and stage. Where others looked to policy, he turned to satire. Smart people, in his view, must stand up when wrongs appear. They ask hard questions. Authority gets tested, not followed blindly. Reason matters more than tradition. Onstage, his figures refuse to blend in. They point at lies buried beneath rules. Institutions crack under their words. Habit gives way to honesty. Truth arrives loud, awkward, unwelcome.

It's the rigid rules of society that Shaw likes to challenge, using plays like *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara*. Not just one system comes under fire - class sits alongside money power, belief systems, even schools. Behind calm appearances of tradition, he shows unfairness quietly thriving. Order claimed by leaders might really be control wearing a moral mask. Watching his characters' change makes it hard to accept things simply because they've always been that way. Questioning what feels normal becomes almost unavoidable.

Change, in Shaw's view, starts inside each person - thinking for oneself matters most. Not just schooling, but real learning wakes up curiosity and doubt about power. A different kind of mind grows when ethics guide thought. Satire sharpens it - his plays prod people to challenge how things are done. Questioning norms isn't optional, he suggests; it shapes better communities. Growth happens only if minds stay open and hearts care beyond themselves.

Comparative Analysis

Even though Freire and Shaw come from separate academic worlds, their thinking lines up in key ways. Not accepting power without question ties them together, along with a shared push against structures blocking honest exploration. Where Freire takes aim at top-down teaching styles, Shaw focuses on fixed societal rules that restrict personal growth and ethical thought.

One idea shapes both their views - education should help people take part in changing the world. Not just talk, but act - that's how Freire sees growth, built through shared dialogue and real group effort. Meanwhile, Shaw finds power in stories that jolt the mind, using sharp humor and bold plays to spark thought. Change begins when learning pushes back on silence.

What stands out is how Freire and Shaw place people at the heart of change through learning and stories. Instead of seeing humans as stuck inside structures, they picture them shaping their own paths. Because of this view, teaching and books become ways to challenge unfair patterns. Change happens when readers and learners start questioning what seems fixed.

VI. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE IN EDUCATION

Nowadays schools are changing because people want fairer chances, wider access, better thinking about what counts as learning. Within such shifts, critical pedagogy stands out more often inside colleges - its roots lie in rejecting one-way teaching where facts get stored like money in a vault. Instead of silent listening, real exchange grows when instructor and learner both dig into ideas together (Freire, 1970).



Questioning common beliefs becomes normal, even expected. Classrooms shift slowly from places of delivery into zones of active doubt and discovery (Giroux, 2011).

Every learner matters when schools reflect the real world. Starting with who walks through the door, education shifts by honoring varied cultures, tongues, identities, skills, and life situations. When quiet voices speak up, fairness grows behind the scenes. Respect takes root not from slogans but from daily practice where differences aren't listed - they're lived. UNESCO noted this quietly back in 2015: inclusion builds democracy one classroom at a time.

Learning that puts students first strengthens this change by making them build understanding themselves. Lectures take a back seat when teachers guide group work, exploration, and hands-on tasks. Independence grows along with creative thinking and the ability to tackle challenges - key abilities needed today (Hattie, 2009).

These days, learning ties closely to fairness in society. Higher education must do more than train capable workers - it should help shape people ready to question deep-rooted unfairness, lack of resources, because systems often favor some over others. Looking at knowledge through a lens of awareness shows who holds influence, since insight rarely comes without control behind it (hooks, 1994).

Out here, knowing how to handle online spaces matters more than ever. Jumping through false claims means spotting what's real, staying sharp while moving around fake details. College work leans heavy on tech now, so handling data right makes a difference. Getting comfortable with software comes down to using it wisely, not just often. What counts shows up when writing papers or digging into sources without losing honesty.

Across Africa and beyond, old ways of teaching face pressure from unequal access, stiff curricula, and inherited colonial frameworks. Because of this shift, teacher training slowly changes direction - aiming at shaping mentors ready for deeper classroom change. Learning plans now seek local grounding, pulling in native insight while questioning long-standing Western control over what counts as knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). What once seemed fixed begins to bend under new demands.

From today's view, learning leans on questioning ideas, welcoming everyone, opening doors through teaching that shapes both people and communities. Though quiet at times, it shifts how lives unfold when classrooms become spaces where thought grows wild yet guided by fairness.

VII. CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

Even though Freire and Shaw shaped key ideas in education, their work runs into real-world hurdles once put into practice. His approach to teaching through questioning power draws sharp replies - some say it leans too hard into politics, turning classrooms into spaces for ideology instead of learning (Ellsworth, 1989). From another angle, raising awareness about oppression matters deeply, yet focusing there can sideline actual course content and clear academic aims. What feels empowering might weaken how much students grasp within standard school frameworks.

Still, Shaw's take on education often comes off as distant, shaped by a narrow academic lens. Because he questions systems so sharply, some find his views out of step with everyday struggles - especially among students outside wealthy Western circles. When real life feels far removed from theory, his solutions start to seem less useful everywhere.

When you try putting conversation-driven, student-led teaching into action, things get tough fast. Big groups of learners crowd the room, while fixed lesson plans box in flexibility - on top of that, tests rule everything. Teachers rarely get proper preparation, so jumping into open-ended methods feels like walking blindfolded. Time slips away quickly during lessons, plus schools seldom back these approaches with real help. Without steady backing or breathing room, keeping deep classroom talks alive becomes a constant uphill push.

Still, old-school education often pushes back on big changes. Power stacked from top to bottom shapes decisions in schools. Test-focused lessons stay common across classrooms. Teachers are seen as the only source of answers in many places. These ideas run deep especially where resources are limited.

Still, even with their flaws, Freire's and Shaw's thoughts hold weight today. Because of them, schools keep rethinking how to teach - focusing more on questioning, society, and giving students control over learning now.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Looking back, comparing Freire's critical teaching methods with Shaw's ideas on changing society shows how learning can spark deep thinking and shift communities. Though shaped by different times and beliefs, each thinker treats school not just as passing facts, yet as shaping people who see more clearly, act with care, because fairness matters. What stands out is their shared trust in classrooms that awaken minds instead of filling them.



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One sees overlap, yet differences stand out too. Dialogic teaching matters deeply to Freire, along with awakening awareness, breaking chains of oppression via shared learning paths. Rather than revolution, Shaw questions structures by pushing change from within, focusing on thoughtful people who resist dullness in ethics and ideas. His way leans into stories and big questions, less into classrooms, unlike Freire's clear push for political growth through lessons. Still, each places faith in learning, sharp thinking, reshaping how life works together.

When stories meet learning, something shifts. Questions rise where silence once lived. One begins to see how power shapes what we accept as normal. Thought stretches beyond old boundaries because of this. New ways of living come into view, slowly at first. Classrooms turn into places where people grow together, not just alone. Change starts to feel possible when minds connect like this. Ideas once locked inside now move freely between them.

What sticks around about Freire and Shaw shows up when people talk about teaching that questions power, reshapes what's taught in classrooms, challenges colonial legacies in schools. Across different parts of the world, their thinking still shapes how educators support student independence, act with integrity, notice injustice. Though time passes, these concepts stay rooted in varied learning spaces.

Ultimately, education must be understood as a transformative force that shapes individuals into critical, reflective, and socially responsible citizens. By fostering inquiry, dialogue, and awareness, it contributes to building more just, inclusive, and democratic societies.

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