



Responsible Educational Freedom in the Merdeka Curriculum: A Reconstruction of Ibn Sina's Educational Philosophy

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Abstract

Educational freedom is often associated with choice, autonomy, and reduced external control, yet these elements do not by themselves explain what makes freedom educationally meaningful. This study reconstructs Ibn Sina's educational philosophy to develop Responsible Educational Freedom (REF) and uses the framework to examine the normative orientation of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum. The study employs a conceptual-philosophical approach based on library research, drawing on Ibn Sina's psychological and metaphysical works, critical scholarship, contemporary literature on educational autonomy, and current curriculum regulations. Source attribution is treated as an analytical concern, particularly the disputed attribution of *al-Siyāsa*. The reconstruction identifies four interrelated dimensions of REF: intellectual agency, cultivation of capacities, ethical self-governance and responsibility, and teleological-spiritual orientation. These dimensions distinguish the availability of choice from the developed capacity to exercise freedom through rational judgment, responsibility, and orientation toward meaningful human formation. Applied to the Merdeka Curriculum, REF provides a philosophical reading of flexibility, differentiation, independence, and critical reasoning without implying historical influence from Ibn Sina. The study contributes a source-sensitive framework for examining educational freedom beyond autonomy-centered interpretations. REF remains conceptual and requires empirical investigation before further development as a pedagogical model or measurement framework.

Keywords: Ibn Sina, Responsible Educational Freedom, Merdeka Curriculum, learner autonomy, Islamic educational philosophy.

Introduction

Curriculum reforms increasingly create space for student agency, choice, flexibility, and independence. This direction has emerged partly from criticism of teacher-dominated instruction and rigid curricular structures. Freedom is therefore often understood as the capacity to manage one's learning and make decisions independently. Yet this understanding leaves a philosophical question unresolved. Greater control over learning does not by itself explain the purposes, limits, or responsibilities that accompany freedom. Sykes (2025) shows that *learner autonomy* rests on diverse conceptual foundations, with individual control constituting only one element. Student freedom also becomes too narrow when reduced to choice and *self-determination* (Lee, 2024). Identity, social relations, educational purposes, and processes of self-formation continue to shape the choices students make. The issue, then, is not simply how much freedom is provided. A more fundamental question concerns what kind of freedom carries educational value.

Kurikulum Merdeka brings this question into the Indonesian educational context. Its flexibility is intended to allow learning to respond to students' needs and developmental

differences. The curriculum also creates greater room for differentiation, reflection, and active participation. Recent policy, however, continues to place freedom alongside character formation and defined educational purposes. Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 12 of 2024 established the basic curriculum framework from early childhood through secondary education (Republic of Indonesia, 2024). It was subsequently amended by Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education No. 13 of 2025. The amendment reinforced curricular flexibility, deep learning as a pedagogical approach, and eight graduate-profile dimensions. Winarno et al. (2026) show that the Merdeka Curriculum integrates Pancasila more fully through these dimensions. Freedom is therefore not framed as the removal of students from the normative direction of education. A tension remains: students are expected to become independent while continuing to develop particular forms of character, competence, and responsibility.

Evidence from implementation suggests that autonomy does not operate automatically. Giving teachers greater decision-making space does not necessarily produce instruction that responds to students' needs. Changes in classroom practice continue to depend on guidance, institutional support, and teachers' pedagogical beliefs (Nihayah et al., 2023). A similar pattern appears in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education. Differentiated and project-based learning has been introduced, yet student learning independence remains difficult to develop in some settings (Yani et al., 2025). Wati et al. (2026), by contrast, report indications of greater initiative, self-regulation, reflection, and academic responsibility. These findings point to an important distinction. Independence develops under particular pedagogical conditions rather than simply following from the availability of choice. Educational freedom also requires the capacity to weigh alternatives, regulate action, and assume responsibility for learning decisions. The meaning of *merdeka* therefore warrants closer philosophical examination.

Islamic educational philosophy provides another basis for examining the relationship between freedom and human formation. Ibn Sina places the soul, intellect, action, and the ends of human life within an interconnected philosophical account. Education is not directed solely toward the acquisition of knowledge. Human development also concerns the cultivation of intellectual, moral, and practical capacities. Educational studies of Ibn Sina have addressed educational aims, curriculum, the role of the teacher, intellectual development, and the formation of learners (Handayani & Suyadi, 2019; Roji & El Husarri, 2021). More recent scholarship has treated the structure of the soul and rational capacity as important foundations for understanding human education (Saihu et al., 2024). This perspective opens another way of thinking about freedom. Educational guidance need not be treated as its opposite. Choice can remain part of the educational process, while its quality depends on the development of reason and the capacity to judge one's actions.

Recent philosophical work on freedom and responsibility in Ibn Sina comes closer to this problem. Kaukua (2022) shows that voluntary action is connected to reasons, beliefs, and the causal conditions within which decisions are formed. Human agency, on this account, cannot be equated with choice detached from all influence. Responsiveness to reasons is itself part of voluntary agency. This differs from an understanding of freedom defined merely by the absence of external constraint. The distinction matters educationally. Students may be given choices without yet possessing the capacity to assess them maturely. Freedom and the

development of capacities therefore cannot be separated. Education retains a formative role in developing the rational and moral capacities through which freedom can be exercised responsibly.

Much of the educational literature on Ibn Sina still proceeds by establishing the contemporary relevance of his thought. Educational aims, teaching methods, curriculum, interests, aptitudes, and the role of the teacher are frequently compared with present educational concerns. Such comparisons help identify elements of Ibn Sina's educational thought, but they do not always clarify how those elements relate philosophically. Problems of textual attribution have also received insufficient attention. A number of pedagogical discussions rely on *al-Siyāsa* or *Tadbīr al-manzil*, texts attributed to Ibn Sina. That attribution is not secure. Druart (2022) provides substantial textual grounds for questioning it. The issue has methodological consequences for educational scholarship. A reconstruction of Ibn Sina's thought cannot rest solely on the repetition of secondary educational literature. Works whose attribution is more firmly established need to provide the primary conceptual basis. Questions concerning the soul, intellect, action, goodness, and perfection can then be examined on firmer textual grounds.

What remains unresolved lies at the intersection of these bodies of literature. Studies of Ibn Sina have examined intellect, soul, educational aims, and human development. Research on *learner autonomy* has addressed control, agency, choice, and the formation of the learner as a subject. Studies of the Merdeka Curriculum have focused on flexibility, differentiation, independence, and the autonomy of teachers and students. Islamic humanist scholarship has examined human dignity, character, social responsibility, and religious orientation in student formation (Mujahid & Muqowim, 2026; Usman et al., 2017). Within the literature reviewed here, educational freedom has not yet been systematically reconstructed from Ibn Sina's psychology and metaphysics while controlling for problems of textual attribution. Nor has such a reconstruction been used to examine autonomy, differentiation, and student development in the current Merdeka Curriculum. This unresolved intersection motivates the present study.

This study reconstructs Responsible Educational Freedom as an interpretive framework grounded in Ibn Sina's philosophy of education. The term is not presented as a historical concept used by Ibn Sina himself. The framework is developed through the relationship among the rational soul, the cultivation of capacities, the regulation of action, responsibility, and orientation toward the good. Two questions guide the inquiry. First, how can Ibn Sina's accounts of the soul, intellect, moral agency, and human development be reconstructed into a conception of Responsible Educational Freedom? Second, how can this framework illuminate principles of autonomy, differentiation, and student development in the Merdeka Curriculum? The reconstruction examines the relationship among rational capacity, human development, the regulation of action, responsibility, and orientation toward the good. Freedom, on this account, is not treated as an educational end in itself. Its educational value depends on the learner's capacity to reason, develop human potential, assume responsibility for action, and orient freedom toward meaningful human formation.

Literature review

Ibn Sina's educational thought begins from an account of the human person, the soul, the intellect, and the direction of human development. Education concerns more than the

acquisition of knowledge. It also involves the cultivation of human capacities. Ibn Sina's psychological writings place the rational soul at the center of human reflection and action (Avicenna, 1952, 1959). Contemporary educational scholarship has subsequently examined this structure in relation to learner development (Saihu et al., 2024). Rational capacity enables human beings to assess reasons, consider possible actions, and determine how to respond to particular circumstances. Educational literature also connects intellectual development with the formation of human capacities (Handayani & Suyadi, 2019; Rohman, 2013; Sabarudin et al., 2024). Freedom, viewed from this perspective, cannot be reduced to the availability of choice. Choice itself depends on rational capacities that education helps to develop.

The development of intellect suggests that human potential is not fully actualized from the outset. Capacities develop through experience, knowledge, practice, and guidance. Handayani and Suyadi (2019) interpret Ibn Sina's levels of intellect as part of human intellectual development. This view has affinities with educational approaches that attend to differences in learners' capacities. The similarity should not be taken to mean that Ibn Sina formulated a modern theory of learner autonomy. Their philosophical foundations remain different. Rational and religious orientations are also treated as interrelated elements in interpretations of Ibn Sina's educational thought (Yuliani et al., 2023). The development of capacities remains connected to the quality of action and the direction of human development (M. I. Rahman & Shofiyah, 2019). Ibn Sina's metaphysical writings further relate goodness to what is desired and to the ends toward which human beings are directed (Avicenna, 2005). The actualization of human potential therefore remains connected to a normative orientation of life.

Educational interpretations of Ibn Sina also assign an important role to the teacher. Curricular content and teaching methods are commonly read in relation to learners' developmental stages and capacities. Zaini (2019) reconstructs Ibn Sina's curricular thought with attention to age and individual development. The role of the teacher has likewise been discussed in relation to learners' character, needs, and abilities (Rasyid, 2019). These accounts belong to an interpretive educational tradition that still requires careful scrutiny. Learners are not treated as entirely passive recipients, but freedom is not equated with release from pedagogical guidance either. Individual development takes place through the relationship between learners' capacities and the guidance available to them.

Textual attribution places an important limit on such interpretations. Several pedagogical ideas are frequently discussed through *al-Siyāsa* or *Tadbīr al-manzil*, texts that have long been attributed to Ibn Sina in educational literature. Medieval Islamic education itself developed through diverse texts, practices, and pedagogical settings that need to be read within their historical contexts (Ayyad, 2022). The attribution of *al-Siyāsa*, however, presents a more specific problem. Druart (2022) provides textual reasons for regarding its attribution to Ibn Sina as difficult to sustain. The consequences extend beyond authorship. Educational claims derived from the text also require greater caution. Psychological and metaphysical works whose attribution is more firmly established provide a more secure basis for reconstructing Ibn Sina's thought. Material drawn from *al-Siyāsa* therefore needs to remain supplementary rather than serving as uncontested primary evidence.

Contemporary debates on educational freedom raise related questions. *Learner autonomy* is no longer understood solely as control over the learning process. Sykes (2025) connects autonomy with identity, internalized values, and the learner's social and historical situation.

Choices are made within particular circumstances, while knowledge, experience, and pedagogical relationships shape the possibilities for action. The amount of choice available to students therefore provides only a partial account of freedom. A more fundamental concern is whether learners possess the capacity to use those choices meaningfully.

A similar criticism appears in discussions of student freedom and subject formation. Lee (2024) argues that *self-determination* alone does not fully explain student freedom. Education also shapes how learners understand themselves, knowledge, and their experiences of learning. Freedom therefore concerns the process of becoming a subject, not simply the right to select among alternatives. This position intersects with the problem examined here, although its normative basis should not be identified with Ibn Sina's philosophy. Bringing the two into dialogue helps clarify why agency requires developed capacities rather than only an expanded field of decision-making.

The relationship between freedom and responsibility receives further support from contemporary interpretations of Ibn Sina. Kaukua (2022) shows that voluntary action is connected to reasons, beliefs, purposes, and the conditions within which decisions are formed. Agency does not require human beings to be detached from every influence. Responsiveness to reasons is itself part of voluntary agency. This interpretation matters for education because students make decisions through knowledge and capacities that are still developing. A greater number of choices does not guarantee better judgment. Freedom requires the ability to assess reasons and assume responsibility for the actions that follow from them.

Islamic humanism provides another normative context for the problem. Human dignity, the development of potential, social responsibility, and religious orientation have been brought together within Islamic educational thought (Usman et al., 2017). More recent studies also connect human development with religious values and character formation (Mujahid & Muqowim, 2026; Panuntun et al., 2026). Religious humanism has also been examined in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction, where attention to learners is discussed alongside religious value formation (Rachman et al., 2023). These studies show that the relationship between humanistic concerns and Islamic values already has an established conceptual basis. The contribution of the present study therefore does not lie in combining Islam and humanism. The unresolved question concerns how educational freedom can preserve agency while remaining connected to responsibility and the normative direction of human development.

The Merdeka Curriculum provides the policy context in which this question can be examined. Its philosophical foundations shape how educational aims and curricular flexibility are interpreted in educational practice (A. Rahman & Robandi, 2024). Flexibility and differentiation create room for differences in learners' needs and capacities (Nahdhiah & Suciptaningsih, 2024). That room, however, remains situated within national educational aims and specified graduate-profile dimensions. Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education No. 13 of 2025 places independence alongside seven other dimensions: faith and piety toward God Almighty, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, health, and communication (Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Independence therefore does not stand as the sole educational aim. It is formulated alongside intellectual, social, personal, and normative qualities that the curriculum seeks to develop.

The pedagogical realization of autonomy remains less straightforward. Guidance, institutional support, and teachers' pedagogical beliefs can shape how autonomy is translated into classroom practice (Nihayah et al., 2023). Wati et al. (2026) identify indications of development in self-regulation, reflection, and academic responsibility. Other settings, however, continue to report difficulties in developing student independence (Yani et al., 2025). These findings point to a distinction between providing room for freedom and developing the capacity to use it responsibly. The literature reviewed here therefore does not reduce educational freedom to choice alone. Ibn Sina's thought provides a conceptual basis for examining this distinction through intellectual development, the cultivation of human capacities, responsibility for action, and orientation toward the good. Responsible Educational Freedom names the philosophical reconstruction developed in this study. It is not presented as a historical concept formulated by Ibn Sina.

Research method

This study adopts a conceptual-philosophical approach based on library research. The analysis reconstructs educational freedom through Ibn Sina's thought and then uses that reconstruction to critically examine the Merdeka Curriculum. Contemporary educational terms are not read directly into classical texts. Instead, conceptual relations are traced through Ibn Sina's discussions of the soul, intellect, action, responsibility, goodness, and human development. This approach is appropriate because the research questions are philosophical and interpretive rather than empirical. The study does not seek to measure the effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum implementation.

The corpus consists of primary works by Ibn Sina, critical scholarship, contemporary educational literature, and official policy documents. The primary sources include *Kitāb al-Najāt* through Rahman's translation (Avicenna, 1952), the psychological part of *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (Avicenna, 1959), and *The Metaphysics of The Healing* (Avicenna, 2005). These works are read together to examine the soul, rational capacity, action, and orientation toward the good. Kaukua (2022) supports the analysis of freedom and responsibility, while Druart (2022) is used to assess the attribution of *al-Siyāsa*. Because that attribution remains disputed, *al-Siyāsa* is not treated on the same evidential level as works more securely attributed to Ibn Sina. Primary texts provide the conceptual basis, critical scholarship controls questions of attribution and interpretation, and secondary educational literature supports contextual and comparative analysis.

Secondary sources were selected for their direct relevance to the research problem. Literature on Ibn Sina was prioritized when it addressed education, intellect, human development, curriculum, or pedagogical relations. Studies of educational freedom were selected when they examined *learner autonomy*, student freedom, agency, or responsibility. Literature on Islamic humanism was used to clarify the conceptual boundaries of the study rather than as its main theoretical framework. Research on the Merdeka Curriculum was included when it addressed flexibility, differentiation, autonomy, independence, or the philosophical foundations of the curriculum. Priority was given to articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, or SINTA, together with theoretical works that directly informed the argument. Older sources were retained when they continued to perform a theoretical function not adequately replaced by more recent studies.

The policy corpus comprises Permendikbudristek No. 12 of 2024 and Permendikdasmen No. 13 of 2025. The 2025 regulation is read as an amendment to the earlier framework. Using the current regulatory framework prevents the analysis from relying on policy terminology that has since changed. These documents are treated as normative texts containing curricular principles, educational aims, and expectations concerning student development. They are not used to evaluate implementation empirically. Empirical studies are instead used as contextual evidence for the practical tensions surrounding autonomy and independence in educational settings.

Analysis began by establishing the status and function of each source. Claims grounded in primary works were distinguished from interpretations found in secondary educational literature. Material derived from *al-Siyāsa* was treated cautiously because of the attribution problem identified by Druart (2022). This distinction prevents pedagogical ideas from being attributed directly to Ibn Sina without adequate source control. Historical claims were also kept separate from the contemporary philosophical reconstruction developed in this study.

Conceptual reconstruction then focused on the relations among rational capacity, the development of capacities, regulation of action, responsibility, and orientation toward the good. Each element was first examined within its philosophical context before being related to contemporary educational concerns. Modern concepts were not assumed to be present in Ibn Sina's texts simply because similar terms could be identified. The relations among these elements were subsequently synthesized into the interpretive framework termed Responsible Educational Freedom. The term is used as a contemporary philosophical reconstruction, not as a historical concept formulated by Ibn Sina.

The reconstructed framework was then used to read the Merdeka Curriculum normatively and philosophically. The analysis focused on autonomy, differentiation, flexibility, and student development. The eight graduate-profile dimensions introduced through Permendikdasmen No. 13 of 2025 were also examined as part of the curriculum's normative orientation. Particular attention was given to the relationship between the space available for choice and the educational purposes within which that choice is exercised. This analysis does not claim that the Merdeka Curriculum derives from Ibn Sina's philosophy. Rather, the reconstruction based on Ibn Sina is used as a critical lens for examining how educational freedom can be interpreted within the curriculum's present orientation.

The final analytical move placed the reconstruction in dialogue with contemporary literature on *learner autonomy*, student freedom, humanism, and responsibility. Comparison was used to identify areas of convergence, conceptual limits, and differences in normative foundations. Contemporary theories were not treated as equivalent to Ibn Sina's philosophy. Their role was to test the coherence and distinctiveness of the reconstructed position while preventing modern notions of autonomy from being projected retrospectively onto Ibn Sina.

Interpretive rigor was maintained through source hierarchy, attribution control, and comparison across different bodies of literature. Primary sources anchored the main philosophical claims. Secondary scholarship was used to examine interpretation, reception, and contemporary educational relevance. Official policy documents provided the basis for the analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum. Differences among sources were not forced into conceptual agreement when they arose from different philosophical foundations. The study

involved no human participants, animals, or personal data. Formal ethical approval was therefore not applicable.

Result/Findings

Analysis of the primary sources and critical scholarship produced a philosophical reconstruction termed Responsible Educational Freedom (REF). The term does not appear as a historical concept in Ibn Sina's works. The reconstruction was developed through the relationship among rational capacity, the cultivation of capacities, the regulation of action, responsibility, and orientation toward the good. Four dimensions emerged from this conceptual relationship: intellectual agency, cultivation of capacities, ethical self-governance and responsibility, and teleological-spiritual orientation. Together, these dimensions place educational freedom beyond the mere availability of choice. Its educational value depends on the learner's capacity to understand, assess, regulate, and direct action.

Intellectual Agency

The first dimension concerns the intellectual capacity involved in deliberating about action. Ibn Sina's psychology assigns a distinctive role to human rational capacity. *Kitāb al-Najāt* connects human action with "rational choice and rational deduction" (Avicenna, 1952, p. 25). This formulation indicates that rational action involves deliberation rather than a simple response to available alternatives. Choice acquires an agential dimension through its connection with reasoning.

Kaukua (2022) clarifies the relation between voluntary agency and responsiveness to reasons in Ibn Sina. Human action remains connected to beliefs, purposes, and particular causal conditions. Such conditions do not by themselves eliminate agency. The agent's capacity to respond to reasons is part of the explanation of voluntary action. Freedom, in this sense, need not be understood as the absence of influence. The quality of deliberation concerning reasons becomes more central.

This finding provides the basis for reconstructing *intellectual agency* in an educational context. The dimension refers to a learner's capacity to understand the reasons underlying learning decisions. A greater number of choices does not in itself indicate the development of intellectual agency. Choice acquires educational meaning when learners can consider reasons, purposes, and consequences. *Intellectual agency* therefore concerns the quality of deliberation that accompanies the exercise of freedom.

Cultivation of Capacities

The second dimension concerns the development of capacities that enable freedom to be exercised with increasing maturity. Ibn Sina's psychology presents a relationship between potentiality and the actualization of human capacities (Avicenna, 1952, 1959). Rational capacity is not treated as fully actualized from the outset. Intellectual development proceeds from potentiality toward increasingly actualized capacities.

This finding supports a reading of freedom as dependent on developed capacities. The availability of choice cannot be separated from the capacities learners already possess or are still developing. Equal access to choices does not necessarily produce decisions of equal

quality. Rational capacity shapes a person's ability to understand alternatives, assess reasons, and determine a course of action.

Cultivation of capacities is used here to describe the relationship between developing capacities and the exercise of freedom. The dimension does not claim that modern differentiated instruction was formulated by Ibn Sina. The connection is interpretive. Attention to differences in capacity provides a point of dialogue with contemporary educational approaches that recognize variation in learner development. The focus remains on the development of capacities through which freedom can be exercised more maturely.

Ethical Self-Governance and Responsibility

The third dimension concerns the regulation of action and responsibility. Ibn Sina distinguishes orientations of the soul associated with knowledge and action. *Kitāb al-Najāt* describes the soul as having “two faces” directed toward these two domains (Avicenna, 1952, p. 33). This structure does not constitute a modern educational theory of *self-regulation*. The relation between knowledge and action nevertheless provides a basis for reconstructing the connection between rational deliberation and the regulation of action.

Responsibility, on this reading, is not identical to compliance with external rules. Kaukua (2022) shows that voluntary action in Ibn Sina is connected to reasons to which an agent responds. Action can therefore be examined through the relationship between a decision and the reasons underlying it. Responsibility concerns more than whether an action conforms to an external requirement. The agent's relation to the reasons shaping the action also matters.

This relationship is interpreted pedagogically through *ethical self-governance and responsibility*. The dimension refers to a learner's capacity to connect decisions with reasons, regulate action, and accept responsibility for its consequences. Regulation of action is not understood as release from all external limits. The emphasis is instead on the development of internal regulation grounded in deliberation. Within this reconstruction, freedom and responsibility develop in relation to one another.

Teleological-Spiritual Orientation

The fourth dimension concerns the normative direction of freedom. Ibn Sina relates goodness to what is desired, while what is desired is connected to existence or the perfection of existence (Avicenna, 2005, p. 284). This relationship provides a teleological basis for examining the direction in which freedom is exercised. Action is therefore not situated within a wholly value-neutral domain.

Educational freedom, from this perspective, concerns more than the capacity to choose. The end toward which a choice is directed also becomes relevant. Agency can account for the capacity to make decisions, but it does not by itself explain the value of the ends selected. Ibn Sina's metaphysical account allows the relation between freedom and purpose to be read through orientation toward goodness and perfection.

The term *spiritual* is used here as an interpretive category developed in this study. It is not presented as a pedagogical term used directly by Ibn Sina. Its basis lies in the teleological and metaphysical orientation toward goodness and perfection. *Teleological-spiritual orientation* therefore marks the normative direction of educational freedom. This dimension

distinguishes REF from conceptions of freedom that remain neutral toward the ends of human development.

The four dimensions are summarized in Table 1. Their foundations draw on primary texts and critical interpretations used to clarify particular conceptual relations. The table does not reproduce historical categories formulated by Ibn Sina.

Table 1. Dimensions of Responsible Educational Freedom

Dimension	Textual and Interpretive Foundation	Educational Meaning	Interpretive Boundaries
Intellectual Agency	Rational soul, deliberation, rational choice, and action responsive to reasons (Avicenna, 1952; Kaukua, 2022)	Capacity to understand reasons, assess consequences, and make learning decisions through rational deliberation	Not equated with unrestricted freedom of choice or a historical theory of student agency in Ibn Sina
Cultivation of Capacities	Relationship between potentiality, actualization, and the development of rational capacities (Avicenna, 1952, 1959)	Freedom depends on the development of capacities that allow choice to be exercised with increasing maturity	Does not claim that modern differentiated instruction originated in Ibn Sina
Ethical Self-Governance and Responsibility	Relationship among knowledge, action, reasons, and voluntary agency (Avicenna, 1952; Kaukua, 2022)	Capacity to connect decisions with reasons, regulate action, and assume responsibility	<i>Self-governance</i> is a pedagogical reconstruction rather than a pedagogical term used directly by Ibn Sina
Teleological-Spiritual Orientation	Relationship among goodness, desire, existence, and perfection (Avicenna, 2005)	Freedom is read in relation to normative direction and the ends of human development	<i>Spiritual</i> is an interpretive category derived from a teleological-metaphysical orientation rather than a direct pedagogical term in Ibn Sina

The four dimensions do not operate independently. *Intellectual agency* concerns the capacity to consider reasons. *Cultivation of capacities* concerns the development required for choice to be exercised meaningfully. *Ethical self-governance and responsibility* connects deliberation with the regulation of action. *Teleological-spiritual orientation* introduces a normative direction for the exercise of freedom. Their relationship constitutes REF as a form of educational freedom organized around agency, capacity, responsibility, and purpose.

Reading the Merdeka Curriculum through Responsible Educational Freedom

The analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum identified several policy elements and educational practices that can be read in relation to Responsible Educational Freedom. This relationship is interpretive rather than historical. The Merdeka Curriculum is not treated as an

implementation of Ibn Sina's philosophy. REF is instead used as a philosophical lens for examining the relationship among spaces for freedom, student development, and the curriculum's normative orientation.

Flexibility is one principle that allows learning to be adjusted to the developmental needs of students (Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Implementation literature also identifies differentiation as a means of responding to differences in student needs and capacities (Nahdhiah & Suciptaningsih, 2024). These elements provide a point of dialogue with *cultivation of capacities*. The relationship lies in their attention to the development of capacities rather than in shared terminology or philosophical origins.

Independence (*kemandirian*) is one of the eight graduate-profile dimensions. Permendikdasmen No. 13 of 2025 places independence alongside faith and piety toward God Almighty, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, health, and communication (Republic of Indonesia, 2025). This arrangement indicates that independence is not treated as an isolated educational aim. It is positioned alongside intellectual, social, personal, and normative qualities.

Reading these elements through REF shows that spaces for choice and independence can be examined in relation to the capacities that support them. Flexibility alone does not indicate whether learners are able to assess available choices. Differentiation likewise does not by itself demonstrate the development of capacities when it amounts only to variation in learning activities. Independence takes on a different meaning when connected to the capacity to provide reasons, regulate action, and assume responsibility for decisions. The relationship between selected elements of the Merdeka Curriculum and REF is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Reading Selected Elements of the Merdeka Curriculum through Responsible Educational Freedom

Policy and Practice Element Examined	Reading through REF	Philosophical Meaning
Instructional flexibility (Republic of Indonesia, 2025)	<i>Cultivation of Capacities</i>	Flexibility can be read through the relationship between instructional adjustment and capacity development
Differentiation (Nahdhiah & Suciptaningsih, 2024)	<i>Cultivation of Capacities and Intellectual Agency</i>	Variation in learning can support capacity development and the ability to use choice
Independence (<i>kemandirian</i>) (Republic of Indonesia, 2025)	<i>Intellectual Agency and Ethical Self-Governance and Responsibility</i>	Independence can be read through the capacity to consider reasons and regulate action
Critical reasoning (Republic of Indonesia, 2025)	<i>Intellectual Agency</i>	Critical reasoning provides a point of dialogue with rational deliberative capacity
Faith and piety toward God Almighty (Republic of Indonesia, 2025)	<i>Teleological-Spiritual Orientation as a point of normative dialogue</i>	Educational orientation is not located within a value-neutral domain

Citizenship and collaboration (Republic of Indonesia, 2025)	<i>Ethical Self-Governance and Responsibility</i>	The exercise of freedom can be read in relation to responsibility and relations with others
Creativity (Republic of Indonesia, 2025)	<i>Intellectual Agency and Cultivation of Capacities</i>	Creativity provides a point of dialogue with agency and the development of capacities

Table 2 maps selected elements and is not intended to cover the entire structure of the Merdeka Curriculum. Health and communication are not mapped directly because their conceptual relationship with REF is less immediate. REF categories are also not stated explicitly in the regulation. The mapping represents a philosophical reading of selected elements that show analytical connections with the four dimensions of REF.

This reading of the Merdeka Curriculum identifies space for freedom, capacity development, and normative orientation within the current policy framework. Regulation alone, however, does not determine how these relations are realized in educational practice. The main finding lies in the distinction between the availability of spaces for freedom and the capacity to use freedom responsibly. REF places these two elements in relation to responsibility and purpose. Their pedagogical implications are examined further in the Discussion.

Discussion

Responsible Educational Freedom beyond Autonomy-Only Models

The findings suggest that educational freedom cannot be adequately explained by the number of choices available to learners. Responsible Educational Freedom places choice in relation to intellectual capacity, the development of capacities, the regulation of action, and normative ends. This shifts attention from freedom as a space for decision-making to freedom as a capacity that develops through education. Learners may have several alternatives while remaining unable to explain the reasons for their decisions. The presence of choice, therefore, does not necessarily indicate educationally mature freedom.

Debates on *learner autonomy* provide a close point of comparison. Autonomy is not determined only by a learner's ability to control the learning process. Identity, internalized values, and social-historical conditions also shape how spaces for decision-making are used (Sykes, 2025). REF intersects with this position because agency is not treated as independent of the learner's context. The difference lies in its emphasis on the development of capacities and the direction in which freedom is exercised. Social conditions help explain the circumstances within which decisions are made, whereas REF draws attention to the capacities and reasons that support those decisions.

A related criticism of choice-centered freedom appears in Lee (2024). Learners do not become free simply because they are given a wider range of alternatives. Education also shapes how they become subjects in relation to knowledge and learning experience. This argument intersects with REF, although the two approaches do not share the same normative foundation. The reconstruction developed here connects agency with capacity development, responsibility, and orientation toward the good. Freedom therefore concerns not only the opportunity to choose but also the formation of the capacity through which choices are made.

This position does not reject *learner autonomy*. Rather, REF questions interpretations of autonomy that reduce it to individual control or choice. Spaces for decision-making remain necessary because agency cannot develop without opportunities for its exercise. Yet freedom gains educational value when choice is accompanied by the capacity to understand reasons, consider consequences, and regulate action. The analytical focus consequently moves from how much choice is provided to what capacities are developed through the exercise of choice.

Dialogue with Humanistic and Emancipatory Traditions

Humanistic traditions offer one point of convergence through their attention to individual development and the quality of pedagogical relationships. Supportive teacher-student relationships are associated with stronger engagement and learning outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). Recent scholarship also continues to examine humanistic principles in tertiary writing assessment (Song & Mukundan, 2025). Person-centered environments may also create greater room for student responsibility and self-regulation (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009). REF intersects with these approaches in its concern for individual growth, but differs in how the direction of that growth is interpreted.

REF therefore should not be equated with *person-centered education*. Space for learner development remains important, but the development of capacities is considered together with responsibility and the purposes toward which action is directed. The educational question does not end with whether an environment supports individual growth. It also concerns what capacities are being developed and what ends are being formed through that process. The teleological dimension gives REF a different position from approaches that focus primarily on experience, engagement, and personal development.

Emancipatory traditions provide another point of comparison. Freirean thought places emancipation, *praxis*, and social transformation within the purposes of education, while contemporary scholarship continues to debate how these ideas should be interpreted and enacted (Ho & Tseng, 2022; Vlieghe, 2018). REF intersects with this tradition in rejecting the view of learners as entirely passive. Its analytical starting point, however, is different. REF does not begin primarily from social domination, but from rational capacity, action, responsibility, and valued ends. Educational freedom can therefore be examined through both emancipatory and developmental approaches without treating their philosophical foundations as identical.

Responsibility and the Merdeka Curriculum

Reading the Merdeka Curriculum through REF suggests that *merdeka* cannot be understood simply as a reduction of external control over learners. Flexibility and differentiation create room for adjusting learning experiences to student needs (Nahdhiah & Suciptaningsih, 2024). Their educational value nevertheless depends on what capacities are developed through that room for adjustment. Flexibility may make learning more responsive, but it does not automatically produce learners who can exercise freedom responsibly.

Curricular flexibility can also operate alongside institutional values, as shown in studies of the integration of Islamic school curricula with the Merdeka Curriculum (Rahmat et al., 2024). Empirical research on implementation points to a related problem. Teacher autonomy

requires guidance, support, and changes in pedagogical beliefs if it is to influence classroom practice (Nihayah et al., 2023). Student independence also develops unevenly across educational settings. Self-regulation, reflection, and academic responsibility have been reported in some contexts (Wati et al., 2026), while difficulties in developing independence remain evident in others (Yani et al., 2025). These findings indicate that providing room for freedom is not the same as developing the capacity to use it.

The mapping presented in the Findings raises a question that goes beyond terminological correspondence. Flexibility gains educational value when the space it creates contributes to the development of learners' capacities. Independence also cannot be identified simply with reduced teacher direction. REF draws attention to learners' capacity to give reasons, regulate action, and assume responsibility for their decisions. Critical reasoning becomes relevant because independent decision-making depends on deliberative capacity. This relationship does not make REF part of the Merdeka Curriculum. The framework is used as an external philosophical lens for examining the quality of freedom that the curriculum may support.

Current policy also places independence within a broader set of educational aims. Permendikdasmen No. 13 of 2025 positions independence alongside faith and piety toward God Almighty, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, health, and communication (Republic of Indonesia, 2025). This arrangement indicates that independence is not treated as a stand-alone aim. Reading the policy through REF highlights a philosophical implication of this arrangement: independence gains educational meaning when it is connected to intellectual capacity, responsibility, social relations, and a wider normative orientation.

The findings therefore allow a distinction between the availability of spaces for freedom and the development of the capacity to use freedom. Learners may be given opportunities to make decisions without yet being able to understand the reasons for those decisions or manage their consequences. This distinction helps interpret variations in findings on student independence across different contexts of Merdeka Curriculum implementation. A curriculum may create room for choice, but the quality of its use continues to depend on pedagogical processes.

Contribution to Contemporary Islamic Educational Thought

The contribution of this study does not lie in combining Islam and humanism. That relationship has already been developed in studies concerned with human dignity, the cultivation of potential, character formation, and religious orientation (Mujahid & Muqowim, 2026; Panuntun et al., 2026; Usman et al., 2017). Within the literature examined here, the specific contribution lies in reconstructing educational freedom through Ibn Sina's psychology and metaphysics. The rational soul, the development of capacities, voluntary action, responsibility, and orientation toward the good are brought together around a single question: what makes freedom educationally valuable?

This reconstruction avoids two conceptual reductions. Freedom is not treated as a threat to moral guidance, but neither is it accepted as a modern concept detached from normative commitments. REF places agency and value in a relationship that does not require one to cancel the other. Learners need opportunities to make decisions, but the capacity to use those opportunities also needs to be developed. Moral responsibility, in turn, is not understood solely

as conformity to external demands. It concerns the learner's developing ability to connect action with reasons that can be defended.

The teleological dimension makes this distinction clearer. Education does not end with capacities that can be used for any purpose whatsoever. Ibn Sina's discussion of goodness and perfection provides a basis for retaining the question of the direction of human development (Avicenna, 2005). REF does not translate this metaphysics directly into curricular requirements. Instead, the teleological dimension keeps the question of purpose within the concept of educational freedom. Agency without reflection on ends may remain procedurally open while lacking a clear normative direction.

This position allows Islamic educational thought to discuss freedom without forcing a choice between agency and moral formation. Their relationship can instead be understood developmentally. Guidance may still be needed under some conditions, but education should not aim to preserve dependence on external control. A more mature form of freedom appears when learners can regulate action through developed judgment. Freedom and responsibility, on this account, develop through the same educational process.

Source-Critical Contribution and Pedagogical Implications

A methodological contribution of the study lies in how claims of contemporary relevance are constructed from classical sources. A number of educational studies rely on *al-Siyāsa* when discussing child education, interests, abilities, and the role of the educator. The attribution problem surrounding this text requires greater caution. Druart (2022) argues that its attribution to Ibn Sina is difficult to sustain. The consequence is not merely philological. The textual basis for identifying a particular idea as part of "Ibn Sina's educational thought" also requires closer examination.

The contemporary relevance of classical philosophy cannot be established through similarity of terminology alone. Historical attribution needs to be distinguished from contemporary reconstruction. REF was developed through this distinction. Modern concepts were not first projected onto Ibn Sina's texts and then read back as historical categories. Instead, relations among rational capacity, the development of capacities, action, reasons, and goodness were examined before they were brought into dialogue with present educational concerns. This approach reduces the risk of anachronism while allowing classical philosophy to address contemporary curricular questions.

The pedagogical implications of REF can be seen most clearly in how freedom in learning is understood. Increasing the number of choices is insufficient when learners cannot explain the reasons for their selections. Differentiation also loses educational value if it results only in different tasks without a clear relation to capacity development. Independence cannot be identified simply with reduced teacher assistance. Attention needs to be given to whether learners can regulate their actions as external control is reduced. The teacher's role therefore need not be positioned as the opposite of freedom.

Pedagogical authority acquires a developmental function within this framework. Guidance may be necessary when learners' deliberative capacities are still developing, but it should not be used to preserve dependence. Support can be reduced as learners become increasingly able to assess reasons and regulate their own actions. Freedom and guidance are

therefore not mutually exclusive. The relevant pedagogical questions concern when guidance is needed, why it is given, and what developmental purpose it serves.

REF is not designed as an instructional procedure that can be applied mechanically in classrooms. It operates at a philosophical level by providing a way to examine the quality of freedom formed through education. Choice, differentiation, creativity, and independence may take different forms in practice. The analytical question remains whether such experiences develop judgment, expand capacities, strengthen responsibility, and orient freedom toward educationally valuable ends. The answer marks the difference between freedom that is merely available and freedom that has developed into the capacity to act responsibly.

Conclusion

This study shows that educational freedom cannot be understood adequately as the provision of choice or the reduction of external control over learners. Through a reconstruction of Ibn Sina's psychology and metaphysics, the study develops Responsible Educational Freedom (REF) as a contemporary philosophical framework. The term is not presented as a historical concept used by Ibn Sina. Instead, REF is constructed from the relationship among rational capacity, the development of capacities, the regulation of action, responsibility, and orientation toward the good. These relations form four dimensions: intellectual agency, cultivation of capacities, ethical self-governance and responsibility, and teleological-spiritual orientation.

The first research question is addressed by showing that educationally meaningful freedom cannot be separated from the development of learners' capacities. Choice becomes educationally valuable when learners are able to understand reasons, consider consequences, regulate action, and assume responsibility for their decisions. Educational guidance therefore need not be treated as the opposite of freedom. It can support the gradual development of more independent judgment when it is directed toward reducing dependence rather than preserving it.

The second research question is addressed through a philosophical reading of the Merdeka Curriculum. Flexibility, differentiation, independence (*kemandirian*), and critical reasoning provide points of dialogue with REF. This comparison does not imply that the Merdeka Curriculum was historically influenced by Ibn Sina. Rather, REF offers a lens for distinguishing between the availability of choice and the capacity to use choice responsibly. From this perspective, independence gains educational meaning when it is connected to rational judgment, responsibility, and the wider normative orientation of student development.

The study makes both theoretical and methodological contributions. Theoretically, REF offers a reconstruction of educational freedom through Ibn Sina's philosophy without reducing his thought to a modern theory of autonomy. Methodologically, the study distinguishes historical attribution from contemporary philosophical reconstruction. The attribution problem surrounding *al-Siyāsa* further shows that claims about Ibn Sina's educational thought require careful attention to their textual basis.

REF remains a conceptual and interpretive framework. Its four dimensions have not yet been tested empirically or operationalized into measurable indicators. Future research may examine how these dimensions appear in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and how they relate to classroom practices, teacher guidance, and student development. At this

stage, REF is best understood as a philosophical framework for distinguishing freedom that merely makes choice available from freedom that develops the capacity to act responsibly.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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