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Reconstructing the Mathematics Learning Paradigm through the Integration of Humanistic Values

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the reconstruction of the mathematics learning paradigm from the aspects of humanistic learning theory and local wisdom (Among System), together with its pedagogical implications. The discussion intends to provide insight into the development of teaching strategies that adapt to the transformation of the way students learn mathematics, move beyond mechanistic procedures, and construct a deep "meaning of learning." The paper, hence, covers a comprehensive overview of both global humanistic approaches, rooted in the views of Maslow, Rogers, Combs, and Freire, and the philosophical foundations of Ki Hajar Dewantara. The writing is anticipated to be helpful for future research which empirically focuses on humanizing mathematics classrooms and improving student well-being. As efforts are made in line with the aspirations of the Merdeka Curriculum to foster independent and critical learners, the integration of humanistic values is indicated to be superior to traditional mechanistic paradigms in overcoming mathematics anxiety and achieving holistic potential development.

Keyword: **Humanistic Learning Theory, Mathematics Education, Meaning of Learning, Merdeka Curriculum, Local Wisdom.**

INTRODUCTION

The current demands of the world of education have brought about major changes that require students to possess critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills,

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commonly known as the 4Cs. These skills have become essential as a response to complex modern developments, where mastery of subject matter alone is no longer sufficient without the ability to adapt and innovate (Lamberti, 2025). Modern education no longer focuses solely on the accumulation of knowledge but instead aims to develop the potential of every individual so that they are able to play a significant role in various fields of life (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024).

In the Indonesian context, this transformation is pursued through the Merdeka Curriculum, which is designed to change learning patterns from mere rote memorization and rigid procedures toward a more comprehensive and student-centered approach (Hasanuddin et al., 2023). This curriculum provides freedom for teachers to design learning that is in accordance with the needs and unique characteristics of each student (Masjudin, 2024). The focus on numeracy literacy and the Pancasila Student Profile indicates that mathematics is expected not only to build intellectual intelligence but also character and learning independence (Zainudin et al., 2025).

However, there is a real gap between this curricular vision and the reality in the classroom. Mathematics learning is still frequently trapped in old, mechanistic, and rigid patterns. The teaching process tends to be dominated by the one-way delivery of formulas that ignores the human side of the students, where they are positioned as passive objects prepared only to produce correct answers (Ghassani et al., 2023). Although innovative learning models have been recommended, in practice, these models often still focus on the achievement of numerical scores and ignore the feelings and the students' search for meaning in life. This gap causes mathematics to be regarded as a boring and frightening subject, which often triggers learning anxiety that inhibits student development (Widjajanti, 2019). Without the feeling that the learning process is important to them, the mathematical knowledge obtained becomes easily forgotten and useless for the students' lives (Li et al., 2021). The old paradigm fails to answer the fundamental question of why mathematics is useful for the students personally. Therefore, reconstructing the learning paradigm through the integration of humanistic values is an urgent need to unite mathematical logic with real life. This article discusses how the combination of humanistic learning values and local wisdom can become the basis for educational changes that educate while simultaneously respecting students as human beings (Farid et al., 2025).

OVERVIEW OF THE ESSENCE OF HUMANISTIC MATHEMATICS LEARNING

Humanistic mathematics learning is an approach that views education as a process of developing individual potential that includes aspects of thought, feeling, and action in a balanced manner. In this perspective, thinking ability is not separated from the students' emotional

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condition but is seen as a unified learning experience in the classroom (Qadry et al., 2021). The essence of this paradigm requires teachers to see students as discoverers who have uniqueness, feelings, and the ability to build their own understanding through a process of exploration (Hendriana et al., 2022).

In this paradigm shift, it is necessary to clarify the difference between learning that is merely connected logically and learning that has deep meaning for the students' lives. If the cognitivist view emphasizes the logical connection between concepts in the mind, then the humanistic view places meaning as an existential connection between the subject matter and the students' life goals and overall existence in the world (Habsy et al., 2023). The meaning of learning in mathematics is not merely understanding how to use a formula or solving a technical problem, but realizing how mathematical logic and precision contribute to the student's growth as a more mature and thoughtful individual. Content-wise, humanistic mathematics must be able to show a close relationship with daily life and aesthetic values (Susilo, 2004). The integration of various topics such as optimization in business, fractal patterns in art, or the use of scales in biology is vital so that students see mathematics as a functional and creative tool that helps them interpret real-world problems (Brown, 2004). By presenting these real-world contexts, mathematics is transformed from a collection of cold, memorized formulas into an empowering intellectual journey that encourages students to read and interpret the world around them, making the discipline feel less like an alien subject and more like an essential part of their human equipment for living.

Another important point is creating an open and friendly learning environment where every student feels valued. Recognition of diverse cultural backgrounds and different learning styles is a concrete form of respect for students in schools (Nugroho & Widjajanti, 2019). When students feel that their identity is recognized in the classroom, they will be more enthusiastic about learning, which will ultimately help them understand the material more deeply and meaningfully.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HUMANISTIC LEARNING THEORY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GLOBAL FIGURES

Abraham Maslow's Aspirations Regarding the Hierarchy of Needs and Potential Development in Mathematics Learning

The success of learning mathematics depends heavily on fulfilling the basic psychological needs of students before they are given difficult tasks. Based on Maslow's theory, students need

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a sense of security and a feeling of being accepted so that they can focus on learning to solve problems (Sumantri & Ahmad, 2019). If a student feels pressured by rigid assessments or is afraid of making mistakes, their mind will be distracted by that fear (Maula, 2021).

In the context of mathematics, the development of self-potential is seen as the highest level where students are able to use mathematical logic to demonstrate their unique abilities independently. Teachers play a critical role in creating a classroom atmosphere that values every student's progress, no matter how small, so that they feel confident as competent learners (Amalia & Munawir, 2022). When the basic needs for safety and appreciation are met, students are naturally driven by intrinsic motivation to explore more complex mathematical concepts without feeling forced or intimidated (Ursula, 2024). The application of Maslow's hierarchy requires a reconstruction of how teachers interact with students, placing emotional comfort and psychological safety as the prerequisites for any cognitive achievement. This means that a teacher must be highly sensitive to the students' levels of anxiety and be capable of providing the appropriate emotional scaffolding to help them overcome mental blocks. By humanizing these basic needs, mathematics learning is redefined from a cold academic obligation into a personal growth journey that strengthens the student's self-esteem. Furthermore, fulfilling the need for social recognition in the classroom allows for the development of a healthy collaborative culture where students no longer compete destructively for high scores but instead support each other in reaching a higher collective understanding (Farid et al., 2025). This holistic development ensures that mathematical success is not just a numerical achievement but a manifestation of the student feeling empowered and capable within their social and academic environment.

Principles of Freedom to Learn and Student Involvement According to the View of Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers emphasized the importance of student-centered learning through freedom in learning. He believed that every human being has a natural desire to grow, but this process is often hindered by school systems that are too controlling (Wang, 2024). In a humanistic mathematics class, students are given the freedom to find their own ways of solving problems without having to be dictated to by the teacher (Khatib et al., 2013).

True learning must involve the mind and feelings simultaneously so that a real change in attitude occurs. Rogers emphasized that knowledge that is only memorized without its usefulness being felt will not provide long-term benefits for students (Sumantri & Ahmad, 2019). Reconstructing the mathematics paradigm within this perspective demands that the teacher acts as an authentic and empathetic facilitator who accepts students unconditionally, creating a warm

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interpersonal relationship that triggers the student's courage to ask questions and explore ideas without fear of judgment (Jaki et al., 2025). This principle of freedom essentially returns the responsibility for the learning process to the student, which in turn fosters significant learning independence. When students are given the opportunity to choose the problem-solving strategies that fit their unique logic, they experience a profound sense of intellectual satisfaction and ownership over their knowledge (Feigenbaum, 2023). Learning by respecting this freedom is the key to creating lifelong learners who are capable of managing their own learning processes across various contexts in an ever-changing world (Amiruddin et al., 2023). Beyond autonomy, Rogers also highlights the importance of self-evaluation as part of the maturation process; in mathematics, this means students are encouraged to reflect on their own thinking patterns, identify their strengths, and consciously determine the necessary steps for improvement, guided by a teacher who provides supportive and honest feedback rather than rigid criticism.

The Role of Student Perception in Building Learning Meaning Based on Arthur Combs' Theory

Arthur Combs emphasized that a student's learning behavior is determined by the way they see themselves and their environment. The meaning of learning cannot be forced by the teacher but must be found by the student through experiences that are memorable to them (Juita et al., 2021). A good mathematics teacher must be able to understand the students' point of view so that the explanations provided feel useful for their lives.

Oftentimes, the failure of students to grasp mathematical concepts is rooted in a deep disconnection between the abstract material being taught and the reality of the world as perceived by the student. If algebraic symbols or geometric theorems are viewed as alien objects with no relevance to their existence, the student's motivation to learn will remain low because the subject feels entirely meaningless (Habsy et al., 2023). Based on Combs' theory, the primary task of the educator is to bridge these mathematical concepts with the student's personal experiences, facilitating a shift in perception from viewing mathematics as a burden to viewing it as a mind-enlightening tool for understanding life (Winarko & Budiwati, 2024). Reconstructing the paradigm through this perceptual lens places the understanding of the student's feelings and perspectives as the top priority in instructional design. The teacher no longer acts as a mere transmitter of data but as a perceptual facilitator who helps students reorganize and reframe their beliefs about their own mathematical abilities. By building a positive perception that every individual is valuable and capable of learning, the mental barriers that have historically locked away student potential can be gradually dismantled through a personal and gentle approach. This

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process of changing perception requires time, patience, and the consistent provision of successful learning experiences through small, meaningful achievements. When students see themselves succeeding in tasks that matter to them, their perception of mathematics shifts from one of fear and avoidance to one of curiosity and engagement (Noperta & Sari, 2023), ensuring that mathematics trains not just the brain to calculate but also the soul to face challenges with confidence.

Liberating Education in Paulo Freire's Dialogic Concept for Mathematics

Paulo Freire criticized the old school model that treated students like empty containers that only received information from the teacher (Freire et al., 2020). Changes in mathematics education demand the elimination of such rigid teaching methods and their replacement with active discussion between teachers and students (Firdaus & Mariyat, 2017). In this view, mathematics is taught as a tool for students to understand the reality of life around them critically.

Freire's teaching method encourages the creation of a classroom atmosphere where student questions are more valued than just ready-made answers available in books. Mathematics must be taught through real problem-solving that is close to the students' culture so that they can see the world more clearly through a mathematical lens, allowing them to use logic and data to analyze social issues and plan for a better future (Ayyubi et al., 2024). In this context, mathematics becomes a liberating tool that empowers students to respond logically and critically to the problems they face in their daily environments. The implementation of this critical pedagogy allows students to see the utility of mathematical knowledge in dismantling injustices or managing resources more equitably. The teacher serves as a thinking partner who accompanies the students in their process of inquiry, rather than a knowledge dictator who stifles independent thought (Hendriana et al., 2022). Through the process of mutual questioning and collaborative problem-solving, students are trained to become independent, free subjects who possess a strong awareness of their existential role as responsible members of society. The ultimate goal is conscientization or awakening, where students realize that mathematics is not a neutral or sterile subject, but one with real political and social dimensions that can be used to read and even rewrite the world around them (Vimbelo & Bayaga, 2024).

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Integration of Humanistic Values in Ki Hajar Dewantara's Educational Philosophy through the Among System

Efforts to change the mathematics paradigm in Indonesia become stronger by incorporating Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts on liberating education. He believed that education is an effort to humanize children physically and mentally, where the teaching method must be adjusted to the students' background and environmental developments (Anggraini & Wiryanto, 2022). The core of this approach is a change in the teacher's role from a classroom ruler to a guide of the child's potential.

The Among System concept serves as a profound ethical guide for mathematics teachers in Indonesia, operationalized through its three core pillars: *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* (leading by example), *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa* (building spirit and initiative in the middle), and *Tut Wuri Handayani* (providing encouragement for autonomy from behind). This philosophy teaches that a teacher must first be an exemplar of integrity and intellectual curiosity, then become a catalyst who sparks the students' desire for exploration when standing among them, and finally have the courage to release control so that students can grow independently (Ducha, 2016). This synergy is perfectly aligned with the humanistic facilitation models seen in global figures, yet it is deeply rooted in the unique sociocultural values of the Indonesian nation (Idris, 2014). Mathematics education within this framework aims to guide every inherent potential within the child, ensuring they achieve a high level of independence as both individuals and citizens. By prioritizing the principle of freedom with responsibility, mathematics is transformed into a character-building tool that produces students who are not only logically sharp but also ethically grounded, polite, and caring toward others (Sabaruddin, 2020). Integrating Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy ensures that the reconstruction of Indonesian mathematics is not just an imitation of Western theories, but a genuine revival of the spirit of humanity within the national education system, allowing students to find deep fulfillment and existential comfort in their academic journey (Zhang et al., 2024).

SYNTHESIS OF BASIC HUMANISTIC EDUCATION VALUES IN MATHEMATICS LEARNING

The process of shifting the mathematics paradigm is based on a combination of various basic values that see students as human beings who have the potential to continue developing holistically. The first and most primary value is respect for student dignity, where every student is valued as a unique and precious individual (Rogers, 1969). In the mathematics classroom, this

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value is visible when the teacher values every student's idea and way of thinking, so that a good relationship becomes the basis for true learning success (Maslow, 1970).

Based on an in-depth review of the views of Maslow, Rogers, Combs, and Freire, the following table summarizes the core humanistic values integrated into the mathematics learning paradigm:

Table 1. Core Humanistic Values and Pedagogical Implications in Mathematics Learning

No	Humanistic Value	Pedagogical Implication in Mathematics
1	Respect for Human Dignity	Valuing students as unique individuals and respecting their diverse thought processes.
2	Responsible Freedom	Providing students with choices in problem-solving strategies and learning paths.
3	Emotional Involvement	Ensuring students are mentally and emotionally engaged during mathematical activities.
4	Optimal Potential Development	Focusing on the holistic growth of the student beyond just cognitive scores.
5	Empathy for Experiences	Acknowledging students' cultural backgrounds and personal life contexts.
6	Authenticity and Honesty	Building a sincere and transparent relationship between the teacher and the students.
7	Psychological Comfort	Creating a safe classroom environment to minimize mathematics anxiety.
8	Lifelong Learning	Viewing mathematics as a natural tool for understanding life throughout one's existence.

These values are operationalized to bridge the gap between abstract mathematical concepts and human existence, ensuring that the classroom becomes a space for genuine human growth. Respect for dignity ensures that each student's unique logic is acknowledged as valid, giving them the confidence to explore creative solutions without fear of dismissal. Providing freedom within the learning process allows students to take full responsibility for their intellectual choices, transforming them from passive recipients of information into active, independent thinkers who understand the logic of their own actions. Furthermore, by addressing the affective domain through emotional involvement and psychological comfort, the teacher can effectively

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mitigate the "cold" and intimidating nature traditionally associated with mathematics, turning the classroom into a supportive community. Ultimately, when educators embody authenticity and empathy, students begin to perceive mathematics not just as a set of rules to be followed, but as a functional and meaningful way of thinking that contributes to their maturity, self-usefulness, and long-term existential well-being. This synthesis ensures that the integration of humanistic values is not merely theoretical, but a practical foundation for a classroom culture where every student is empowered to find personal relevance in the logic of numbers and patterns.

All these basic values are the foundation for fostering true meaning of learning. The meaning of learning in mathematics is no longer just a cognitive understanding of numbers, but the emotional and mental awareness of students that mathematics is an important part of their life journey toward maturity and self-usefulness.

DISCUSSION

Reconstructing the mathematics paradigm through the integration of humanistic values is a real answer to the problem of rigid and boring classrooms, where fostering the meaning of learning becomes the key to the success of the curriculum transition in Indonesia. As found in the study by Farid et al. (2025), when students realize the relationship between numbers and their life goals, their motivation to learn increases naturally, indicating that reconstructing the paradigm is not just about changing how teachers speak but about changing how students view themselves through mathematics. The integration between global humanistic values, rooted in the views of Rogers (1969), Maslow (1970), Combs (1979), and Freire (1970), with Ki Hajar Dewantara's Among System provides a distinctiveness to the education model in Indonesia, where if Rogers' theory emphasizes freedom, then the *Tut Wuri Handayani* pillar provides wise boundaries so that this freedom remains responsible in fostering the growth of the Pancasila Student Profile, an individual who is independent yet critically minded (Anggraini & Wiryanto, 2022). This discussion also strengthens the opinion of Zainudin et al. (2025) that freedom of learning will not be achieved if students still feel emotionally threatened by assessment standards that only chase cognitive numbers, however, the application of this new paradigm still faces challenges such as the tension between humanism’s idealism and the demands of the school system (Perni, 2019; Denis et al., 2025). Therefore, the relevance of this paradigm reconstruction demands broader policy support where student psychological comfort is recognized as an indicator of learning success equal to test scores (Maula, 2021; Widjajanti, 2019), allowing mathematics to truly become a human activity

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that helps every individual achieve a better and more useful life for society without excessive pressure.

CONCLUSION

The shift in the mathematics learning paradigm through the combination of humanistic values indicates that mathematics must be returned as a human activity involving the whole student through the combination of global humanistic learning values and the Among System philosophy which offers a solution to overcome the fear of learning that has been experienced by many students in secondary schools. The fundamental thing that needs to be considered in this new perspective is the importance of fostering the meaning of learning for students, where mathematics is no longer seen as a collection of foreign numbers but as an important part of their life experience toward maturity that helps them achieve a good, useful, and dignified life. This article concludes that a change to a teaching method that is cognitively intelligent yet emotionally friendly to students is an urgent need for today's education where future success in learning mathematics will no longer be measured by test scores alone, but by the extent to which students feel empowered, independent, and find the benefit of learning through a process that respects human dignity. The relevance of this perspective to the Merdeka Curriculum becomes an important opportunity for teachers to change their role into guides of student potential who are able to unite mental intelligence with character goodness in accordance with the demands of the times in the 21st century without abandoning the nation's noble and inclusive cultural identity for all learners.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should move toward the development of broader pedagogical frameworks that operationalize humanistic principles in diverse classroom settings, ensuring that the integration of logic and emotion becomes a systematic standard rather than an isolated teacher initiative. There is a profound need to investigate the longitudinal impact of humanistic classroom environments on students' mathematical identities and their long-term persistence in quantitative fields, particularly for those who have historically faced chronic anxiety. Furthermore, researchers should prioritize exploring how teacher professional development can be reoriented to prioritize "affective guidance" and empathy, moving beyond technical pedagogical training to embrace the spiritual and emotional roles inherent in the Among System. Another critical area involves the creation of holistic evaluative tools that can capture qualitative shifts in a student’s

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"existential well-being" and their personal sense of the "meaning of learning," providing a more humane alternative to standard numerical testing. Lastly, as digital education becomes more prevalent, future inquiries must address how technology can be humanized to foster authentic interpersonal connections and cultural relevance, ensuring that the "soul" of education is not lost in the push for automation and algorithmic efficiency in mathematics learning.

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