

Rethinking Formal Education through Ivan Illich's Concept of Deschooling Society

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ABSTRACT: The formalisation of modern education has increasingly contributed to the dehumanisation of the learning process and fostered bureaucratic dependence on formal qualifications and certification. This study critically analyses the implementation of transformative pedagogy at Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM) in Yogyakarta as a practical manifestation of Ivan Illich's radical critique of institutionalised education in *Deschooling Society*. This qualitative study employed a systematic literature review of relevant academic literature retrieved from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), followed by qualitative content analysis. The findings indicate that SALAM has deconstructed conventional classroom practices by promoting the principle of "Independent Thinking," redefining facilitators as learning companions rather than one-way instructors, and developing a community-based learning ecosystem. Its operational curriculum is implemented through a "Learning Cycle" model and independent inquiry into real-world issues, including food, health, environmental, and socio-cultural concerns, while integrating local wisdom (*titen*) and narrative-based evaluation. Nevertheless, this alternative education model faces several challenges, including scalability, regulatory barriers related to the recognition of qualifications through Packages A/B/C, the sustainability of self-funded operations, and the need to strengthen facilitator capacity. The findings demonstrate how the deconstruction of conventional schooling can be translated into autonomous and community-based "learning webs" that reconnect education with everyday life and learner autonomy.

KEYWORDS: Deschooling society; Ivan Illich; learning webs; Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM).

1. Introduction

Formal education in the modern era faces fundamental institutional challenges, particularly as the distinction between institutionalised teaching and meaningful learning has become increasingly blurred. The dehumanisation of the school system has been associated with the assumption that greater institutional intervention will necessarily produce higher levels of individual competence [1]. Educational institutions have consequently been criticised for shifting from spaces of intellectual liberation towards bureaucratic structures that increasingly shape and constrain society's understanding of legitimate learning [2]. This institutionalisation may foster dependence on administrative credentials, such as diplomas and certificates, which

do not always adequately represent an individual's actual knowledge and capabilities. These concerns highlight the need to reconsider structural assumptions underlying conventional education, particularly where standardised and compulsory curricula may restrict learner autonomy, creativity, and critical thinking.

Alternative approaches to conventional schooling have been widely discussed, including comparative examinations of Ivan Illich's radical concept of "deschooling" and Ki Hajar Dewantara's humanistic philosophy of education. Previous studies have indicated that both Illich and Dewantara criticised the inability of conventional education to adequately respond to learners' and society's needs, particularly its potential to constrain creativity and intellectual independence [3]. However, their proposed solutions differed substantially. Illich advocated a radical transformation beyond institutionalised schooling, whereas Dewantara adopted a more integrative approach through the concepts of *Tri Pusat Pendidikan* and the *Among System* [4]. Within the Indonesian context, the principles of learner autonomy and community-based education can be observed in the educational practices of Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM) in Yogyakarta. SALAM employs a curriculum based on learning cycles and independent inquiry, positioning learners as active participants in constructing their own learning experiences [5]. Through this approach, education is contextualised within everyday experiences and oriented towards the development of creative and critical thinking.

Although previous studies have identified various consequences of the bureaucratisation, institutionalisation, and commercialisation of formal education, much of the existing literature has focused on reforms within the conventional schooling system, such as modifications to teaching methods, curricula, and educational financing. Less attention has been given to how Illich's critique of institutionalised education can be interpreted through contemporary community-based educational practices. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between Illich's concept of *Deschooling Society* and the transformative pedagogical practices implemented at SALAM [2]. In particular, the study explores the reconstruction of the learning ecosystem through autonomous and community-oriented "learning webs," in which learning is shaped through interaction, experience, and engagement with real-life issues rather than being confined to conventional classroom structures.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending discussions of Illich's educational philosophy by examining its relevance to contemporary alternative education practices. From a practical perspective, the study provides insights for educators and policymakers seeking to develop educational environments that are more flexible, participatory, context-sensitive, and responsive to learners' needs. Accordingly, this study aims to critically analyse the implementation of transformative pedagogy at SALAM and examine the extent to which its educational practices reflect Ivan Illich's critique of conventional schooling and his concept of a *Deschooling Society*.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design.

This study employed a qualitative research approach based on a systematically designed literature review to examine the relationship between Ivan Illich's concept of *Deschooling Society* and the transformative educational practices implemented at Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM). A literature review is a research method in which a particular topic or phenomenon

is systematically examined through relevant bibliographic sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, dissertations, and other scholarly documents [6]. This approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting philosophical concepts and examining their application within an alternative educational setting rather than collecting primary quantitative data. The review was designed around two interconnected dimensions. The first concerned the theoretical foundations of alternative and transformative education, particularly Illich's critique of institutionalised schooling, learning webs, learner autonomy, experiential learning, and critical pedagogy. The second focused on the implementation of these principles within SALAM, particularly its learning cycle, research-based curriculum, independent learning practices, facilitator roles, and community-based learning environment. Integrating these two dimensions enabled the study to examine the extent to which SALAM's educational practices reflected or differed from Illich's theoretical propositions.

2.2. Literature Search Strategy.

The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). These platforms were used to identify theoretical literature and empirical studies relevant to alternative education, transformative pedagogy, and SALAM. The search process used combinations of keywords such as "Ivan Illich," "Deschooling Society," "learning webs," "transformative pedagogy," "alternative education," "independent learning," "experiential learning," "Sanggar Anak Alam," and "SALAM Yogyakarta." The search strategy was structured to capture both foundational theoretical literature and contemporary empirical studies. Seminal works were used to establish the theoretical foundations of deschooling, critical pedagogy, experiential education, and Indonesian educational philosophy. More recent studies were subsequently examined to identify how these concepts have been interpreted and implemented within contemporary alternative educational practices.

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

The literature selection process followed predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to maintain the relevance and academic quality of the reviewed sources. Sources were included when they addressed at least one of the principal themes of the study, including Illich's educational philosophy, deschooling, learning autonomy, critical or transformative pedagogy, experiential education, community-based learning, or educational practices at SALAM. Eligible sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, theses, dissertations, and seminal theoretical works directly relevant to the conceptual framework. Priority was given to literature published within the last ten years to ensure that the analysis reflected contemporary educational debates. However, older foundational works were retained when they represented essential theoretical references, particularly the seminal works underpinning *Deschooling Society*, experiential education, critical pedagogy, and Indonesian educational philosophy. Publications were excluded when they lacked substantial relevance to the research objectives, provided insufficient theoretical or empirical information, duplicated information available in more complete sources, or lacked adequate academic credibility. The selection process therefore sought to balance contemporary evidence with foundational theoretical literature.

2.4. Literature Characteristics and Theoretical Framework.

The selected literature represented several complementary theoretical perspectives. Illich's critique of institutionalised schooling provided the principal analytical framework, while literature on critical pedagogy, experiential learning, Indonesian humanistic education, learner autonomy, and community-based education was used to broaden the interpretation. Studies specifically addressing SALAM provided empirical and contextual evidence concerning how these principles were translated into educational practice (Table 1).

Table 1. Synthesis of Key Literature Included in the Review.

Key Concepts/Theories	Context of Study	Key Findings	Relevance to Illich's Deschooling Framework	Ref.
Deschooling, learning webs, institutional monopoly	Critical theory/philosophy of education	Formal schooling can monopolise legitimate learning and create dependence on institutional structures.	Provides the principal framework for analysing the deconstruction of schooling and the development of autonomous learning networks.	[2]
Problem-posing education, conscientisation	Critical pedagogy and education for liberation	Rejects the "banking model" of education and promotes dialogue, participation, and equality in learning.	Supports the interpretation of learner liberation from hierarchical and one-way teaching practices.	[7]
Experiential learning, pragmatism	Progressive education	Learning develops through direct experience, inquiry, and reflection.	Provides a conceptual basis for understanding learning through empirical investigation and real-life experiences.	[8]
<i>Sistem Among, Tri Pusat Pendidikan</i>	Indonesian educational philosophy	Emphasises intellectual, personal, and physical freedom through guidance and nurturing.	Provides a culturally grounded perspective that complements learner autonomy and community-based education.	[9]
Educational critique, Indigenous learning	Global alternative education	Community-based educational practices can strengthen intrinsic motivation and contextual learning.	Supports the relevance of autonomous and community-based learning beyond conventional institutional structures.	[10]
Independent thinking, learning autonomy	Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM)	SALAM reduces dependence on standardised learning and encourages independent exploration.	Demonstrates practical characteristics comparable to Illich's concept of autonomous learning networks.	[11]
Learning cycle, curriculum management	SALAM Yogyakarta	The learning cycle provides flexibility for integrating research based on learners' interests.	Demonstrates the operationalisation of autonomous learning within a structured learning process.	[5]
Research curriculum, creative thinking	PKBM SALAM	Research based on local contexts develops critical thinking and natural problem-solving skills.	Illustrates the use of the real environment and community as primary learning resources.	[4]

As shown in Table 1, the literature was organised around a progression from theoretical critiques of conventional schooling to empirical studies of alternative educational practices. Rather than treating each theoretical perspective independently, the review examined their conceptual intersections, particularly learner autonomy, experiential learning, community participation, freedom from rigid instructional hierarchies, and the use of real-life environments as learning resources. Illich's framework remained the principal analytical lens, while the other perspectives were used to contextualise and critically interpret the educational practices observed at SALAM.

2.5. Data Extraction and Categorisation.

Relevant information from the selected literature was extracted and organised according to the main analytical themes of the study. The extraction process focused on the critique of formal schooling, learner autonomy, facilitator roles, learning networks, experiential learning, community participation, curriculum flexibility, assessment practices, and institutional challenges. The extracted information was subsequently reduced and categorised to identify recurring concepts across the literature. Particular attention was given to evidence describing how SALAM organised learning activities, positioned learners and facilitators, incorporated community resources, implemented research-based learning, and evaluated learning outcomes. This process allowed theoretical propositions from Illich and related educational thinkers to be systematically compared with reported practices at SALAM.

2.6. Qualitative Content Analysis.

The selected literature was synthesised using qualitative content analysis. The analytical process consisted of three main stages: data reduction, thematic categorisation, and interpretative synthesis. First, information unrelated to the study objectives was removed, while statements and findings concerning the central research themes were retained. Second, the relevant information was grouped into thematic categories reflecting Illich's critique of conventional schooling and the characteristics of alternative educational practice. The categories were then compared across the selected literature to identify similarities, differences, recurring patterns, and conceptual relationships. Particular attention was given to determining whether the educational practices reported at SALAM represented direct parallels with Illich's ideas or reflected context-specific adaptations influenced by Indonesian educational philosophy and local community practices. This distinction was important because the analysis did not assume that SALAM represented a complete implementation of Illich's model. Finally, an interpretative synthesis was undertaken to connect the theoretical and empirical findings. The analysis examined how concepts such as learning webs, learner autonomy, facilitator-based learning, experiential inquiry, and community-based education were reflected in SALAM's educational practices. The resulting themes formed the basis for the Results and Discussion section and enabled a structured assessment of the relationship between Illich's theoretical critique and contemporary alternative educational practice.

2.7. Analytical Rigor.

To strengthen analytical consistency, the interpretation was based on comparisons across multiple theoretical and empirical sources rather than relying on a single publication. Foundational theoretical literature was used to establish the conceptual meaning of deschooling and autonomous learning, while recent empirical studies were used to examine their relevance to SALAM. Contrasting perspectives were retained where appropriate to avoid interpreting all alternative educational practices as direct manifestations of Illich's philosophy. The review also distinguished between theoretical interpretation and reported educational practice. This distinction reduced the risk of attributing concepts to SALAM that were not explicitly supported by the reviewed literature. Through systematic categorisation, cross-source

comparison, and interpretative synthesis, the methodological process was designed to provide a transparent and logically structured basis for examining SALAM through the conceptual framework of *Deschooling Society*.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Ivan Illich's Critique of Formal Schools.

3.1.1. Institutionalisation of Learning.

Ivan Illich's critique of formal education begins with the argument that the institutionalisation of education transforms learning from a natural and continuous human activity into a service controlled by formal organisations. As illustrated in Figure 1, Illich's critique provides the conceptual foundation for understanding the transition from institutionalised schooling towards an alternative learning ecosystem based on autonomy, community participation, and learning networks. The framework also provides a basis for examining how these principles are reflected in the educational practices implemented at SALAM.

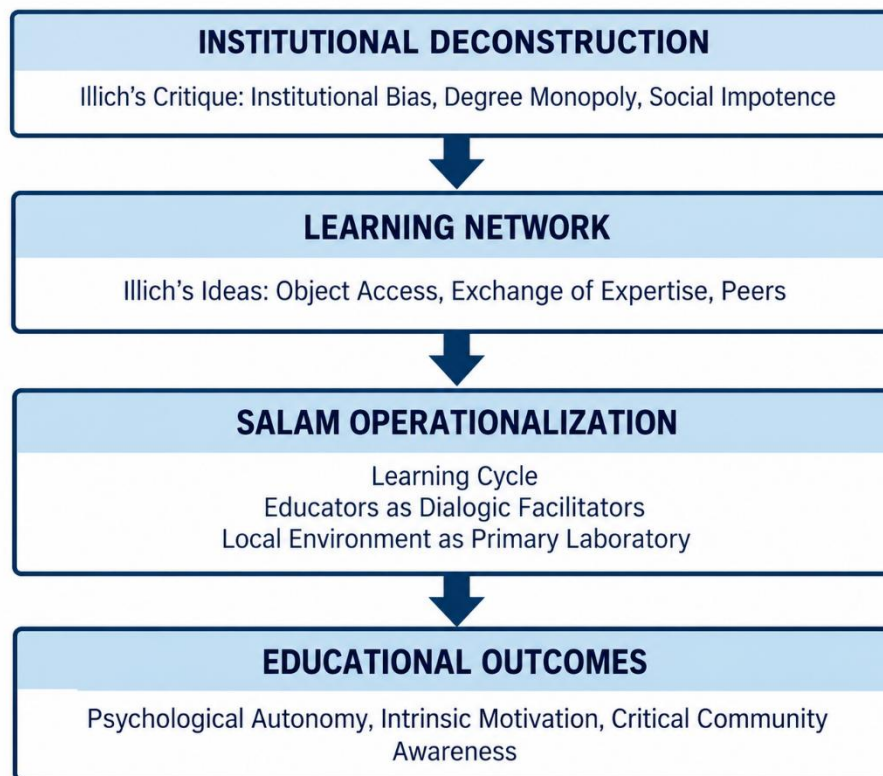


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Integration of Ivan Illich's Thought and Pedagogical Practice at SALAM Yogyakarta.

The institutionalisation of education through formal schooling has transformed the meaning of learning from an organic human process into an activity increasingly regulated by bureaucratic structures. From Illich's critical perspective, schools may cease to function primarily as spaces for intellectual liberation when institutional procedures, prescribed curricula, and formal credentials become dominant measures of educational achievement. This process creates what Illich describes as an "institutional bias," in which personal development and intellectual achievement are increasingly associated with participation in formal educational structures [2]. Learning is consequently perceived less as a lifelong process

embedded within social experience and more as an institutional product acquired through classroom attendance.

A central problem identified by Illich is the tendency to confuse the process of schooling with the substance of learning. Within this logic, longer participation in institutional education is assumed to correspond directly to greater knowledge and competence [2]. Consequently, teaching may be equated with learning, progression through grade levels with educational development, and possession of qualifications with genuine competence. Such assumptions may encourage society to place greater value on institutional indicators of achievement than on knowledge, creativity, experience, and the capacity to solve real-life problems [12].

3.1.2. Psychological and Social Consequences of Institutionalised Education.

Beyond its effects on learning, Illich's critique identifies psychological consequences associated with excessive dependence on institutions. When responsibility for education and other social needs is increasingly transferred to professionalised bureaucracies, individuals may gradually lose confidence in their capacity to organise learning independently [1]. Self-directed learning can consequently be perceived as less legitimate than institutionally certified education. Instead of strengthening autonomy, education may therefore contribute to passivity when learners become dependent on predetermined curricula, professional instruction, and formal recognition [13].

Illich further compares institutionalised schooling to a "New World Religion" because formal education can divide knowledge into legitimate academic learning and supposedly less valuable non-academic experience [2]. Promotion, examinations, and certification consequently operate as institutional rituals through which social recognition is distributed. Although educational qualifications may provide important opportunities for social mobility, excessive dependence on credentials can also reinforce inequality when access to recognised qualifications differs among social groups [12]. From this perspective, the problem lies not simply in the existence of schools but in the institutional monopoly over defining what constitutes legitimate knowledge and competence.

3.1.3. From Institutional Schooling to Learning Webs.

Illich's proposed alternative extends beyond conventional curriculum reform. His concept of a *Deschooling Society* challenges the monopoly of formal institutions over learning and advocates greater separation between demonstrated competence and formal academic credentials [14]. Instead of concentrating educational resources within schools, Illich proposes the development of open "learning webs" through which individuals can access knowledge, skills, people, and learning resources according to their interests and needs.

Learning webs therefore represent a shift from institution-centred education towards learner-centred networks. Such networks emphasise voluntary participation, access to learning resources, peer interaction, and individual initiative. This conceptual transition is particularly important for interpreting SALAM because its educational model similarly extends learning beyond conventional classroom boundaries. Nevertheless, SALAM should not automatically be regarded as a complete implementation of Illich's vision because it retains organisational structures and operates within the Indonesian educational context. Rather, its practices can be examined as a contextual adaptation of several principles associated with autonomous and community-based learning.

3.2. Independent Thinking and Learner Autonomy at SALAM.

3.2.1. Independent Thinking as Transformative Pedagogy.

Transformative education places critical awareness and learner autonomy at the centre of the educational process. Within the Indonesian context, SALAM represents an alternative educational environment in which these principles are deliberately incorporated into everyday learning practices [11]. Its principle of “Independent Thinking” challenges educational approaches that standardise learners through uniform curricula, predetermined achievement indicators, and administrative requirements [15].

Rather than organising learning primarily around prescribed subjects, SALAM encourages learners to identify their interests, recognise their individual potential, and connect learning with everyday experience. This approach represents a practical critique of curricula that may expose pupils to numerous subjects without adequately connecting them to their immediate social and environmental realities [16]. Freedom of learning at SALAM therefore does not imply the absence of structure; instead, it involves restructuring educational activities around learner participation, inquiry, and contextual experience.

This principle also shares characteristics with Freire’s concept of liberating pedagogy, in which learners are regarded as active participants in knowledge construction rather than passive recipients of information [16]. SALAM consequently seeks to “de-formalise formal education” by reducing unnecessary rigidity while retaining organised educational processes [18]. Learners are provided with greater opportunities to explore their individual interests without allowing fear of conventional academic failure to dominate the learning process [16]. Such autonomy is intended to promote intellectual independence and democratic participation in learning [19].

3.2.2. Transformation of the Educator’s Role.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of SALAM is the transformation of the educator from an authoritative source of knowledge into a facilitator of learning. Its educational practices are organised around three interconnected elements: an inclusive learning community, collectively established agreements, and research-oriented activities [16]. The resulting relationships between learners and educators are more dialogical and are intended to develop intellectual, emotional, and social autonomy [4].

Within this framework, facilitators are described as being “prohibited from teaching” when teaching refers to conventional one-way transmission of knowledge. This does not mean that educators withdraw from the educational process. Instead, their role changes from delivering predetermined answers to accompanying learners in identifying questions, investigating problems, interpreting experiences, and reflecting on findings. The facilitator therefore functions as a learning partner who provides guidance without unnecessarily dominating the learning process.

This practice has important implications for Illich’s concept of learning webs. Knowledge is no longer assumed to flow exclusively from the qualified teacher to the learner. Instead, learning can emerge through interactions among learners, facilitators, parents, community members, environments, and other available resources. The educational relationship consequently becomes more networked and less hierarchical.

3.2.3. Community as a Learning Ecosystem.

SALAM's learner autonomy is supported by an integrated learning ecosystem involving learners, facilitators, families, and the wider community [21]. Parents participate not merely as observers but also contribute to planning learning activities and evaluating learners' development. Narrative reporting further enables assessment to incorporate dimensions of development that may not be adequately represented by conventional numerical scores [22].

This community-based structure reflects the principle that education does not occur exclusively within school buildings. Homes, neighbourhoods, natural environments, community activities, and everyday social interactions can function as educational resources. SALAM therefore demonstrates how the concept of learning webs can be contextualised through relationships among individuals and community resources rather than through dependence on classroom instruction alone.

3.3. Learning Cycle and Research-Based Curriculum.

3.3.1. Structure of the Learning Cycle.

Curriculum management at SALAM represents a departure from conventional subject-centred curriculum structures. Rather than organising learning exclusively according to standardised government subject packages, SALAM employs an interest-based curriculum implemented through a structured Learning Cycle [23]. The model provides flexibility in learning time, location, content, and activities according to learners' interests and developmental needs [5]. The Learning Cycle consists of interconnected stages of doing, expressing, analysing, concluding, and applying. Learners first engage directly with a phenomenon or activity and subsequently articulate their observations and experiences. They then analyse the information obtained, formulate conclusions, and apply the resulting knowledge to relevant situations. Learning therefore progresses from direct experience towards reflection, conceptual understanding, and practical application rather than beginning primarily with abstract textbook information. This structure is important because it demonstrates that alternative education does not necessarily mean unstructured education. SALAM replaces rigid subject-centred organisation with a different form of structure based on inquiry and experiential progression. Learner autonomy is therefore combined with systematic processes of investigation and reflection.

3.3.2. Independent Research and Real-World Learning.

Independent research represents the principal operational mechanism through which the Learning Cycle is implemented. At the beginning of each term, learners formulate research plans through discussion involving the learner, parents, and facilitator [22]. Research topics are selected according to individual interests and contextual relevance rather than being imposed entirely through a predetermined curriculum. At the primary level, research commonly addresses four broad areas: food, health, the environment, and socio-cultural issues. Activities may involve cultivating organic vegetables, preparing food from harvested produce, examining waste-management practices, conducting observations, or interviewing members of the community. These activities transform the surrounding environment into a learning resource and enable learners to connect abstract concepts with observable real-world phenomena. The

approach is consistent with the local principle of *titen* or *niteni*, which emphasises careful observation, recognition of patterns, interpretation of experience, and the formulation of conclusions [20]. Learners consequently develop knowledge through direct engagement rather than simply reproducing information provided by textbooks or teachers.

3.3.3. *Assessment through Reflection and Narrative Evaluation.*

The research process concludes through presentations or workshops in which learners communicate their findings to facilitators, parents, and peers [21]. These activities are adjusted according to individual and class readiness rather than being conducted according to a completely uniform schedule. Learners are required to explain their research processes, evidence, interpretations, and conclusions, thereby developing communication and reflective skills alongside subject knowledge. Assessment within this model consequently extends beyond short-term memory testing. Narrative evaluation allows facilitators to document the development of knowledge, practical skills, critical thinking, independence, and other aspects of learner development. This approach contrasts with conventional assessment practices that may rely heavily on standardised examinations and numerical rankings. The Learning Cycle therefore illustrates how SALAM operationalises several principles associated with transformative education. The conventional linear relationship, in which knowledge passes from teacher to textbook to pupil and is finally measured through examination, is replaced by a more interactive sequence that moves from experience to inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and application. This process provides an important practical connection between Illich's theoretical concept of autonomous learning and SALAM's contextual educational practices.

3.4. *Comparative Analysis of Educational Philosophies and SALAM.*

3.4.1. *Convergence of Illich, Freire, Dewey, and Dewantara.*

Although Illich provides the principal theoretical framework for this study, SALAM cannot be adequately interpreted through a single educational philosophy. Its educational practices demonstrate conceptual similarities with Freire's critical pedagogy, Dewey's experiential education, and Dewantara's Among System. These thinkers emerged from different historical and cultural contexts, yet they share a common concern with the limitations of education that treats learners as passive recipients of predetermined knowledge. Table 2 compares these perspectives across four dimensions: views on schools, the role of educators, principal learning methods, and the ultimate purpose of education. This comparison helps clarify both the shared foundations and the distinctive emphases of each perspective, allowing SALAM's practices to be understood as a synthesis rather than as the application of a single model. SALAM does not reproduce any single philosophical tradition in its entirety. Instead, its practices show several areas of convergence. Illich's emphasis on autonomy and decentralised learning is reflected in the movement beyond classroom-centred education [2]. Learning at SALAM is not confined to a fixed physical space or a uniform syllabus; it extends to the surrounding environment, the community, and everyday activities, so that learners draw on a wider network of people and resources rather than relying solely on the institution. Freire's dialogical relationship appears in the interaction between facilitators and learners [7, 13]. Facilitators do not position themselves as the sole holders of knowledge who transfer information to learners. They pose questions, accompany the research process, and negotiate learning topics with learners, which

reflects Freire's rejection of the "banking" model of education in favour of mutual inquiry. Dewey's experiential philosophy is evident in research based on direct engagement with real-world problems [8]. Learners choose topics that arise from their daily lives, investigate them through observation and practice, and then reflect on what they have found. In Dewey's terms, experience becomes educative only when it is connected to reflection and to further inquiry, and SALAM's Learning Cycle is structured around precisely this connection.

Table 2. Comparison of Educational Philosophies and Their Practical Implementation at SALAM.

Dimension	Ivan Illich – <i>Deschooling</i> [2]	Paulo Freire – Critical Pedagogy [7]	John Dewey – Progressivism [8]	Ki Hajar Dewantara – <i>Among System</i> [9]	Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM) [4, 5, 11]
View of schools	Institutional structures that can monopolise legitimate learning	Institutions that may reproduce domination unless transformed through dialogue	Social environments for democratic and experiential learning	Spaces connected with family and community through <i>Tri Pusat Pendidikan</i>	Community-based educational space designed to support learner autonomy
Role of educators	Facilitators who provide access to learning networks and resources	Dialogical partners engaged with learners in understanding reality	Facilitators of experiential inquiry	<i>Pamong</i> who guides without dominating	Facilitators who avoid one-way teaching and accompany research-based learning
Main methods	Learning webs and autonomous learning networks	Problem-posing education and conscientisation	Learning by doing and inquiry	<i>Tri-Nga: ngerti, ngrasa, nglakoni</i>	Learning Cycle and contextual independent research
Ultimate goal	Individual autonomy from institutional monopoly	Humanisation and liberation from oppression	Growth through experience and democratic participation	Development of intellectually, emotionally, and physically independent individuals	Independent thinking, curiosity, autonomy, and environmental and social awareness

3.4.2. SALAM as a Contextual Adaptation of Deschooling.

The comparison in Table 2 also reveals an important distinction between Illich's radical theoretical position and SALAM's educational practice. Illich questioned the institutional monopoly of schools and proposed learning networks beyond conventional institutional structures [2]. SALAM, by contrast, does not completely abolish educational organisation. It maintains facilitators, curriculum processes, learning plans, assessment, and mechanisms for qualification equivalence. SALAM can therefore be interpreted more accurately as a contextual adaptation of deschooling principles rather than a literal implementation of Illich's institutional abolition. It combines Illich's structural critique with Dewey's experiential learning and Dewantara's culturally grounded approach to learner development [8, 9, 11]. Facilitators remain present, but their authority is transformed: rather than functioning primarily as transmitters of predetermined knowledge, they support learners in investigating questions generated through their own interests and experiences [4, 5, 16]. This distinction strengthens the analysis because it demonstrates that the significance of SALAM lies not in replicating Illich's philosophy exactly but in translating several of its central principles into a workable educational model within the Indonesian social and regulatory environment.

3.5. Limitations and Challenges of the SALAM Model.

3.5.1. Scalability and Replicability.

Despite its pedagogical strengths, SALAM faces limitations regarding scalability. Its model requires substantial engagement from facilitators, learners, parents, and community members. Parental participation in planning, supporting, and evaluating learning can require considerable time and emotional commitment [22, 23]. Such conditions may be difficult to reproduce uniformly across communities with different socioeconomic conditions, family structures, and levels of educational participation. Scaling the model to conventional schools would also require consideration of pupil–teacher ratios. Individualised facilitation and research-based learning may become more difficult where a single educator is responsible for large numbers of learners. Consequently, replication should focus on adapting the underlying principles rather than mechanically reproducing SALAM’s organisational structure.

3.5.2. Regulation, Accreditation, and Qualification Recognition.

A second challenge concerns the relationship between alternative education and national regulatory structures. Learners within non-formal or alternative educational systems may still need formal recognition through Paket A, B, and C equivalency mechanisms to progress into conventional higher education or other credential-dependent pathways [21, 22]. This requirement creates a fundamental tension between Illich’s criticism of credentialism and the practical realities experienced by learners. SALAM may seek to reduce dependence on standardised qualifications within its educational philosophy, but its graduates continue to operate within a wider society where formal credentials remain important. This illustrates the difficulty of implementing deschooling principles within an institutional environment that continues to use certification as a major mechanism for educational and professional progression.

3.5.3. Financial Sustainability.

Financial sustainability represents another important constraint. Community-based educational organisations may depend heavily on family contributions, community participation, and self-funding when substantial government financial support is unavailable [14, 22]. Although such independence can provide greater curricular autonomy, it may also expose alternative institutions to financial uncertainty. This creates a potential contradiction between autonomy and accessibility. If alternative education depends substantially on private or community resources, participation may become difficult for families with limited financial capacity. Sustainable financing mechanisms are therefore necessary if community-based educational models are expected to remain both autonomous and socially inclusive.

3.5.4. Assessment Quality and Facilitator Capacity.

SALAM’s narrative and qualitative assessment approach provides opportunities to capture dimensions of learner development that standardised examinations may overlook. However, such evaluation also places substantial responsibility on facilitators. Assessing critical thinking, independence, creativity, communication, and personal development requires strong observational and analytical skills [5, 22]. Without clear assessment criteria and continuous

facilitator development, qualitative evaluation may become inconsistent or overly subjective. Facilitator capacity-building is therefore essential to maintain the reliability and quality of the educational process. The challenge is to develop sufficient quality assurance without recreating the excessive standardisation that the alternative model seeks to avoid.

3.6. *Implications for Transformative and Alternative Education.*

The findings indicate that SALAM provides a practical example of how several principles associated with Illich's *Deschooling Society* can be adapted within a contemporary educational environment. As conceptualised in Figure 1, the transition from institutionalised learning towards learner autonomy involves more than simply removing conventional classroom structures. It requires changes in the roles of learners, educators, families, communities, curricula, learning resources, and assessment practices. The comparative analysis presented in Table 2 further demonstrates that SALAM is better understood as an intersection of several educational traditions rather than as an exclusive implementation of Illich's philosophy. Its emphasis on autonomous learning resembles Illich; its dialogical relationships resemble Freire; its experiential research reflects Dewey; and its community-oriented and nurturing philosophy corresponds closely with Dewantara. This combination enables radical criticism of institutionalised learning to be translated into a culturally contextualised educational practice. However, the limitations identified in this study demonstrate that alternative education does not automatically eliminate institutional challenges. Questions concerning scalability, accreditation, financing, accessibility, and quality assurance remain significant. The contribution of SALAM therefore lies not in providing a universally transferable replacement for formal schooling, but in demonstrating how selected principles of learner autonomy, experiential inquiry, community participation, and flexible learning networks can inform broader educational transformation. Overall, the findings suggest that the contemporary relevance of Illich's *Deschooling Society* may lie less in the literal abolition of schools and more in challenging the assumption that meaningful learning must be controlled exclusively by formal institutions. SALAM demonstrates one possible pathway through which learning can be reconnected with lived experience, community relationships, and individual curiosity while continuing to negotiate the practical requirements of the wider educational system.

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that Ivan Illich's concept of *Deschooling Society* can be meaningfully interpreted through the transformative educational practices of Sanggar Anak Alam (SALAM) in Yogyakarta. The study's main contribution lies in connecting Illich's critique of institutionalised education with a contemporary community-based learning model that promotes learner autonomy, experiential inquiry, and shared responsibility. SALAM challenges conventional classroom structures through "Independent Thinking," the repositioning of educators as dialogical facilitators rather than one-way instructors, and the implementation of a Learning Cycle centred on real-life research concerning food, health, environmental, and socio-cultural issues. Its integration of *titen*, community participation, and principles related to Ki Hajar Dewantara's *Among System* further demonstrates how autonomous learning networks can be adapted to local cultural contexts. However, SALAM should be understood as a contextual adaptation rather than a complete realisation of Illich's vision, particularly because it continues to operate within existing regulatory and qualification

systems. Its wider application is also constrained by scalability, accreditation requirements, financial sustainability, and the capacity required for narrative-based assessment. As this study was based on a qualitative literature review and focused on a single alternative education model, future research should employ longitudinal and comparative empirical approaches to examine learner outcomes, alumni trajectories, curriculum scalability, and policy mechanisms for recognising non-formal learning. Overall, the findings suggest that deschooling is better understood as a reorientation of education towards autonomous, contextual, community-based, and meaningful learning rather than simply the rejection of schools.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests or conflicts of interest that could have influenced the work reported in this study.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, methodology, literature review, data analysis and interpretation, manuscript preparation, review, and editing. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the content of the work.

Data Availability Statement

All data supporting the findings of this study were obtained from the literature and sources cited in the manuscript. No new primary datasets were generated or analysed during this study.

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