



## Philosophical Foundations of Education: Key Ideas and Philosophical Schools in Education

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### Abstract

*The philosophical foundation of education serves as a fundamental framework for determining the goals, processes, and practices of education. It provides direction and meaning, ensuring that education is not limited to the transfer of knowledge, but also emphasizes the development of values, attitudes, and character. This study aims to explain the main ideas underlying the philosophical foundations of education as well as the philosophical schools that influence educational practices. This study employs a library research method by reviewing relevant books and scholarly journals. The findings indicate that several philosophical schools have significantly influenced education, including idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, and progressivism. Each school offers different perspectives regarding the aims of education, the role of teachers, and appropriate learning methods. Understanding these philosophical perspectives helps educators build a strong foundation for designing effective educational processes and improving the quality of teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** *philosophical foundations of education; philosophy of education; schools of philosophy; education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental process in shaping the quality of human resources that are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally, socially, and morally mature. In the context of contemporary education, educational systems are required to respond to increasingly complex global challenges, including technological development, social change, and the demand for critical and creative thinking skills. However, in reality, educational practice still tends to focus on academic achievement and pays less attention to the holistic development of human aspects. This indicates the importance of strengthening the philosophical foundation of education as a basis for formulating more comprehensive and meaningful educational goals and practices (Dan et al., 2026).

The classical paradigm of education generally describes education as an institution that performs three main functions. First, it prepares the younger generation to take on certain roles in the future. Second, it transfers knowledge in accordance with expected roles. Third, it transmits values in order to maintain social unity and continuity as a prerequisite for the survival of society and civilization. The second and third points show that education is not only a transfer of knowledge but also a transfer of values. Thus, education can serve as a helper for human development (Giri et al., 2021).

Philosophy itself has evolved from simply meaning the love of knowledge or

wisdom into systematic thinking about ontology, epistemology, and axiology. It has shifted from metaphysical reflections to discussions of human existence and its various problems, including nature and self-understanding. From rigid and exclusive schools of thought, philosophy has developed into more inclusive and flexible frameworks. In essence, philosophy represents the intellectual heritage of humanity that reflects the continuous development of human maturity (Ishak, 2022). Philosophical studies play an essential role in building the foundation of scientific knowledge and function as a critical tool for evaluating the development of human intellectual discourse. Although philosophy does not directly intervene in all scientific developments, it contributes significantly by testing the validity of knowledge through rational and accountable evaluation (Razali & Ed, 2024).

Philosophers have proposed various perspectives that often differ or even contradict one another, although at certain points these perspectives may also reinforce each other. These differences generally arise from distinctions between Islamic educational philosophy and Western educational philosophy, particularly in their assumptions about the sacredness of knowledge sources. Western philosophy tends to emphasize rationality, whereas Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes religiosity. However, debates regarding influence and differences among philosophical views in education are not the most crucial issue. Such differences are natural due to

variations in perspective, historical context, and philosophical background of each thinker (Navi, 2022).

The components of the philosophical foundation of education include ideas derived from general philosophy, namely metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology. As in general philosophy, educational philosophy also consists of various schools of thought such as idealism, realism, and pragmatism (1, 2, 3, 2024). New philosophical approaches such as critical realism have even been integrated with complexity theory to address nonlinear and multilayered realities. This integration opens broader analytical perspectives in understanding causality within modern social structures. Therefore, various philosophical schools ranging from rationalism, empiricism, idealism, materialism, positivism, pragmatism, existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxism, Islamic existentialism, to neopositivism contribute to addressing contemporary epistemological, ethical, and social issues (Faizah & Winarno, 2025).

Empiricism, pioneered by John Locke, argues that human development is determined by environmental factors, including education. Humans are viewed as a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) at birth, which is shaped by environmental influences (Stit & Ulum, 2023). Schools of educational philosophy include progressivism, idealism, perennialism, essentialism, and pragmatism (J. Pendidikan & Vol, 2020). Educational philosophy is a branch

of philosophy that discusses concepts, goals, and fundamental principles of education, including epistemology, ontology, and axiology in the learning process. In the Islamic context, educational philosophy is not only based on rationality and logic but also integrates spirituality and revelation as primary sources of knowledge (Rekonstruksi & Dalam, 2025).

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design. Library research is a method conducted by examining and analyzing various written sources related to the research topic. These sources include books, scientific journals, articles, and other relevant literature concerning the philosophical foundations of education, key ideas in educational philosophy, and philosophical schools that influence the field of education.

Data collection techniques in this study are carried out through documentation study, namely by collecting various references related to the research focus. The collected data are then analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis, which involves describing, explaining, and interpreting various concepts and ideas found in the sources. This analysis aims to gain a deeper understanding of the philosophical foundations of education and the philosophical schools that contribute to the development of educational thought.

Through this method, the researcher systematically organizes and explains the

concept of the philosophical foundations of education as well as the main ideas within various schools of educational philosophy. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to provide a clear overview of the importance of philosophical foundations in the implementation of education.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Philosophical Foundations of Education***

Philosophical foundations of education begin with an understanding of two key terms, namely “foundation” and “education.” In the Indonesian Dictionary, a foundation is defined as a base, support, or footing. In a broader sense, a foundation refers to the underlying basis or starting point upon which something is built. Based on its form, foundations can be classified into two types: material foundations and conceptual foundations. Material foundations refer to physical supports such as an airplane runway or the foundation of a building, while conceptual foundations refer to theoretical or intellectual bases such as the foundation of education (Alfulaila, 2022).

The philosophical foundation of education is a fundamental framework that explores the meaning and essence of education in a deeply reflective and systematic manner. It provides the intellectual basis for understanding educational processes not only as technical activities but also as value-oriented human endeavors. Through this foundation, education is viewed as a meaningful process that shapes human existence.

The term “philosophy” originates from the Greek words *philein*, meaning “to love,” and *sophos*, meaning “wisdom.” Thus, philosophy can be interpreted as “the love of wisdom.” In this sense, philosophical inquiry in education seeks to understand the most fundamental questions regarding human learning, knowledge, and existence.

Accordingly, the philosophical foundation of education refers to a system of thought that addresses essential questions such as what education is, why education is necessary, and what ultimate goals education should achieve in human life. These questions become the basis for constructing educational theory and practice.

In its development, the philosophical foundation of education plays a crucial role in shaping educational systems that are relevant to modern challenges. Various philosophical schools such as idealism, realism, pragmatism, and progressivism contribute significantly to educational policies and classroom practices (Adelia, 2024).

In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, the philosophical foundation does not merely serve as a conceptual guide but also as a practical framework for designing curricula that are adaptive, flexible, and responsive to social change. Education must continuously evolve in response to global demands.

Philosophy also plays a central role in curriculum development. Different schools of thought, including idealism, realism, materialism, pragmatism, existentialism, perennialism, essentialism, and reconstructionism, influence how

curricula are designed and implemented. Each philosophical tradition provides a distinct worldview that shapes educational orientation (Haoxing & System, n.d.).

The philosophical foundation of cultural and character education refers to the values, beliefs, and principles that guide the formation of students' character as well as the preservation of national culture. It emphasizes that education should not only focus on cognitive achievement but also on moral development and cultural identity (Hardiyanto et al., 2024).

Educational philosophy is a branch of philosophy that specifically examines education in depth, including its ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions. Ontology deals with the nature of education and human existence, epistemology concerns the validity and sources of knowledge, while axiology focuses on values, ethics, and the purpose of education in real life.

More broadly, the philosophical foundation of education can be understood as a system of ideas derived from major branches of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. According to Callahan and Clark as well as Edward J. Power, educational philosophy is a derivation of general philosophical systems adopted by specific schools of thought, demonstrating the close relationship between philosophy and education theory (Arsyad & Sauri, 2024).

In general, the foundation of education refers to a set of basic principles that guide the implementation of educational practice. It

provides direction, structure, and purpose within the education system, helping educators make appropriate instructional decisions. This foundation integrates philosophical, juridical, and psychological aspects that collectively support holistic educational development (K. Pendidikan, 2023).

Philosophy, according to the Indonesian Dictionary, is the study of the essence of existence, causes, origins, and principles through rational reflection. It is also understood as a theoretical framework underlying human thought and action, encompassing logic, aesthetics, metaphysics, and epistemology. Etymologically, philosophy derives from *philo* (love) and *sophia* (wisdom), meaning the love of wisdom.

Philosophy seeks to understand the comprehensive relationship between humans, nature, and divinity. It also explores fundamental questions about human freedom, knowledge, and existence. In education, philosophy provides the deepest conceptual basis for understanding the essence of teaching and learning processes.

Without a philosophical foundation, education risks becoming purely technical and losing its meaning as a process of human development. Therefore, philosophy ensures that education remains oriented toward human values, moral growth, and intellectual development.

In practice, the philosophical foundation of education helps educators design learning experiences that are meaningful, reflective, and transformative. It guides teachers in selecting appropriate methods, content, and evaluation strategies that align with educational goals.

Ultimately, education based on strong philosophical foundations aims to develop well-rounded individuals who are not only intellectually competent but also morally responsible and socially aware. It ensures that education contributes to the formation of a balanced and humane society.

Thus, the philosophical foundation of education is not merely theoretical knowledge but a guiding principle that shapes all aspects of educational practice. It remains essential for achieving meaningful, holistic, and sustainable educational outcomes in modern society (Waras et al., n.d.).

### ***Terminology of the Philosophical Foundation of Education***

Before discussing the philosophy of education in greater depth, it is important to first understand the terminology of the philosophy of education itself. The philosophy of education consists of two terms, namely philosophy and education. Philosophy examines issues from their deepest and most fundamental aspects; therefore, philosophical truth is often understood as a reflective and relative form of truth. This is because scientific truth is generally viewed only from limited observable aspects, whereas philosophy seeks to explore the essence of reality through critical and profound thinking.

Etymologically, philosophy comes from the Greek words *philos*, meaning deep love, and *sophia*, meaning wisdom. Thus, philosophy can be interpreted as the love of wisdom. According

to Sadulloh, philosophy is often used in everyday life both consciously and unconsciously. Plato defines philosophy as the pursuit of true knowledge, while Aristotle describes it as a discipline that encompasses various fields such as metaphysics, logic, politics, economics, and aesthetics. Meanwhile, Yamin explains philosophy as a concentration of thought that enables humans to discover their true identity.

Education, on the other hand, can be understood in both narrow and broad senses. In a narrow sense, according to Langeveld, education is guidance provided by adults to immature individuals to help them achieve maturity. Education is also seen as a process of assisting individuals to perform life tasks independently and responsibly. Thus, in its narrow sense, education focuses on the process of human maturation, both physically and mentally.

The development of philosophical thought among philosophers shows a variety of perspectives that sometimes support each other but also often contradict one another. These differences are influenced by variations in thinking methods, historical periods, cultural backgrounds, and philosophical worldviews. In the context of education, the philosophy of education serves as the foundation of values, beliefs, and directions that shape the characteristics of an educational system.

Philosophy generally consists of three major theoretical frameworks: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontology deals with the nature of "being," epistemology examines the sources and processes of knowledge acquisition, while axiology focuses on the value and usefulness of knowledge

in human life. These three aspects form the philosophical foundation for understanding the essence of education.

More profoundly, education is understood as a fundamental action aimed at humanizing human beings. Education is not merely oriented toward institutional or formal purposes, but it seeks to develop the wholeness of human character. Therefore, education must instill essential life values such as honesty, responsibility, togetherness, and politeness as part of character formation.

The philosophy of education can also be explained through three main pillars: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontology of education concerns the nature of education itself. Epistemology of education examines how knowledge is acquired, validated, and developed within the educational process. Meanwhile, axiology of education explores the benefits and values of knowledge in human life.

In its development, the concept of education has also been interpreted by various scholars. George F. Kneller states that education can be viewed as both a process and an outcome that occurs throughout life. Gerald L. Gutek explains that education is a social process that takes place within society and formal institutions such as schools, aimed at developing knowledge, skills, and values in learners.

Furthermore, the educational philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara provides an important contribution to Indonesian education. According to him, education does not only focus on intellectual development but also on character

and moral formation. Concepts such as *Tri Pusat Pendidikan*, *Sistem Among*, and the principles of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha*, *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*, *Tut Wuri Handayani* form the foundation of holistic and character-based education.

### ***Schools of Philosophy Influencing the Philosophy of Education***

Education can only be implemented in a structured, meaningful, and effective way when it is grounded in a strong philosophical foundation. A solid foundation provides direction for educational goals, clarifies the learning process, and ensures that educational practices remain relevant to the needs of society. Therefore, before carrying out educational activities, educators are required to strengthen their understanding of the philosophical basis of education. Since the essence of education is humanization—an effort to develop and elevate human beings into more dignified individuals—educators must first understand the nature of human beings as the central foundation of educational practice. The way educators perceive human nature will significantly influence how they design learning objectives, choose teaching methods, and interact with learners in the educational process (Aulia et al., 2022).

In the development of educational thought, several philosophical schools have played an important role in shaping how education is understood and practiced. These schools of philosophy provide different perspectives regarding knowledge, values, learning processes, and the ultimate goals of education. Although they differ in orientation, each contributes valuable insights that

enrich educational theory and practice. Among the most influential philosophical traditions are idealism, essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, reconstructionism, and other related schools of thought that continue to influence modern education systems.

Idealism is one of the earliest and most influential philosophical schools in education. The main representative of this school is Plato (427–374 BC), a student of Socrates. Idealism emphasizes the primacy of ideas, mind, and spiritual reality over the physical world. According to this view, ultimate reality is not found in material objects but in ideas and universal truths that exist beyond sensory experience. The physical world perceived by humans is considered only a reflection or shadow of higher reality. In the context of education, idealism stresses the development of intellectual and moral qualities, with the aim of helping learners understand eternal truths, develop rational thinking, and cultivate moral integrity. Education, therefore, is seen as a process of guiding individuals toward truth, goodness, and wisdom through intellectual and spiritual development.

Essentialism, on the other hand, is a philosophy of education that emphasizes the transmission of essential knowledge, skills, and cultural values that have stood the test of time. This school emerged strongly during the Renaissance period as a response to changing social and cultural conditions. Essentialism argues that there are fundamental bodies of knowledge and moral values that every learner

must master in order to function effectively in society. In educational practice, essentialism tends to support a structured curriculum, teacher-centered instruction, discipline, and mastery of core academic subjects. Although it is more rigid compared to other approaches, essentialism plays an important role in ensuring that learners acquire a strong foundation of knowledge that is considered universally important and enduring.

Perennialism is another significant philosophical school that strongly influences educational thought. It views education as a process of returning to enduring truths and universal principles that remain relevant across time. Perennialism emphasizes the importance of classical knowledge, moral values, and intellectual discipline as the foundation of education. According to this view, although society continues to change, fundamental truths about human existence, morality, and knowledge remain constant. Therefore, education should focus on helping learners understand these timeless principles through the study of classical works, logical reasoning, and moral reflection. Perennialism contributes to education by maintaining intellectual traditions and ensuring that education is not merely responsive to change but also grounded in stable and universal values.

In contrast to more traditional approaches, progressivism introduces a more flexible and learner-centered philosophy of education. This school emphasizes that education should be closely connected to the experiences, interests, and needs of learners. Knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student but is actively constructed

through experience, inquiry, and problem-solving. Progressivism encourages critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and adaptability in responding to real-life challenges. In this perspective, education is viewed as a dynamic process that evolves alongside social change, and learners are encouraged to actively participate in shaping their own learning experiences.

Reconstructionism extends the ideas of progressivism by emphasizing the role of education in transforming society. This philosophical approach argues that education should not only respond to social change but also actively contribute to building a better and more just society. Reconstructionism encourages learners to critically analyze social problems and engage in efforts to improve social conditions through collective action and moral responsibility. In this view, education becomes a powerful tool for social reform, enabling individuals to contribute to the creation of a more equitable and ethical society.

In addition to these major schools of thought, the philosophy of education is also influenced by broader intellectual traditions that continue to evolve over time. Each school contributes different perspectives regarding the goals of education, the role of teachers, and the nature of learning. When integrated, these philosophical foundations provide a comprehensive framework for understanding education as a complex process that involves intellectual, moral, social, and cultural development. In the context of contemporary educational practice, these

philosophical perspectives help educators design learning processes that are not only academically effective but also socially relevant and value-oriented.

In conclusion, the diversity of philosophical schools demonstrates that education is not a neutral or purely technical activity, but a deeply value-laden process shaped by different views of reality, knowledge, and human nature. By understanding these philosophical foundations, educators are better equipped to develop educational practices that are meaningful, balanced, and responsive to the needs of learners and society.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion of the philosophical foundations of education, it can be concluded that philosophy plays a very important role in providing the conceptual basis for the implementation of education. The philosophical foundation of education serves as a guiding framework in determining the direction, objectives, and processes of education. With a strong philosophical foundation, education does not merely focus on the transfer of knowledge, but also emphasizes character formation, moral values, and the holistic development of human potential.

The philosophical foundation of education is closely related to fundamental questions concerning the nature of human beings, the nature of knowledge, and the purpose of human life. These fundamental questions become the basis for formulating educational goals, designing curricula, selecting learning methods, and

defining the roles of teachers and students in the educational process. Therefore, understanding the philosophy of education is essential for educators in order to implement education in a more directed, meaningful, and goal-oriented manner.

In the development of educational thought, various philosophical schools have significantly influenced both the concept and practice of education. Among the most influential schools are idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, and progressivism. Each of these philosophical traditions offers different perspectives on the goals of education, the role of teachers, and appropriate teaching methods. Idealism emphasizes moral and spiritual values in education, realism focuses on objective reality and factual knowledge, pragmatism highlights experience and practical learning, existentialism stresses individual freedom and self-development, while progressivism promotes learner-centered education and active learning experiences.

The diversity of these philosophical schools demonstrates that education is a dynamic field that continuously evolves in response to changes in society and human needs. Each philosophical tradition contributes valuable insights that enrich the concept of education. Therefore, educational practice should not be limited to a single philosophical perspective, but may integrate various relevant ideas in accordance with educational goals and contextual needs.

By understanding the philosophical

foundation of education and the various schools of thought that influence it, educators are expected to gain broader insight in designing and implementing learning processes. Such understanding also helps educators determine appropriate approaches, strategies, and methods so that the learning process can run effectively and optimally develop students' potential. Ultimately, the philosophical foundation of education is not merely a theoretical concept but plays a crucial role in everyday educational practice.

Education based on strong philosophical thinking is able to produce individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also possess good character, critical thinking skills, and the ability to face various life challenges. Thus, the philosophical foundation of education is an essential element that must be understood and applied in efforts to realize high-quality and meaningful education for human and societal development.

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