

# Analysis of Classical Schools of Educational Philosophy in the Formation of Modern Educational Paradigms

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**Abstract.** *The classical philosophy of education holds a fundamental contribution to shaping the construction of the modern educational paradigm. Major schools of thought such as perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism play a significant role in directing the development of contemporary educational orientations, both in curriculum formulation and pedagogical application. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the relevance of these classical philosophical traditions in the formation of the modern educational paradigm through a literature-based approach. The research findings indicate that the modern educational paradigm did not emerge instantly but is instead the result of an evolutionary interaction between classical philosophical principles and the continuously developing dynamics of socio-cultural change. Key concepts such as the pursuit of universal truth,*

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*Main schools of thought such as perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism play a significant role in directing the development of contemporary educational orientations, both in terms of curriculum formulation and the implementation of pedagogical strategies. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the relevance of various schools of classical educational philosophy in the process of forming the modern educational paradigm through a literature study approach. The research findings indicate that the modern educational paradigm did not emerge instantly, but rather is the result of an evolutionary interaction process between classical philosophical principles and the dynamics of socio-cultural change that continues to develop. Various key concepts such as the search for universal truth, the importance of mastering core knowledge, a learning orientation that places students at the center of the learning process, and the importance of critical education are the foundation in the formulation of current educational policies and practices. Thus, this study confirms that classical educational philosophy still has strategic relevance as a conceptual foundation in strengthening the direction of modern educational development that is oriented towards humanist values, adaptive capabilities, and transformative goals.*

*the importance of mastering essential knowledge, learner-centered instruction, and the significance of critical education serve as foundational elements in the formulation of contemporary educational policies and practices. Thus, this study affirms that classical educational philosophy retains strategic relevance as a conceptual foundation for strengthening the development of a modern education system that emphasizes humanistic values, adaptive capacities, and transformative aims.*

**Keywords:** *Classical Educational Philosophy; Educational Schools; Modern Paradigm*

**Abstract.** *Classical educational philosophy has a fundamental contribution in shaping the construction of the modern educational paradigm. Main schools of thought such as perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism play a significant role in directing the development of contemporary educational orientations, both in terms of curriculum formulation and the implementation of pedagogical strategies. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the relevance of various schools of classical educational philosophy in the process of forming the modern educational paradigm through a literature study approach. The research findings indicate that the modern educational paradigm did not emerge instantly, but rather is the result of an evolutionary interaction process between classical philosophical principles and the dynamics of socio-cultural change that continues to develop. Various key concepts such as the search for universal truth, the importance of mastering core knowledge, a learning orientation that places students at the center of the learning process, and the importance of critical education are the foundation in the formulation of current educational policies and practices. Thus, this study confirms that classical educational philosophy still has strategic relevance as a conceptual foundation in strengthening the direction of modern educational development that is oriented towards humanist values, adaptive capabilities, and transformative goals.*

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## Introduction

Modern education did not emerge suddenly; it is the result of a long epistemological construction rooted in the classical tradition of educational philosophy that has developed over centuries. In essence, the development of modern education is the accumulation of philosophical reflections that have gradually occurred through the struggle of ideas from the time of Ancient Greece to contemporary thought. The thoughts of fundamental figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Dewey, and Paulo Freire have provided a strong conceptual foundation for the orientation of modern education, both in the realm of theory, policy, and learning practice (Gutek, 2009). These thinkers not only contributed individual ideas but also built philosophical paradigms that later functioned as value systems in modern education. Therefore, although the forms and methodologies of modern education often appear progressive and responsive to social, economic, and technological changes, its epistemological substance still retains the depth of the classical heritage that positions education as a process of forming the whole person, encompassing intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social aspects.

The legacy of classical educational philosophy is manifested in various mainstream schools of thought, including perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism. Perennialism, deeply rooted in the thought of Plato and Aquinas, views education as a means of instilling eternal values, universal moral principles, and character formation as the core of pedagogical activity (Ozmon & Craver, 2012). Essentialism, which developed rapidly in the modern era through the thought of William Bagley, emphasizes the importance of mastering core knowledge and basic competencies as the foundation for students' intellectual development (Bagley, 1934). Progressivism, particularly influenced by John Dewey, shifts the orientation of education toward experiential learning, problem-solving, and learner-centered learning (Dewey, 1938). Meanwhile, reconstructionism, pioneered by Brameld and Counts, views education as a critical instrument for understanding and transforming social reality (Brameld, 1965).

These classical thoughts did not cease to be philosophical discourse, but underwent transformation and reinterpretation in various modern educational systems. Digitalization, globalization, and the development of information technology have transformed the way humans learn, interact, and produce knowledge. However, these paradigm shifts remain built on a foundation of classical values and principles. This demonstrates that educational modernity is not a break with the past, but rather a reflective continuation of the long history of educational philosophy.

In the Indonesian context, the link between classical educational philosophy and modern educational practices is evident in various national education policies. Curriculum reforms such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum reflect the integration of various educational philosophies. Essentialism is reflected in the structure of competency standards and learning outcomes, which emphasize mastery of essential knowledge. Perennialism is evident in the Strengthening Character Education (PPK) policy, which prioritizes the internalization of moral values, universal virtues, and social ethics (Rohman et al., 2023).

Progressivism is manifested through project-based learning approaches, student-centered learning, inquiry learning, and constructivism, which form the pedagogical

foundation of the Independent Curriculum (Juwan & Agus Siswadi, 2023). Reconstructionism is evident in the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, which encourages students to become critical and responsible agents of social change (Hannan et al., 2024).

Specifically, the Independent Curriculum, Indonesia's latest education policy, emphasizes this philosophical integration. This curriculum emphasizes learning autonomy, curriculum flexibility, and the development of 21st-century competencies, including creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. This orientation aligns with Dewey's view of the importance of direct experience in the educational process and Paulo Freire's thinking on dialogical education that fosters liberation and critical awareness (Freire, 1970). Thus, although often positioned as a modern innovation, the Independent Curriculum demonstrates epistemological continuity with the legacy of classical educational philosophy.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on classical educational philosophy and modern educational policy, most research tends to be descriptive-historical or discusses each school of thought separately. There are still limited studies that comprehensively analyze how classical schools of educational philosophy interact, integrate, and shape modern educational paradigms in an eclectic manner, particularly in the context of educational policy and practice in Indonesia in the era of globalization and digitalization. This gap indicates the need for philosophical studies that not only explain these schools but also examine their functional contributions and relevance in the contemporary education system.

Based on the above background description, this study attempts to conduct a comprehensive philosophical study of the schools of classical educational philosophy, including perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism. The main focus of the study is directed at analyzing the conceptual characteristics and epistemological foundations of each school, as well as the dynamics of thought that shape its pedagogical orientation. Furthermore, this study examines the contribution of these schools of classical educational philosophy in building and influencing the modern educational paradigm, both in theoretical, normative, and practical dimensions. This study also critically examines the relevance and forms of integration of these various schools of classical educational philosophy in the policies, curriculum, and practices of modern education in Indonesia, particularly in the context of social change, globalization, and the development of digital technology. Thus, this study is expected to provide a complete understanding of the epistemological continuity between the legacy of classical educational philosophy and the dynamics of contemporary education, while also emphasizing the position of educational philosophy as a reflective foundation in the formulation and implementation of national education policy.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative approach by Cresswell (2017); Sugiyono (2020) with a literature study method ( *library research* ) as the main strategy in obtaining data and building theoretical arguments. This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives that focus on an in-depth study of the concepts, theories, and

philosophical ideas that developed in classical schools of educational philosophy, namely perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism. *Library research allows researchers to examine scientific sources comprehensively, in-depth, and critically, so that the research results reflect an accurate understanding of the relevance of these four schools in the formation of a modern educational paradigm* (Zed, 2014).

The literature sources analyzed in this study include primary and secondary books in the field of educational philosophy, journals, and other relevant academic documents. The literature was selected based on its academic credibility, relevance to the research issue, and contribution to the philosophical understanding of classical and modern educational orientations. This study employed thematic analysis techniques, which aimed to identify thematic patterns emerging from the literature, then group and interpret the data based on a theoretical framework. Thematic analysis enabled researchers to systematically explore the conceptual linkages between classical educational philosophy and modern educational paradigms. Braun & Clarke, (2006) This procedure involved several stages, namely: a. Familiarization of the data through repeated reading of the literature; b. Identification of initial themes based on conceptual patterns; c. Formation of relevant thematic categories; d. Analysis of relationships between themes; e. Thematic interpretation in theoretical and practical contexts.

Thematic analysis is used to explore how core concepts in perennialism such as eternal truth and character education emerge in modern education policy. With this methodological approach, research can provide a comprehensive picture of how classical concepts are not lost or replaced, but instead undergo transformation and reinterpretation to meet the needs of the times. Literature research in the philosophy of education allows researchers to reveal that the modern educational paradigm is the result of the evolutionary integration of classical philosophical heritage with contemporary socio-cultural demands. Therefore, literature study is highly relevant for analyzing these historical and conceptual relationships in depth.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Schools of Classical Educational Philosophy

#### a) Perennialism

Perennialism is a school of educational philosophy rooted in the tradition of classical philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, and systematically developed by Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages. This school is based on the belief that there are eternal truths (perennial truths) that transcend the boundaries of space and time, so that education should be directed towards the formation of human reason and morality based on these universal principles (Ozmon & Craver, 2012). In Plato's perspective, education is understood as a process of guiding the human soul out of the "cave of ignorance" towards universal knowledge that is transcendent. Aquinas then integrated Greek rationality with Christian theology, so that education is seen as a means of forming moral character and the perfection of reason.

Pedagogically, perennialism emphasizes intellectual discipline through the study of classical texts, logic, mathematics, literature, and philosophical reflection. Teachers are

positioned as moral and intellectual authorities who guide students in developing higher-order thinking skills and moral virtues. This approach provides a strong normative foundation for character education in the context of modern education.

In the Indonesian context, the relevance of perennialism is evident in the Strengthening Character Education (PPK) policy, which emphasizes the values of religiosity, integrity, nationalism, mutual cooperation, and independence as core to the formation of Indonesian people (Soro et al., 2024). However, upon critical examination, perennialism has limitations when applied rigidly in a pluralistic and dynamic society. An overemphasis on universal values has the potential to ignore the social context and actual needs of students. Therefore, in modern education, perennialism needs to be contextualized and integrated with other approaches to avoid falling into pedagogical conservatism.

#### b) Essentialism

Essentialism developed in the early 20th century as a response to progressivism and was pioneered by William C. Bagley (1934). This school of thought asserts that there is a set of core knowledge and basic skills that all students must master, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, science, and mastery of cultural and national values. Education is seen as a systematic process for transmitting this intellectual heritage to the next generation.

From an essentialist perspective, teachers hold significant authority as transmitters of knowledge and shapers of learning discipline. Learning is structured and standardized, thus essentialism is closely related to the concept of a standards-based curriculum (Saputro et al., 2025). In Indonesia, the influence of essentialism is clearly visible in the structure of the national curriculum, which establishes competency standards and core subjects as learning guidelines (Farih & A'yun, 2024).

Although often criticized as a conservative and inflexible approach, essentialism still plays a significant role in maintaining educational quality and clarifying learning outcome standards. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, essentialism is not eliminated but reinterpreted through the concepts of learning outcomes and essential competencies (Rubingah et al., 2023). This demonstrates that essentialism still serves as the structural foundation of modern education, although it needs to be complemented by a more contextual and participatory pedagogical approach.

#### c) Progressivism

Progressivism developed rapidly through the thinking of John Dewey (1938), who rejected traditional education based on memorization and teacher authority. Dewey emphasized that education should be centered on the learner and the learning experience, where knowledge is constructed through the interaction of experience, reflection, and real-world problem-solving.

Progressivism encourages active, collaborative, contextual, and inquiry-based learning, with the teacher acting as a facilitator (Faiz & Purwati, 2021). This approach is the main foundation of 21st-century learning, emphasizing creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration.

In the Indonesian context, progressivism is prominent in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through project-based, problem-based, and student-centered learning (Juwana & Agus Siswadi, 2023). However, progressivism also has limitations when implemented without a clear framework of values and standards. Without strengthening values (perennialism) and a competency structure (essentialism), progressive learning risks losing its substantive direction. Therefore, progressivism in modern education needs to be balanced with other streams.

#### d) Reconstructionism

Reconstructionism is a critical continuation of progressivism, which positions education as an instrument of social transformation. Its leaders, such as George Counts and Theodore Brameld (1965), emphasize that education must play an active role in building a more just, democratic, and humanistic society.

This school of thought focuses on solving contemporary social problems such as social inequality, poverty, gender injustice, and environmental degradation (Sutrisno et al., 2024). Education is aimed at fostering critical consciousness and students' ability to critique unjust social structures, in line with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy.

In Indonesia, the principles of reconstructionism are reflected in the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which encourages students to identify social problems and design collaborative solutions (Hannan et al., 2024). However, reconstructionism also faces challenges when the critical dimension is not balanced with students' cognitive and moral readiness. Therefore, reconstructionism requires integration with perennialism, essentialism, and progressivism to ensure that the resulting social transformation remains grounded in strong values and competencies.

## 2. Comparison and Relevance of Classical School to Modern Education

Comparatively, perennialism and essentialism both emphasize the stability of values and knowledge structures, but differ in their epistemological orientations. Perennialism focuses on universal truths and moral formation, while essentialism emphasizes the practical need for standardized core competencies. Conversely, progressivism and reconstructionism both draw on experience and social reality, but progressivism is oriented toward individual development, while reconstructionism explicitly directs education toward social change.

This article argues that modern education cannot be understood as the dominance of one particular school of educational philosophy, but rather as the result of a dialectical synthesis of all four schools. The modern educational paradigm is eclectic and contextual, combining value stability (perennialism), competency structure (essentialism), pedagogical flexibility (progressivism), and an orientation toward social transformation (reconstructionism).

## 3. Integration of Classical Philosophy in Indonesian Education Policy

The integration of classical educational philosophy into Indonesian education policy is clearly visible in various national strategic policies (Gutek, 2009), including:

- a) The Character Education Strengthening Movement (PPK) reflects the principle of perennialism
- b) Competency standards and learning outcomes influenced by essentialism
- c) Project-based learning (P5) as an implementation of progressivism and reconstructionism
- d) The Independent Curriculum combines progressivism with essentialist structures.

This shows that the Indonesian education system is a concrete example of classical philosophical integration contextualized to answer the challenges of modern education.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that classical schools of educational philosophy—perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism—have a continuing role in shaping the modern educational paradigm. These four schools do not operate in isolation, but rather interact dialectically and complement each other in responding to the complex challenges of contemporary education. Perennialism provides a foundation for values and character formation; essentialism provides a knowledge structure and competency standards; progressivism encourages experience-based pedagogical flexibility; and reconstructionism directs education toward the development of critical consciousness and social transformation. Therefore, modern education cannot be understood as the dominance of one particular philosophical school, but rather as a contextual, eclectic synthesis.

In the Indonesian context, this philosophical integration is reflected in educational policies such as the Independent Curriculum, the Character Education Strengthening Movement, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. These findings confirm that educational modernization is a reflective continuation of the classical educational philosophy tradition, reinterpreted to reflect current social, cultural, and technological needs. Understanding classical educational philosophy thus provides a crucial foundation for developing a humanistic, adaptive, and transformative education in the era of globalization and digitalization.

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