

Essentialist Educational Philosophy (Doctrine and Its Influence in the Context of Modern Education)

Ahmad Gunardi¹, Sry Hartati¹
¹SD Negeri 6 Banyuasin I, Indonesia

Corresponding author email: ahmadgunardi1418@gmail.com

Article History: Accepted on 4 October 2023, Revised on 30 March 2024,
Published on 22 April 2024

Abstract: The philosophy of essentialism is a conservative educational philosophy formulated as a critique of progressive educational practices in schools. Essentialists argue that the main function of schools is to convey cultural and historical heritage to the younger generation. Essentialism is not an independent philosophical building, but rather a critique of progressive education. This school of essentialism views that education which is based on the view of flexibility in all its forms can be a source of views that are changing, easy to change, lacking focus, uncertain and unstable.

Keywords: Education, Essentialism, Philosophy

A. Introduction

In the world of Western education, various philosophical movements have developed, including idealism, realism, perennialism, progressivism, essentialism, and others. These philosophical orientations serve as basic educational perspectives, each of which has a different view and significant influence on contemporary education.

As mutually agreed, education must be based on values that contribute to stability. To achieve this goal, these values need to be selected, have clear principles, and stand the test of time. The values that can meet these criteria originate in culture and philosophy, relatively speaking, over the last four centuries, since the Renaissance, which marked the emergence of an early essentialist perspective. Essentialism argues that education must be based on cultural values that have existed since the beginning of human civilization.

Generally, essentialist educational thinking is supported by classical idealism and traditional philosophical realism. Although both schools support essentialism, they do not merge into one and maintain their different characteristics. Therefore, this article will explore essentialist educational philosophy, examining its teachings and influence in the context of modern education.

B. Methods

The data collection technique includes collecting data and information from various sources, which will be used as references from several relevant sources, ranging from books to national and international journal articles.

C. Results and Discussion

Essentialist educational philosophy emerged in the early 1930s, with pioneers such as William C. Bagley, Thomas Brigger, Frederick Breed, and Isac L. Kandel. In 1983, they formed an institution called "The Essentialist Committee for the Advancement of American Education". Bagley, an important figure in essentialism, was a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. He believes that the main function of schools is to convey cultural and historical heritage to the younger generation. Essentialism emerged during the Renaissance, distinguishing itself from progressivism. The main difference lies in providing an educational foundation that is flexible and open, tolerant of change and not tied to certain doctrines. Essentialism holds that education should be based on values that have lasting clarity and stability, with the values chosen having clear principles. These values originate from correlated cultures and philosophies spanning four centuries. According to essentialism, current cultural deviations and undesirable socio-cultural phenomena can only be overcome by consciously returning to the world of education – returning to the path of established cultural heritage. By doing this, we can be optimistic about our future and the future of human culture.

Essentialism is a philosophy within the conservative school of education that was originally formulated as a critique of progressive trends in schools. For this movement, "Education as Cultural Preservation" is seen as cultural preservation. Because of this premise, essentialism is considered by scholars to be a "conservative path to culture", an orientation that seeks to return to an old cultural heritage that has proven its primacy throughout history. Essentialism argues that education must be based on cultural values that have existed since the beginning of human civilization. The culture they inherited and passed on to us has been tested by time, conditions and cultural history.

Essentialism views education as based on clear and enduring values, providing stability and selected values with clear principles. This opinion was expressed by Jalaluddin et al, who were quoted from the point of view Ekawati (2023) the flow of philosophy of essentialism towards managerial supervision. Essentialism is a school that has closeness and relevance to managerial supervision. Managerial supervision is the supervisor's authority to review and assess what has been done regarding the school's activities and performance. The application of the philosophy of essentialism can be seen from how supervisors carry out supervision, including having standards

that serve as guidelines in carrying out activities or programs carried out by school principals and teachers, guiding and developing teaching staff using a conventional approach, as well as determining strategic and operational steps that will be taken to improve the school.

Ekawati (2023) the flow of Essentialism emerged during the Renaissance, with its main characteristics being different from progressivism. This difference is mainly in providing a basis for education full of flexibility, where everything is open to change, tolerant and has no attachment to certain doctrine. For essentialism, education that is based on basic views is easily shaken and less focused. Therefore, essentialism views that education must be based on values which has clarity and is durable, thus providing stability and clear direction. Essentialism is based on the view of humanism which is a reaction to life leads to worldliness, is completely scientific and materialistic. Apart from that, it is also colored. by views from the beliefs of idealism and realism. Imam Barnadib mentioned several the main figure who played a role in the spread of essentialism.

Witanti, (2016) Meanwhile, *essentialism* emphasizes that education must be functional and relevant to needs, both the needs of individuals, families and the needs of various sectors and sub-sectors, both local, national and international. Related to the demands of globalization, Islamic education must prepare Indonesian human resources who are able to compete internationally. In actualizing these two philosophies, the four pillars of education, namely: *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be*, are valuable benchmarks for aligning education implementation practices in Indonesia, starting from the curriculum, teachers, teaching and learning processes, infrastructure, up to the assessment.

Frederich Herbart (1776-1841). He was a very critical student of Immanuel Kant. According to him, the purpose of education is to adapt a person's soul to absolute virtue. This means adapting to the laws of morality which is called educational teaching in the process of achieving education. And *seventh*, Willian T Harris (1835-1909). He was a follower of Hegel. According to him, education is allowing the opening of reality based on a definite structure based on spiritual unity. The success of a school is as an institution that maintains values that have been passed down from generation to generation and guides each person's adaptation to society. Djumransyah, (2008: 183-184).

Amin Putri & M Yunus Abu Bakar, (2023) Essentialism is a philosophical school that was initially formulated as a critique of progressive trends in educational institutions. Essentialism views that having the characteristic of flexibility can cause changing views, erratic implementation and lack of stability, resulting in education that loses direction. In fact, education should be based on values that are able to provide balance, namely values that have been tested by time and values that are transparent and

selected. For this reason, the essentialist school of philosophy emerged with its argument that education must be based on values that can bring stability and have been tested by time, so that the values in education are clear and selected.

Faizin, (2020) even though it was initially unorganized, Essentialism grew as a protest or resistance to Progressivism. Essentialism has a view of culture and education that is different from Progressivism. Essentialism rejects the view of Progressivism which recognizes the changing, flexible, particular nature of reality and that values are relative. According to essentialism, such a basis is not appropriate for education, because it can lead to changing views on education, unstable and uncertain implementation of education, and can even lead to a loss of direction in education. Therefore, according to essentialism, education must be based on values that can bring stability. For this reason, it is necessary to choose values that have a clear order or that have been tested.

Aristyasari & Faizah, (2020) the character of holistic and integrated learning can at least be divided into two important domains of etiquette, namely: first, etiquette towards Allah and the Messenger of Allah. and second, manners towards other people or society (Sayuti et al., 2020). In Islamic education, including Muhammadiyah education, manners towards teachers or students are an aspect that receives great attention in the learning process. Abror said that seeking knowledge by obeying and carrying out good manners is nothing else.

Nikma & Rozak, (2023) The flow of essentialism comes from English, namely *essential*. In the Oxford dictionary, this word means *absolutely necessary; indispensable, fundamental; basic* (something that is absolutely necessary; very necessary, fundamental, and basic). According to Brameld, this philosophy is a marriage between two philosophies, namely realism and idealism. The meeting of these two philosophies is electric, namely as a support, not giving up identity and characteristics of each school. This school wants a golden age that was obtained before the dark ages or what is known as "the dark middle age" (an era where reason was confined, science was stagnant, and life was dominated by church doctrine). During the Renaissance, there were efforts to revive ancient civilization and science, especially from the Roman and Ancient Greek periods. In this philosophy, education must be based on clarity and consistency of scientific values that provide stability and clear principles. Strictly speaking the philosophy of essentialism states that education must adhere to clear values and their durability has been tested so that they have stability and clear procedures. The aim is that the cultural heritage and social norms that are formed are results that have been tested over time.

The educational pattern of essentialism is humanism. This means that education born from essentialism is teaching and curriculum that is not consistent with materialistic,

worldly and absolutely scientific concepts. In simple terms, essentialism views education as a custodian of culture (*education as cultural conservation*).

Marup (2023) the school of essentialism can become an educational school supported by cultural values that have existed since the beginning of human civilization. Essentialism emerged throughout the Renaissance with completely different characteristics from the ideology. The inspiration of this faculty was many amendments that were flexible and tolerant, and had nothing to do with any particular doctrine. Essentialism saw that education should be supported and supported to have clarity and longevity, which provides stability and value - value choices that have a transparent order Essentialism, as a philosophy of life, begins to read about the individual with an emphasis on I. In line with essentialism, in the initial stages the individual learns to understand his own account, then goes out to understand the target world From example to creation in line with Kant all information achieved by humans through the five senses which require an a priori Nursing component that is not preceded by previous expertise Once individuals handle objects, it does not mean that each of them already has a certain type of space and time Forms, space and time already existed in the human mind before expertise or observation.

Warami, (2018) the essence of language cannot be separated from human life. The essence of the meaning of language and the existence of language always projects human life which is unlimited and complex. In the context of the projection of human life, language is always used uniquely and has its own rules of the game. For this reason, there are many language games in human life, it could even be said to be unlimited, and the rules of one game and another cannot be determined by a general rule. However, even though there are differences, there are sometimes similarities, and this is difficult to determine definitively and with certainty. Even though people do not know exactly a particular language game, they know what to do in a game. Therefore, to reveal the nature of language in human life can be done by making a description and providing examples in human life that are used differently.

Efendi (2023) According to the Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim, the concept of an independent curriculum as outlined in the independent learning program was created out of his desire to create a comfortable and enjoyable learning atmosphere without burdening students with achieving certain scores or grades. Because in the existing curriculum, teachers determine a student's learning success based on the values obtained so that students' talents and abilities in other fields tend not to emerge and develop. Therefore, the Minister of Education and Culture created a new policy framework that differentiates between the previous curriculum and the current curriculum.

Nurokhman, (2017) Government policy to organize SBI (international standard schools) should also be implemented for madrasas. When viewed from a philosophical perspective, this policy is based on the philosophy of *existentialism* and *essentialism* (*functionalism*). The philosophy of *existentialism* believes that education must nourish and develop the existence of students as optimally as possible through facilities implemented through an educational process that is dignified, pro-change, creative, innovative and experimental, growing and developing the talents, interests and abilities of students, Kir Haryana, 2007: 37-38).

Abdiyah, (2021) the educational environment is a pattern composed of various aspects and main variables, such as school policy, politics, school culture, as well as formalization of the curriculum and fields of study. If there is a change in this matter then the change should be focused on creating and maintaining a school environment in an effective multicultural state. Every child should adapt to the school environment in multicultural conditions. The main goal of multicultural education is to change teaching and learning approaches that lead to a system that is able to provide equal opportunities for every child.

Back to Basic Movements

Essentialists argue that schools must train/educate students to communicate clearly and logically. Core skills in the curriculum should include reading, writing, speaking and arithmetic. Schools have a responsibility to ensure mastery of these skills. According to essentialist philosophy, school education should be practical and provide logical teaching that prepares students for their lives. Schools should not influence or set social policy.

Educational Goals

The aim of essentialist education is to pass on cultural and historical heritage through the accumulation of core knowledge that has survived over a long period of time. It represents a life that has stood the test of time and is known to everyone. Apart from that, the aim of essentialist education is to prepare humans to face life. This does not mean that schools wash their hands, but that schools contribute to designing subject objectives, especially accountable subject objectives, which in the end are sufficient to prepare society to face life.

Curriculum

Essentialist curriculum, like perennialism, is centered on subject matter. In elementary school, the emphasis is on reading, writing, and mathematics. In high school, this knowledge expands to include mathematics, science, languages, and literature. Mastery of this curriculum is an important foundation for general education

(philosophy, mathematics, science, history, languages, arts and literature) which is needed in life. Learning specifically related to these scientific disciplines can develop students' minds (reasoning abilities) and at the same time make them aware of the physical world around them.

The Role of Schools and Teachers

The role of schools is to preserve and pass on cultural and historical heritage to the current generation of students through the wisdom and accumulated experience of traditional disciplines. At school, every student learns the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to become members of society. Regarding the role of the teacher, there are many similarities with perennialism. Teachers are considered experts in certain subjects and are excellent role models to emulate and respect. Teachers have knowledge, and the class is under their influence and supervision.

Principles of Education

The principles of essentialist education can be stated as follows: education must be achieved through hard work, not only arise from within the student, initiative in education is emphasized on the teacher, not on the student, the core of the educational process is the assimilation of predetermined subjects. Essentialism recognizes that education will encourage individuals to realize their potential, schools must maintain traditional methods related to mental discipline, the ultimate goal of education is to improve general welfare, the true demands of democracy, traditional methods related to mental discipline are prioritized in educational schools. Power (1982) presents several implications of essentialist educational philosophy:

Educational goals, cultural transmission to determine social solidarity and shared prosperity. The curriculum in basic education includes reading, writing and arithmetic. Communication skills are essential for academic achievement and social life. The school curriculum contains what should be taught. In the student's position, the school is responsible for providing logical or trustworthy teaching. Schools have the authority to demand student learning outcomes. Students go to school to learn, not to manage lessons. Method, traditional method that emphasizes teacher initiative. The role of the teacher, teachers must be educated. Morally, they are individuals who can be trusted, and technically they must have the skills/abilities to guide the learning process. Portrait of an Essentialist Teacher. From all the explanations above, perhaps we already have an idea of what a portrait of a teacher in essentialist philosophy looks like, which shows some differences with the portrait of a progressive teacher.

In this philosophy, teachers are considered experts in a particular subject and are excellent role models to be imitated and respected. Teachers have knowledge, and the class is under their influence and supervision. In this context, teachers must work hard

and show high dedication; they are highly critical of the tendency of some teachers to let students do things on their own and spend time expressing their feelings.

Students go to school solely to learn, not to manage lessons, so the teaching method emphasizes and centers on teacher initiative, not student initiative. It is generally believed that students do not really know what they want, and that they should be forced to learn. Therefore, soft pedagogy should be avoided, focusing instead on the appropriate use of traditional methods. An essentialist teacher's strict discipline towards his students is emphasized to help them achieve the ultimate goal.

From the description above, it can be concluded that the portrait of essentialist teachers is very different from the portrait of progressive teachers who give their students a lot of freedom in learning. If progressive education is student-centered, then essentialism is the opposite, and students do not have much freedom in acting or thinking. Of all the essentialist philosophical teachings described above, of course there are advantages and disadvantages, just like other educational philosophies. Therefore, according to the author, a combination of teachings or concepts from each philosophy is very necessary to create a quality and superior modern education pattern.

D. Conclusion

The philosophy of educational essentialism is a philosophy in the school of education which was initially formulated as a critique of progressive trends in schools. Essentialism views education that relies on a foundation of flexibility in all forms as a source of perspective that fluctuates, is easily swayed, lacks direction, is uncertain and unstable. Therefore, the teachings of essentialist philosophy require humanity to return to old culture, a historical heritage that has proven its primacy in human life, which is considered by experts to be a 'conservative path to culture'. Modern essentialism in education is a movement that protests the progressive movement's skepticism and cynicism towards the values embedded in cultural and social heritage. The implications of essentialist philosophy in the context of modern education are as follows:

1. Learning objectives are directed at preparing students to face life or life in their social environment;
2. The curriculum contains fundamental aspects that aim to instill essential values that are considered important to students;
3. Education is teacher-centered. It is generally believed that students do not really know what they want and must be forced to learn. Therefore, soft pedagogy should be avoided, focusing on the use of appropriate traditional methods;
4. The strategies or methods used include providing examples, modeling, habituation, and persuasive approaches;

5. In terms of learning evaluation, the emphasis is placed on evaluating ethical references as an effort to measure the internalization of faith and human values in students and the extent to which the implementation of these values occurs in the social realm.

E. Acknowledgement

Thanks to the principal of SDN 6 Banyuasin I and all friends who helped me in this article.

References

- Abdiyah, L. (2021). Philosophy of Islamic Education: Multicultural Education. *Tarbawy: Journal of Islamic Education*, 8 (2), 24–31. <https://doi.org/10.32923/tarbawy.v8i2.1827>
- Amin Putri, RK, & M Yunus Abu Bakar. (2023). The Concept of Essentialism in the Perspective of Islamic Education Philosophy. *Dirasah: Journal of Islamic Education Science and Management Studies*, 6 (1), 112–124. <https://doi.org/10.58401/dirasah.v6i1.752>
- Aristyasari, YF, & Faizah, R. (2020). Dissecting the Philosophy of Muhammadiyah Education (Examining the Concept of Muhammadiyah Educators). *Journal of Islamic Religious Education Al-Thariqah*, 5 (2), 129–143. [https://doi.org/10.25299/al-thariqah.2020.vol5\(2\).5872](https://doi.org/10.25299/al-thariqah.2020.vol5(2).5872)
- Efendi, PM, Tatang Muhtar, & Yusuf Tri Herlambang. (2023). The Relevance of the Merdeka Curriculum to the Concept of Ki Hadjar Dewantara: Critical Study in a Philosophical-Pedagogical Perspective. *Journal of Elementaria Education*, 6 (2), 548–561. <https://doi.org/10.31949/jee.v6i2.5487>
- Ekawati, W., Siti Masitoh, & Mochamad Nursalim. (2023). Study of the Philosophy of Essentialism on the Implementation of Managerial Supervision. *HELPER: Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 40 (1), 14–21. <https://doi.org/10.36456/helper.vol40.no1.a6321>
- Faizin, I. (2020). Paradigm of Essentialism in Islamic Education. *Al-Miskawaih Journal*, 1 (2), 155–171.
- Islam, JP, Waluyo, T., & Fauziati, E. (2023). *Tawazun Character education in learning Malay Culture at Muhammadiyah Ukui Elementary School: An Essentialist approach*. 16 (1), 21–32. <https://doi.org/10.32832/tawazun.v16i1.13808>
- Marup, Karim Fatkhullah, F., & Saefurridjal, A. (2023). Education Based on Religion, Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology. *Rayah Al-Islam*, 7 (1), 463–476. <https://doi.org/10.37274/rais.v7i1.686>

- Nikma, S., & Rozak, A. (2023). Independent curriculum in a review of educational philosophy. *Qiro'ah: Journal of Islamic Religious Education*, 13 (1), 36–48. <https://www.ejurnal.iiq.ac.id/index.php/qiroah/article/download/875/349>
- Nurokhman, A. (2017). Alternatives for Islamic Boarding School-Based Madrasah Development. *Journal of Education*, 5 (2), 130–139. <https://doi.org/10.24090/jk.v5i2.1940>
- Research, J., & Education, I. (2022). *Philosophical thought of Islamic education (essentialism)*. 1 (2005), 194–201.
- Warami, H. (2018). Language at the Gate of Educational Philosophy: An Ontological Perspective on Language and Culture. *Triton Journal of Education*, 1 (1), 35. <https://doi.org/10.30862/jtp.v1i1.793>
- Witanti, F.N. (2016). Revitalization of Madrasas as Integrative-Alternative Education Institutions. *Tarbiyatuna*, 7 (1), 82–93.