

Implementation of Flexible Education in the Perspective of Essentialism Education Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the application of essentialism education philosophy in the Indonesian education system which aims to integrate cultural values in learning. Education in Indonesia faces the challenge of creating learners who are not only academically competent but also have character based on cultural values. Essentialism, with its emphasis on the inheritance of cultural values, offers a solution to maintain cultural stability through relevant and flexible education. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research examines the ontological, epistemological and axiological views in essentialism and their implications in an inclusive and flexible curriculum. The results show that education should include the intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual development of learners. In this context, essentialist education focuses on character building, activeness in learning, and strengthening learners' morality to prepare them for the challenges of life in this world and the hereafter.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Essentialism in education emphasizes the preservation of cultural heritage and noble values, and criticizes progressive approaches that are considered too flexible (Solihah et al., 2024). The Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia attempts to combine elements of essentialism and progressivism to create a more effective and relevant education (Fatirul, 2022). Essentialism supports the strengthening of basic subjects such as reading, writing and mathematics as the foundation of education. Although essentialism criticizes flexibility in the curriculum, this approach can still contribute to the development of Merdeka Curriculum policies. The implementation of essentialism in Indonesian education can be done through the national literacy movement, strengthening basic subject matter, and culture-based education.

The importance of implementing flexible education in Indonesia is underlined by various studies (Ratri & Atmojo, 2024) highlighting the need for character education in primary schools, pointing out challenges such as insufficient support and planning. (Gumilar et al., 2023) supported the shift from Curriculum 2013 to Curriculum Merdeka, which focuses on project-based learning and soft skills development, overcoming the limitations of the previous curriculum. Meanwhile, (Isma et al., 2022) emphasized the need for digitalization in education to improve the quality of learning and prepare students for the 4.0 to 5.0 revolution, in line with the government's "free learning" initiative.

Education in Indonesia continues to face challenges in creating a system that is able to produce learners who are not only academically competent but also have a strong character based on cultural values. However, in reality, the application of cultural values in education is often marginalized by approaches oriented towards pragmatism and the achievement of academic results alone. This condition causes a gap between the expected goal of education, namely character building through the inheritance of cultural values, and the

current educational practices. Therefore, a philosophical foundation is needed that is able to bridge the gap, one of which is through the essentialism educational philosophy approach. The ontology, epistemology, and axiology of Islamic education are explored, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these philosophical dimensions in shaping educational practices (Rohiyatun, 2020). The importance of studying the philosophy of education for future teachers is also highlighted, as it offers a deeper understanding of the sources of knowledge and guides pedagogical strategies.

Previous research shows that essentialism as a school of educational philosophy has become a foundation in maintaining the stability of cultural values through education. Rosanawati (2021) asserts that essentialism is important in building stability through durable values, while Jalaluddin & Idi (2013) reveal that essentialism focuses on inheriting cultural values to guide society. On the other hand, Muslim (2020) states that essentialism offers an alternative to overcome the value vacuum amidst the dominance of progressive education. However, previous research focuses more on the theoretical aspects without providing practical solutions to integrate essentialism in a flexible and inclusive education system. This research offers a new approach by adapting the principles of essentialism into a modern educational design that is relevant to current needs.

This research aims to formulate strategies for the implementation of essentialism education philosophy in a flexible and inclusive Indonesian education system. Hopefully, this research can provide practical recommendations for integrating cultural values in learning that not only preserves cultural heritage but is also relevant to the needs of modern education. The results of this research are expected to be the basis for developing educational policies that support the holistic formation of students' characters.

2. METHOD

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand the phenomenon in depth based on data collected from various sources. The research is conducted by observing the subject or object directly or indirectly and analyzing information obtained from print, online, or interview media. Data is studied in detail through the stages of preparation, data collection, and data analysis. Research subjects are individuals or groups that are directly related to the research theme. Subject selection was conducted using purposive sampling technique, which selects participants who are considered capable of providing relevant information based on predetermined criteria, such as experience, position, or knowledge of the research context. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Interviews used a semi-structured guide with a grid covering aspects such as the subject's experiences, perceptions and responses.

Observation was conducted by recording the context, activities, and interactions, while documentation involved collecting data in the form of photos, videos, or relevant written documents. The research instruments were validated through expert judgment, which is input from experts in the field of qualitative research to ensure content suitability, language clarity, and appropriateness to the research objectives. Data analysis was carried out with the steps of data reduction, data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives or tables, and conclusion drawing based on patterns, themes, or relationships found. To increase the validity of the results, this study used triangulation of sources and methods. With this method, the research is expected to be able to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and answer research questions comprehensively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research explores the views of ontology, epistemology, and axiology within the framework of essentialism with a focus on its relevance in education (Swastoko, 2022). First, the ontology of essentialism is a concept that the world is ruled by a flawless value system, which governs its contents flawlessly (Prihanta et al., 2024). The goal is to shape individuals into happy human beings in this world and the hereafter. Therefore, the content of education includes science, art, and everything that can move the human will. The school curriculum for essentialism is a kind of miniature world that can be used as a measure of reality, truth, and greatness (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2013: 97).

Second, the Epistemological View of Essentialism begins with the controversy between the physical and the spiritual (Windayani, 2023). The difference between idealism and realism lies in its view of the spirit as the key to awareness of reality. Idealism holds that humans know things only in and through spiritual ideas, whereas realism holds that knowledge comes from corporeally perceived reality. Some realists argue that the mind is physical and subject to physical laws. Physical and spiritual elements are considered part of the reality of human personality, so that understanding of humans, both philosophically and scientifically, must be done with a dual approach that is appropriate in the implementation of education (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2013: 99).

Furthermore, the idealistic approach to knowledge explores several basic premises (Riyadi & Khojir, 2021). First, humans can only understand their own spiritual life, but that understanding gives awareness to understand the reality of other lives, because human consciousness is part of God's Most Perfect ratio. Second, T.H. Green argues that personalism education can only be obtained through self-introspection, meaning that humans cannot know something only based on mental awareness without observation. Every mental experience must involve reflection of various experiences. Third, in modern religious philosophy, there is a theory that states that human knowledge comes from the resonance of God's understanding (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2013: 100).

The realist approach to knowledge has several theories that underlie the emergence of this approach. The theory of associationism, influenced by John Locke and the philosophy of empiricism, states that children born into the world are like blank paper that has not been written on, otherwise known as "tabula rasa" (Ferizal Rachmad & Amril, 2023). Thoughts or ideas that exist in the soul are formed from the association of elements of sensing and observation. Adherents of this theory use introspection, which is also used by idealists. Furthermore, the theory of behaviorism states that the manifestation of mental life is reflected in behavior, because humans are considered as total biological organisms.

Understanding a person's mental state must involve understanding the organism, which is related to neurological experience. According to this theory, the knowledge that humans receive cannot be separated from the process of cultivating conditions, which then leads to sarbon theory, which involves the process of stimulation or stimulus that is greeted with a certain response. This response and response become a unity in an interconnected psychological process (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2013: 100-101). The theory of connectionism states that human behavior is formed by the pattern of the relationship between stimulus and response, with the feelings that humans have affecting learning success (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2013: 101).

Finally, the epistemological type of realism consists of several types. The first type is neorealism, which is psychologically closely related to behaviorism (Faiz et al., 2023). In neorealism, knowledge is received directly by the mind about the world of reality, with the body as a specific response to external stimuli, without involving much intellectual process. The second type is critical realism, which states that the medium between intellect and reality is sensing and observation (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2013: 102).

Essentialism's axiological view is strongly influenced by thoughts from ontology and epistemology, so essentialism's axiology states that values originate and depend on the views of idealism and realism. In this case, there are several theories of value explained in the understanding of essentialist axiology. First, the theory of value according to idealism states that ethical laws are the laws of the cosmos or natural laws (Muhammad Ichsan Thaib, 2015). Therefore, a person is said to be good if he is interactive and implements these laws. In the view of idealism, attitudes, behaviors, and expressions of feelings also have a relationship with good and bad qualities.

Second, the theory of value according to realism states that ethical values are obtained through the principle of ontology, where the source of human knowledge lies in the regularity of the environment (Mubin, 2020). The problem of good or bad human ethics is strongly influenced by heredity and the environment. A person's behavior or actions are the result of a combination that arises as a result of the relationship between physiological factors (heredity) and influences from environmental factors (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2013: 102-103).

The curriculum in essentialism focuses on subjects that emphasize mastery of material, which is the basis of general education necessary in life to learn appropriately. This curriculum aims to develop students' minds and reasoning abilities (Muslim, 2020: 39). Some essentialist views on curriculum include: (1) Herman Harrel Horne argues that the curriculum should rest on a single basis, namely the ideal human character and the ideals of an ideal society. Educational activities should be adjusted and directed to achieve goodness, so that students' activities are not limited, but in line with the predetermined foundation.

(2) Bogoslousky asserted that in order to avoid separation between subjects, the curriculum should be regarded as a house that has four parts: first, the universe, which sees knowledge as the background of the manifestation force of human life; second, civilization, which is concerned with human works resulting from community life; third, culture, which includes philosophy, art, literature, religion, and interpretation of the environment; fourth, personality, which forms a real personality that does not conflict with the ideal personality. The curriculum must be designed so that physical, physiological, emotional, and intellectual factors develop harmoniously and in accordance with ideal humanity (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2013: 105-106).

3.1. Essentialism's View on Flexibility

In essence, the curriculum must be structured flexibly and based on the child's personality. Flexibility is not applied to the understanding of religion and the universe, which must have certainty (Faiz et al., 2023).

The curriculum needs to be carefully planned, and in learning activities, all learners' abilities should be mobilized so that they actively participate. Learning activities must be carried out flexibly, without rigidity, so that all components of education can carry out their duties properly. The essentialist curriculum is seen as a miniature world involving teachers, administrators and other supporters, who view students as part of the world of reality. Essentialism does not support one curriculum model for all types of schools; various essentialist curriculum models are structured according to different times and places, but remain within the frame of the essentialist platform (Theodore Brameld 1955: 247 in Hidayat, 2008: 5).

3.2. Essentialism's View on Inclusivity

Education in essentialism is not bound by binding rules, but rather flexible, thus opening up opportunities for everyone to be accepted in an educational institution without distinguishing religion or social class. Essentialist education opens itself to accept all differences, allowing the plurality in human life to be seen (Purnama & Hs, n.d.).

3.3. Essentialism's View of Learning

According to essentialists, learning begins with humans learning about themselves or “me”. Learning begins with understanding oneself, and then understanding the outside world or other people. Learning is accepting and recognizing existing social values, which are then passed on and added to by the next generation. In essentialist philosophy, the main focus is on shaping students' intellect, encouraging them to think clearly and logically. The goal of essentialist education is to prepare students to master the basic disciplines of knowledge in order to solve the various problems they face, both personal and social problems (Bakar & Novita, 2021: 16-17).

3.4. Essentialism's View on Activeness

Activeness in learning activities is very important in essentialism, because it is an activity to develop cognitive abilities, attitudes, and values that exist in students (Tolchah, 2020). Therefore, the learning design must realize the active involvement of each learner in the entire learning process. Learners' activeness allows them to achieve the learning objectives that have been designed by the teacher. Learners feel accepted and valued in learning activities, and can share knowledge with their peers.

3.5. Essentialism's View on Character

In essentialism, education is a manifestation of mental life reflected in behavior (Daga, 2020). Humans are considered as a whole organism, which is the totality of biological mechanisms. Education helps the formation of learners' characters to grow and develop as ideal human beings, by bringing to life positive characters or attitudes and behaviors, both towards oneself and in interactions with others. Character education aims to foster positive character, because character has two sides: positive and negative. With character education, the positive side will be explored, while the negative side will be dulled and not developed. For example, confidence fosters courage, not arrogance, fear fosters prudence, not cowardice, and shame fosters modesty, not insolence. The purpose of character education is to form a positive character, which is inseparable from the values of right and wrong (Munir: 2010 in Muslim, 2020: 38).

4. CONCLUSION

Education has a very important role in shaping the character of learners, which is not only related to academic achievement, but also to the application of cultural values that develop in society (Santika Virdi et al., 2023). The education process should be designed to pay attention to all aspects of learners' lives, including their intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development, so that they are ready to face the challenges of life in this world and prepare for life in the hereafter. Therefore, education is not only limited to the transfer of knowledge, but also to forming individuals who can contribute positively to society and the world at large.

In an essentialist framework, the education curriculum should be designed to meet the basic needs of knowledge and skills relevant to real life, which will help learners deal with problems in society (Sadewa, 2022). Essentialist education not only emphasizes the importance of mastering the material, but also how students are guided to develop good morals and character, in accordance with the moral principles that apply in their culture. In this case, all relevant parties including educators, parents, communities and governments

must work together harmoniously to create an education system that can facilitate the achievement of these goals.

In addition, education must be inclusive and flexible, able to accept diversity in society and accommodate various differences that exist (Taufan & Mazhud, 2016). With a more open approach, education will be able to develop the potential of each individual, as well as strengthen a sense of community and mutual respect between learners. Therefore, essentialist education that focuses on character development must continue to be developed to create individuals who are not only academically intelligent, but also moral, virtuous, and ready to face life with full responsibility, both in this world and in the hereafter.

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