

## **Idealism in Educational Philosophy: Reclaiming Values in an Age of Scientific Pragmatism**

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### **Abstract**

Education, as a means of shaping humanity through human resource development, demands a comprehensive outlook that encompasses the full spectrum of human existence and potential. Addressing contemporary educational challenges requires more than practical experience; it necessitates critical thinking, rigorous scientific analysis, and sustained scholarly research. Additionally, education must be firmly grounded in philosophical discourse and reflective inquiry. As the foundational discipline underlying all sciences, philosophy seeks to resolve both existing and emerging human challenges, particularly those concerning the metaphysical triad of God, humanity, and nature. However, with the ongoing evolution of society and the acceleration of technological change, many contemporary issues have surpassed the explanatory capacity of traditional philosophy alone, leading to the emergence of empirical science as a complementary approach to understanding reality. The term "philosophy" originates from the ancient Greek *philosophia*, signifying "love of wisdom"—a synthesis of *philos* (to love) and *sophia* (wisdom). In its essence, philosophy embodies humanity's enduring quest for truth, meaning, and ethical understanding. The systematic study of philosophy enables individuals to confront life's multifaceted challenges with deeper insight and analytical sophistication, particularly within the complex domain of education. In this context, philosophy provides a foundational framework for educational thought and practice, serving to align pedagogical approaches with the broader aspirations and values of society. This paper explores the significance and application of idealism within the philosophy of education, examining how idealist principles—alongside other philosophical schools such as essentialism and radicalism—inform educational concepts, objectives, curriculum design, and instructional methodologies. Through qualitative descriptive analysis grounded in library research and philosophical inquiry, this study demonstrates that idealism continues to play a pivotal role in shaping educational values, moral development, and the intellectual orientation of contemporary educational systems.

**Keywords:** idealism, philosophy of education, educational values, essentialism, moral education

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### **Introduction**

Education occupies a fundamental position in the development of human potential and serves as the primary mechanism through which societies transmit knowledge, values, and cultural practices across generations (Dewey, 1938). Beyond the mere transfer of information and technical skills, education aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals through comprehensive human resource development that addresses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Bloom et al., 1956). The educational enterprise, as expansive as the scope of human life itself, demands a multidisciplinary approach that transcends practical experience and routine pedagogical practice. It requires profound philosophical reflection, rigorous scientific inquiry, and continuous empirical research grounded in systematic analysis and theoretical discourse (Suripto, 2012; Noddings, 2016).

These philosophical foundations serve to elevate educational practices beyond technical considerations, enabling them to evolve dynamically in response to the complexities of human existence and the changing demands of contemporary society. As Biesta (2010) argues, education must be understood not merely as a technical enterprise but as a fundamentally normative practice that involves questions about what constitutes a good life and what kind of society we wish to create. Philosophy, often characterized as the foundational discipline from which all other sciences emerge, has historically sought to address both present challenges and potential future problems in human life (Kartanegara, 2005; Russell, 1945). Among its core concerns lies the metaphysical triad of God, humanity, and nature—fundamental issues that remain central to philosophical inquiry across cultures and historical periods.

However, the rapid transformation of modern society, accelerated by technological innovation, globalization, and social change, has revealed certain limitations in philosophy's capacity to fully address all universal human problems through abstract reasoning alone (Kuhn, 1962). This recognition has given rise to modern empirical science as a complementary response that combines philosophical inquiry with systematic observation and experimentation. Despite these developments, philosophy retains its vital relevance, particularly as an essential means to explore questions of meaning, ethics, purpose, and the fundamental nature of the human condition—questions that remain especially pertinent in the field of education (Carr, 2004; Pring, 2004).

The word "philosophy" derives from the ancient Greek term *philosophia*, which literally means "love of wisdom"—a compound formed from *philein* (to love) and *sophia* (wisdom). This etymological origin reflects philosophy's fundamental character as humanity's enduring quest for knowledge, truth, moral understanding, and wisdom in the face of existence's inherent uncertainties (Plato, trans. 1997). Through the systematic study of philosophy, individuals develop the intellectual tools and critical capacities necessary to confront life's challenges with depth, nuance, and careful reflection—capabilities that prove especially valuable in addressing the complex problems that characterize contemporary educational systems (Lipman, 2003; Paul & Elder, 2006).

Educational challenges today extend far beyond technical pedagogical questions to encompass fundamental issues of purpose, value, justice, and human flourishing that cannot be resolved through empirical data alone (Hansen, 2007). Consequently, educational philosophy emerges as an indispensable framework that connects abstract theoretical foundations with

concrete practical applications, thereby aligning the aims and methods of education with the deepest values, ideals, and aspirations of individuals and societies (Ozmon & Craver, 2014).

In educational contexts specifically, idealism emphasizes the cultivation of moral character, the systematic development of intellectual capacities, the refinement of aesthetic sensibilities, and the elevation of consciousness through engagement with enduring truths and cultural achievements (Butler, 1968; Shahid, 2008). Idealist educational philosophy positions the human mind and spirit as the primary locus of reality and meaning, suggesting that education's fundamental purpose lies in developing these internal capacities rather than merely adapting individuals to external material circumstances (Sarkar & Al Mamun, 2023).

However, despite its historical importance and theoretical richness, the contemporary relevance and practical application of idealist thought in modern educational systems merit deeper exploration and critical examination (Liu, 2024). In an era increasingly dominated by pragmatic concerns, technological imperatives, economic pressures, and measurable outcomes, the question arises whether idealism's emphasis on eternal truths, moral absolutes, and spiritual development remains viable or whether it represents an outdated approach unsuited to contemporary needs (Noddings, 2016; Pring, 2004).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of idealism as a foundational philosophy within education, investigating its core principles, historical development, and contemporary applications. Additionally, this research situates idealism within the broader landscape of educational philosophy by comparing and contrasting it with other significant philosophical orientations, particularly essentialism and radicalism. Through this comparative analysis, the study seeks to clarify idealism's distinctive contributions to educational theory and practice, identifying both its enduring strengths and potential limitations.

The research addresses several fundamental questions: What are the core ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin idealist educational philosophy? How do these philosophical commitments translate into specific educational objectives, curriculum designs, pedagogical approaches, and conceptions of the teacher-student relationship? In what ways does idealism differ from other major educational philosophies in its understanding of knowledge, learning, and human development? What role can—or should—idealist principles play in addressing contemporary educational challenges?

By systematically exploring these questions through philosophical analysis grounded in both classical and contemporary scholarship, this research seeks to illuminate the ongoing significance of philosophical foundations—particularly idealist thought—in shaping meaningful, value-driven, and humanizing education in the modern era. The study ultimately argues that while idealism cannot serve as a comprehensive or exclusive framework for contemporary education, its emphasis on moral development, intellectual cultivation, and the pursuit of truth provides essential counterbalance to purely instrumental or utilitarian educational orientations that dominate current policy discourse (Biesta, 2010; Sandel, 2009).

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach utilizing library research methodology, focusing specifically on philosophical analysis and conceptual inquiry (Creswell, 2014). This methodological approach was deliberately selected to enable comprehensive exploration of idealism as a philosophical concept within the broader framework of educational philosophy. The research sought to examine idealism's theoretical foundations, historical development, educational applications, and relationships to other

philosophical schools through systematic review and critical analysis of relevant scholarly texts and philosophical discourse.

Library research methodology proves particularly appropriate for philosophical inquiry because it allows researchers to engage directly with primary philosophical texts, trace the historical development of ideas across time periods, and examine how different philosophical positions have been articulated, defended, and criticized within scholarly literature (Bowell & Kemp, 2015). Unlike empirical studies that gather data through observation or experimentation, philosophical research proceeds through careful textual analysis, logical argumentation, conceptual clarification, and critical evaluation of theoretical positions (Nola & Irzik, 2005).

### ***Research Subjects and Materials***

As a literature-based study grounded in philosophical analysis, this research did not involve human participants as subjects. Instead, the primary subjects consisted of classical and contemporary philosophical texts, peer-reviewed academic journal articles, scholarly books, and authoritative sources that address idealism, essentialism, radicalism, and related concepts within educational philosophy. The selection of materials followed systematic criteria designed to ensure both comprehensiveness and quality.

Literature was selected based on multiple criteria including: (1) direct relevance to the research topic and questions; (2) academic credibility of authors and publication venues; (3) recognized significance within the field of educational philosophy; (4) temporal distribution spanning both foundational historical texts and recent scholarship; and (5) representation of diverse philosophical perspectives to enable balanced comparative analysis.

Primary materials utilized in this research included: peer-reviewed journal articles from reputable academic databases addressing idealism and related educational philosophies; foundational philosophical texts by major idealist thinkers including Plato, Berkeley, Kant, and Hegel; contemporary books on educational philosophy published by recognized academic presses; and authoritative sources retrieved from scholarly databases including Google Scholar, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Garuda (the Indonesian national research repository).

The literature search employed carefully selected keywords designed to capture relevant materials across different terminological frameworks and scholarly traditions. Primary keywords included: "idealism in education," "philosophy of education," "educational idealism," "essentialism," "radicalism," "Plato and education," "moral education," "character education," "curriculum theory," and "philosophical foundations of education." These searches were conducted in both English and Indonesian to capture relevant scholarship from different linguistic and cultural contexts.

Reference management throughout the research process was supported by Mendeley bibliographic software, which facilitated systematic organization of sources, accurate citation tracking, and proper formatting of references according to APA 7th edition guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2020).

### ***Research Procedure***

The research was conducted through a systematic multi-stage procedure designed to ensure methodological rigor and comprehensive coverage of relevant literature. The procedure consisted of the following sequential steps:

Stage 1: Problem Identification and Scope Definition. The research team identified the central research problem—understanding idealism's role and relevance in contemporary educational philosophy—and established clear boundaries for the philosophical scope of

inquiry. This stage involved preliminary reading to identify key themes, debates, and gaps in existing literature.

Stage 2: Literature Gathering and Selection. Researchers conducted systematic searches across multiple academic databases using predetermined keywords. Initial searches yielded several hundred potentially relevant sources, which were then screened based on inclusion criteria including relevance, academic quality, and accessibility. This screening process ultimately identified approximately 80 sources for detailed review.

Stage 3: Critical Reading and Philosophical Analysis. Selected sources underwent careful close reading employing hermeneutic and interpretive methods appropriate to philosophical texts (Gadamer, 1975/2004). This stage involved identifying key arguments, examining logical relationships between concepts, noting points of agreement and disagreement among different authors, and extracting relevant passages for detailed analysis. Researchers maintained detailed analytical notes documenting interpretations, questions, and emerging themes.

Stage 4: Thematic Categorization and Synthesis. Data were organized into main thematic categories emerging from the literature including: foundational principles of idealism, historical development of idealist thought, applications to educational practice, comparisons with essentialism and radicalism, contemporary critiques and defenses, and implications for current educational policy and practice. This thematic organization provided the structure for presenting findings and developing arguments.

#### ***Data Collection***

Data collection occurred through systematic document analysis conducted during the period from September through December 2024. The research team manually reviewed each selected source to extract key concepts, identify theoretical foundations, note educational implications, document relevant quotations, and record bibliographic information. Only literature meeting established standards for academic quality and demonstrating clear relevance to educational philosophy was included in the final corpus.

The document analysis process involved multiple readings of selected texts at different levels of engagement. Initial readings provided general familiarity with arguments and main themes. Subsequent closer readings focused on identifying specific claims, analyzing supporting arguments, noting methodological approaches, and examining how authors positioned their work relative to existing scholarship. Final readings verified interpretations and ensured accurate representation of authors' positions.

#### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis employed content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, both well-established approaches within philosophical and qualitative educational research (Krippendorff, 2018; Schwandt, 2007). Content analysis involved systematic examination of texts to identify recurring themes, concepts, arguments, and patterns across different sources. Hermeneutic interpretation focused on understanding the meaning of philosophical arguments within their appropriate contexts while also examining their broader implications.

The analytical process organized data thematically to reflect each philosophical school's distinctive perspective on fundamental educational questions including aims and purposes, curriculum content and organization, appropriate instructional methods, the proper teacher-student relationship, and conceptions of knowledge and learning. This thematic organization enabled systematic comparison across different philosophical approaches while maintaining attention to each tradition's internal coherence and distinctive emphases.

Coding was conducted manually rather than through automated software, reflecting the interpretive nature of philosophical analysis that requires nuanced understanding of complex abstract arguments that resist straightforward categorization. The coding process prioritized

conceptual clarity, logical coherence, and faithful representation of philosophical positions rather than quantitative measures or statistical processing.

Throughout the analytical process, researchers maintained reflexive awareness of their own philosophical assumptions and potential biases, explicitly noting instances where interpretation involved judgment calls or where texts might support multiple readings. This reflexive approach aligns with established best practices in qualitative research that recognize the researcher's role in constructing interpretations while striving for rigor, transparency, and fidelity to source materials (Tracy, 2010).

## **Results**

This section presents the findings from the philosophical analysis examining idealism's role within educational philosophy. The analysis was structured around three central themes derived from the research objectives: (1) foundational principles of idealism in education, (2) implementation of idealist thought within educational components, and (3) comparative analysis with essentialism and radicalism.

### ***Foundational Principles of Idealism in Education***

The analysis revealed that idealism conceptualizes reality as fundamentally mental or spiritual in nature, positioning ideas, values, and consciousness as the core constituents of human development and the primary focus of educational endeavor (Butler, 1968; Shahid, 2008). From this philosophical orientation, education aims fundamentally at shaping the mind, character, and spiritual capacities of individuals through systematic engagement with eternal truths, universal moral values, enduring aesthetic achievements, and the accumulated wisdom embedded within cultural heritage.

The research identified four key principles that constitute the foundation of idealist educational philosophy:

*Reality as Mental/Spiritual Construction:* Idealism maintains that ultimate reality consists of mind, consciousness, or spirit rather than material substance (Berkeley, 1710/1982; Hegel, trans. 1977). Physical objects and material conditions represent manifestations or expressions of underlying mental reality rather than self-subsistent entities. Applied to education, this ontological commitment suggests that developing students' minds and consciousness takes precedence over training for material production or adaptation to physical environments. The internal life of reason, moral judgment, and aesthetic appreciation constitutes education's proper domain.

*Education Aims for Perfection and Self-Realization:* Idealist philosophy understands education as oriented toward achieving human perfection through systematic development of rational, moral, and spiritual capacities (Mustaqim, 2017; Sarkar & Al Mamun, 2023). This perfectionist orientation reflects idealism's teleological view that human nature contains inherent potentialities requiring cultivation to reach fruition. Education serves as the primary mechanism through which individuals realize their essential nature as rational and moral beings, ascending from ignorance toward wisdom, from vice toward virtue, and from particularity toward universal understanding.

*Knowledge Consists of Eternal Truths:* Idealism maintains that genuine knowledge concerns universal, timeless truths rather than contingent facts or contextually variable information (Plato, trans. 1997). Mathematical principles, logical laws, moral imperatives, and aesthetic standards exemplify such eternal truths that exist independently of particular times, places, or cultures. Education should focus on transmitting these enduring truths and developing students' capacity to apprehend them through reason and intuition rather than

emphasizing current events, local customs, or vocational skills tied to temporary social arrangements.

*Teachers as Moral Exemplars:* Within idealist educational philosophy, teachers occupy positions of profound responsibility and legitimate authority (Ozmon & Craver, 2014; Shahid, 2008). Because teachers possess greater access to truth and virtue through education and experience, they serve not merely as instructors but as models embodying the intellectual and moral ideals toward which students should strive. The teacher-student relationship fundamentally involves the transmission of wisdom and virtue from more developed to less developed individuals rather than collaborative exploration among equals.

**Table 1**

**Foundational Principles of Idealism in Education**

<b>Key Principle</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Reality is mental/spiritual	Ultimate reality constructed through mind and consciousness rather than material substance
Education aims for perfection	Systematic development of moral, intellectual, and spiritual capacities toward human fulfillment
Knowledge consists of eternal truths	Emphasis on timeless principles, ideal forms, and universal moral standards transcending contexts
Teacher as moral exemplar	Educators serve as models of virtue, wisdom, and intellectual authority for student emulation

### ***Implementation of Idealism in Education***

The analysis demonstrated that idealism translates into educational practice through distinctive approaches to curriculum design, pedagogical methodology, and structural organization of learning environments. These practical manifestations reflect idealism's core philosophical commitments while adapting to the institutional realities of formal schooling.

*Curriculum Emphasizing Great Works and Humanities:* Idealist curricula prioritize engagement with humanity's greatest intellectual and artistic achievements (Adler, 1982; Liu, 2024). This includes philosophical texts that address fundamental questions about reality, knowledge, and value; literary works that illuminate universal aspects of human experience; historical narratives that reveal moral lessons and cultural achievements; and artistic masterpieces that cultivate aesthetic sensibility. Mathematics receives attention as exemplifying eternal rational truths, while natural sciences are valued primarily for revealing ordered rational patterns in nature rather than for practical applications.

The "great books" tradition associated with Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler represents perhaps the most explicit curricular expression of idealist principles in modern education (Adler, 1982). This approach organizes curriculum around careful study of Western civilization's most influential texts, from Homer and Plato through Augustine and Aquinas to Shakespeare and Kant, based on the conviction that these works embody enduring wisdom addressing perennial human concerns.

*Pedagogical Methods: Dialogue and Contemplation:* Idealist pedagogy emphasizes intellectual methods appropriate to accessing universal truths (Ozmon & Craver, 2014; Temt, 2019). Socratic dialogue occupies a central position, using carefully structured questioning to help students discover truths through their own reasoning rather than through passive reception of information. This method reflects idealism's view that genuine knowledge requires internal rational insight rather than mere memorization of external facts.

Contemplative practices including silent reflection, meditation on great ideas, and systematic analysis of complex arguments also feature prominently in idealist education. These methods cultivate students' capacity for sustained rational thought and develop their ability to grasp abstract concepts and universal principles. Lecture remains important as a means for teachers who possess superior understanding to guide students toward truth, though effective lectures engage students' rational faculties rather than demanding uncritical acceptance.

*Role of Teacher: Authority Figure and Guide:* Within idealist educational settings, teachers exercise significant intellectual and moral authority (Mustaqim, 2017; Shahid, 2008). This authority derives not from arbitrary power but from the teacher's greater knowledge, wisdom, and moral development. Students benefit from this structured relationship because it provides clear guidance from those better positioned to discern truth and model virtue.

However, idealist authority differs from mere authoritarianism. The goal remains developing students' own rational capacities and moral judgment rather than enforcing blind obedience. Teachers guide students toward truths that students can ultimately recognize and affirm through their own reason, much as Socrates helped interlocutors discover knowledge they already possessed in latent form.

*Student Role: Active Seekers of Wisdom:* Despite teachers' authoritative position, students in idealist education are not entirely passive (Sarkar & Al Mamun, 2023). They must actively engage intellectual content, wrestle with challenging ideas, and work to develop their own rational capacities and moral judgment. The student's task involves disciplined attention, serious study, honest self-examination, and persistent effort to elevate consciousness and refine character.

This conception positions students as apprentices in the life of reason and virtue, learning from masters who have achieved greater development while striving toward their own eventual mastery. Education becomes a process of self-formation and self-transcendence as students progressively realize their potential as rational and moral beings.

**Table 2**  
**Implementation of Idealism in Educational Practice**

<b>Educational Component</b>	<b>Idealist Approach</b>
Curriculum content	Emphasizes great works of literature, philosophy, history, and art; focuses on moral and intellectual depth
Learning methods	Socratic dialogue, contemplative reflection, systematic rational inquiry, guided textual analysis
Role of teacher	Intellectual and moral authority figure who guides students toward truth and virtue
Student role	Active seeker of wisdom engaged in self-formation through disciplined study and reflection
Assessment approach	Emphasis on demonstration of understanding, moral development, and intellectual growth rather than mere factual recall

### ***Comparative Analysis: Idealism, Essentialism, and Radicalism***

The research examined how idealism relates to two other significant educational philosophies—essentialism and radicalism—revealing both similarities and important distinctions that illuminate each tradition's distinctive character.

Essentialism represents a conservative educational philosophy emphasizing transmission of core knowledge and fundamental skills considered essential for all students (Gunardi & Hartati, 2024). Like idealism, essentialism maintains that certain truths and skills possess

universal validity and that education should focus on these essentials rather than following student interests or contemporary trends. However, essentialism typically adopts a more pragmatic orientation than idealism, emphasizing practical knowledge and skills necessary for effective social participation.

While idealism prioritizes moral and spiritual development through engagement with great ideas, essentialism focuses more on academic mastery and intellectual discipline across core subjects including mathematics, science, language, and history. Essentialist curricula include practical subjects that idealists might view as insufficiently concerned with ultimate truths or moral development. Additionally, while both approaches grant teachers significant authority, essentialism emphasizes the teacher's role as expert transmitter of established knowledge rather than as moral exemplar and spiritual guide.

Radicalism (or critical pedagogy) presents a more fundamental contrast to idealism (Freire, 1970; Apple, 2004). Radical educational philosophy views education primarily as a tool for social transformation and liberation from oppressive social structures. Rather than emphasizing eternal truths or cultural heritage, radicalism focuses on developing critical consciousness regarding how power operates in society and how education can serve either to perpetuate or challenge existing inequalities.

Where idealism positions the teacher as authoritative guide, radicalism emphasizes more egalitarian relationships where teachers and students engage in mutual dialogue and collective consciousness-raising. Radical curricula prioritize contextual, politically engaged content addressing contemporary social issues rather than timeless classics. The educational goal shifts from individual moral perfection and intellectual development to collective empowerment and social justice.

**Table 3**

**Comparative Analysis of Idealism, Essentialism, and Radicalism**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Idealism</b>	<b>Essentialism</b>	<b>Radicalism</b>
View of knowledge	Eternal, universal truths accessible through reason	Core knowledge and skills essential for social participation	Socially constructed knowledge serving political interests
Educational goal	Character development and spiritual perfection	Academic mastery and intellectual discipline	Critical consciousness and social transformation
Role of teacher	Moral exemplar and intellectual guide	Expert transmitter of essential knowledge	Co-learner and facilitator of critical awareness
Curriculum focus	Great works, philosophy, humanities, moral education	Core academic subjects, fundamental skills	Contextual issues, social problems, political awareness
Student role	Seeker of wisdom through disciplined study	Learner mastering established knowledge	Active agent of personal and social change
View of authority	Legitimate authority based on wisdom and virtue	Authority based on expertise and institutional role	Skepticism toward authority; emphasis on shared power

This comparative analysis reveals that while idealism, essentialism, and radicalism share certain concerns about educational quality and substance, they differ fundamentally in their understanding of knowledge, learning, human nature, and education's ultimate purposes. These philosophical differences generate divergent practical recommendations regarding curriculum content, pedagogical methods, institutional structures, and assessment approaches.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this comprehensive philosophical analysis substantiate the study's central thesis that idealism, as a foundational orientation within educational philosophy, continues to exert significant influence on educational aims, processes, and content despite contemporary challenges to its assumptions and methods. The research confirmed that idealism's distinctive framework—centered on the ontological primacy of mind and ideas, commitment to universal truths, emphasis on moral development, and teleological understanding of human nature—offers unique insights into education's fundamental purposes that remain relevant even within contemporary pluralistic contexts.

These results demonstrate substantial continuity with classical idealist positions articulated by foundational figures including Plato, whose theory of Forms established the philosophical template for distinguishing between superficial appearances and deeper realities (Plato, trans. 1997); Kant, who demonstrated the mind's constitutive role in constructing experienced reality (Kant, 1781/1998); and Hegel, who synthesized idealist philosophy into a comprehensive system understanding all reality as manifestation of Absolute Spirit (Hegel, trans. 1977). The research shows that contemporary discussions of idealism in educational contexts remain deeply indebted to these classical formulations while attempting to address modern challenges.

In contrast to both essentialism and radicalism, idealism in education upholds moral and intellectual development as co-equal and mutually reinforcing objectives, positioning the teacher not merely as an instructor or facilitator but as a moral and spiritual exemplar whose life embodies the ideals toward which students should aspire (Mustaqim, 2017; Shahid, 2008). This conception aligns closely with Surtanto's (2012) argument that education must rest on rigorous philosophical analysis and normative commitment rather than experiential knowledge or technical expertise alone, thus affirming both the theoretical significance and practical importance of this research within both classical and contemporary educational discourse.

The comparative analysis revealed important distinctions among idealism, essentialism, and radicalism that illuminate each tradition's strengths and limitations. While essentialism shares idealism's concern for substantive content and intellectual rigor, it lacks idealism's explicit focus on ultimate questions of meaning, value, and human purpose, tending instead toward a more pragmatic emphasis on academic skills and disciplinary knowledge (Gunardi & Hartati, 2024). Radicalism, conversely, shares idealism's concern for human flourishing and social betterment but rejects idealism's confidence in universal truths and emphasis on individual moral development in favor of collective political action and structural transformation (Freire, 1970; Apple, 2004).

#### ***Critical Evaluation and Limitations***

However, the research also exposed several significant theoretical and practical limitations in idealist educational philosophy that must be acknowledged and addressed. While idealism emphasizes universal truths and eternal values, this emphasis may inadequately address the legitimate concerns of cultural pluralism, diverse knowledge traditions, and contextually appropriate learning that characterize contemporary global societies (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010). In real-world educational settings marked by increasing diversity, curricula

grounded purely in idealist principles—particularly those emphasizing Western canonical texts—may fail to represent the experiences, knowledge, and values of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, potentially perpetuating forms of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007).

Furthermore, idealism's teleological assumptions about human nature and developmental trajectories may not align well with contemporary understanding of human development as multifaceted, contextually variable, and not necessarily progressing toward single predetermined endpoints (Rogoff, 2003). Developmental psychology and educational research have increasingly recognized that development follows multiple pathways influenced by cultural context, individual differences, and environmental factors rather than converging on universal ideals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 2003).

Additionally, idealism's epistemological confidence in the accessibility of universal truths through rational reflection faces challenges from postmodern and pragmatist philosophical perspectives that emphasize knowledge's contextual, provisional, and constructed character (Rorty, 1999; Lyotard, 1984). These critiques suggest that what idealism presents as eternal truths may actually represent historically contingent beliefs reflecting the perspectives of particular social groups, raising questions about whose truths become enshrined in educational curricula and whose perspectives remain marginalized.

From a practical pedagogical perspective, idealism's emphasis on contemplative study of abstract ideas and classical texts may not provide sufficient attention to the active, embodied, and social dimensions of learning emphasized by contemporary learning sciences (Bransford et al., 2000). Research on learning demonstrates that effective education often requires hands-on experience, collaborative problem-solving, authentic tasks, and connections to students' lives and communities—pedagogical approaches that may seem foreign to traditional idealist methods (Sawyer, 2006).

One substantial limitation of this study itself lies in its non-empirical, philosophical character, which, while methodologically appropriate for conceptual analysis and normative inquiry, limits its capacity to make definitive claims about idealism's practical effects in actual educational settings. Without empirical testing through classroom observations, teacher interviews, student outcome assessments, or comparative studies of schools adopting different philosophical orientations, practical conclusions about idealism's effectiveness remain necessarily speculative and theoretical.

Moreover, this study did not systematically assess variations in how idealism is understood, interpreted, and applied across different cultural contexts, national educational systems, or historical periods. Such variations could introduce important nuances into understanding idealism's potential contributions and limitations. The research focused primarily on idealism within Western philosophical traditions, potentially overlooking important insights from non-Western philosophical traditions that may embody idealist principles in different forms (Nakamura, 1964; Tu, 1985).

### ***Implications for Contemporary Education***

Despite these limitations, the research findings carry important implications for contemporary educational theory and practice. In an era increasingly dominated by narrow instrumental rationality, economic imperatives, standardized testing, and measurable outcomes, idealism's emphasis on moral development, intellectual depth, pursuit of truth, and cultivation of human excellence provides essential counterbalance to purely utilitarian or technocratic approaches (Biesta, 2010; Nussbaum, 2010).

Idealist philosophy reminds educators and policymakers that education serves purposes beyond economic productivity and workforce preparation, including formation of moral character, development of aesthetic sensibility, cultivation of wisdom and practical judgment,

and preparation for meaningful participation in democratic citizenship (Nussbaum, 2010; Gutmann, 1987). These broader purposes, while more difficult to measure and assess than standardized test scores or employment rates, arguably matter at least as much for individual flourishing and social well-being.

Furthermore, idealism's emphasis on engaging substantive content—whether classical texts, fundamental concepts, or enduring questions—challenges contemporary tendencies toward educational relativism that treat all knowledge as equally valuable or that subordinate content entirely to process skills. While critical pedagogy rightly emphasizes developing students' critical consciousness, idealism reminds us that criticism requires substantive knowledge about alternatives and criteria for judgment (Bloom, 1987). Students cannot critically evaluate their society or imagine alternatives without substantive knowledge of different possibilities drawn from history, philosophy, literature, and other humanistic disciplines.

The idealist emphasis on teachers' moral and intellectual authority also offers important corrective to tendencies that reduce teachers to mere facilitators or technicians implementing prescribed curricula and pedagogical methods (Hansen, 2001). While avoiding authoritarianism, idealism recognizes that teachers' greater knowledge, experience, and moral development provide legitimate grounds for educational guidance and that students benefit from relationships with adults who model lives worth emulating (Noddings, 1984).

#### ***Directions for Future Research***

The limitations and implications identified above suggest several productive directions for future research that could extend and complement this philosophical study. First, empirical studies combining philosophical inquiry with qualitative fieldwork in actual classrooms could investigate how teachers understand and apply idealist principles in practice, what challenges they encounter, and how students respond to idealist pedagogical approaches. Such research might employ ethnographic methods, case studies, or narrative inquiry to provide rich descriptions of idealism's lived reality in educational settings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Second, comparative studies examining how idealist educational philosophy manifests across different cultural contexts could reveal important variations in how core principles are understood and applied. For example, examining Confucian educational traditions in East Asia alongside Western idealist approaches might reveal both similarities in emphasis on moral cultivation and differences in understanding the individual's relationship to society (Tu, 1985; Lee, 1996). Such comparative work could challenge parochial assumptions and enrich understanding of idealism's potential forms.

Third, outcome studies employing quantitative or mixed methods could examine whether and how exposure to idealist educational approaches affects students' moral reasoning, critical thinking, civic engagement, or other relevant outcomes. While measuring such outcomes presents methodological challenges, carefully designed longitudinal studies could provide evidence about idealism's practical effects that pure philosophical analysis cannot supply (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Fourth, theoretical research could explore productive syntheses between idealism and other philosophical approaches, investigating whether hybrid philosophies might preserve idealism's strengths while addressing its limitations. For instance, examining how idealist emphases on moral development and substantive content might be integrated with pragmatist attention to experience and social context could generate richer theoretical frameworks (Garrison, 1997).

Fifth, applied research could develop and evaluate specific curricular materials, pedagogical approaches, or institutional models informed by idealist principles but adapted to

contemporary contexts. For example, researchers might design humanities curricula that engage diverse cultural traditions while maintaining idealist emphasis on ultimate questions, or develop teacher education programs that cultivate moral exemplarity alongside pedagogical skill (Fenstermacher et al., 2009).

Finally, philosophical research could examine how idealist educational philosophy addresses emerging challenges including digital technologies' educational implications, artificial intelligence's potential effects on learning and knowledge, environmental education's theoretical foundations, and global education's philosophical assumptions. These contemporary issues require philosophical analysis that idealist traditions might distinctively illuminate (Peters et al., 2021; Selwyn, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

This comprehensive philosophical study has demonstrated the continuing relevance and significance of idealism as a foundational orientation within educational philosophy, while also acknowledging its important limitations and the challenges it faces in contemporary contexts. The research confirmed that idealism offers a distinctive and valuable perspective emphasizing moral development, intellectual cultivation, pursuit of truth, and engagement with humanity's cultural heritage—concerns that address important gaps in contemporary education's predominantly instrumental and technocratic orientation.

The study's central thesis—that idealism prioritizes development of moral character and intellectual capacities through systematic engagement with ideas, values, and eternal truths—has been substantiated through detailed philosophical analysis of idealist principles, their educational applications, and their relationships to alternative philosophical frameworks. The findings demonstrate that education informed by idealist principles has potential to cultivate thoughtful, ethically engaged, and intellectually sophisticated individuals capable of reflecting critically on fundamental questions about meaning, value, and human flourishing.

In direct response to the original research questions, several conclusions emerge. First, idealism rests on distinctive ontological and epistemological assumptions including the primacy of mind over matter, existence of universal truths, possibility of rational access to these truths, and purposive character of human development. Second, these philosophical commitments translate into specific educational objectives emphasizing character formation and intellectual development; curriculum designs prioritizing humanities, philosophy, and great works; pedagogical approaches featuring dialogue, contemplation, and rational inquiry; and teacher-student relationships characterized by legitimate intellectual and moral authority. Third, idealism differs substantially from essentialism and radicalism in its metaphysical foundations, understanding of knowledge, and conception of education's ultimate purposes.

Regarding idealism's potential role in addressing contemporary educational challenges, the research suggests a nuanced position. Idealism cannot serve as a comprehensive or exclusive framework sufficient for all aspects of contemporary education, particularly given legitimate concerns about cultural pluralism, diverse knowledge traditions, practical skill development, and educational equity. However, idealist principles provide essential correctives to dominant trends that reduce education to workforce preparation, emphasize measurable outcomes over meaningful learning, neglect moral and character development, and abandon substantive content in favor of generic skills.

The implications of these findings extend across theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, this research reinforces the importance of maintaining space for philosophical inquiry within educational discourse and policy debates increasingly dominated by empirical research and economic considerations (Biesta, 2010; Pring, 2004). It demonstrates that

fundamental questions about educational purposes, appropriate knowledge, and desired human qualities cannot be resolved through empirical investigation alone but require normative philosophical analysis.

Practically, the research encourages educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers to consider how idealist principles—including emphasis on moral inquiry, pursuit of truth, engagement with cultural heritage, and respect for intellectual authority—might be thoughtfully integrated into educational environments that also honor diversity, promote equity, encourage student agency, and address practical needs. This integration requires creativity and adaptability rather than rigid adherence to traditional formulations, but the effort seems worthwhile given idealism's distinctive contributions.

Several important limitations of this study must be acknowledged. As primarily philosophical and conceptual research, the study lacks empirical evidence demonstrating how idealist principles function in actual practice or affect measurable outcomes. The research focused predominantly on Western philosophical traditions, potentially overlooking insights from other cultural contexts. The study did not systematically examine variations in how idealism is interpreted and applied across different settings. These limitations suggest important directions for future research combining philosophical analysis with empirical investigation and comparative cultural study.

Looking forward, the most productive approach may involve neither wholesale rejection nor uncritical acceptance of idealist educational philosophy, but rather thoughtful integration of idealist insights within more comprehensive frameworks that also incorporate insights from pragmatism, constructivism, critical pedagogy, and other traditions. Education for the 21st century requires philosophical frameworks sophisticated enough to honor both universal human concerns and cultural particularity, both timeless wisdom and contemporary challenges, both individual development and social transformation.

In this spirit, the study concludes by affirming idealism's continuing contributions to educational philosophy while recognizing that these contributions must be balanced with other legitimate concerns and adapted to contemporary circumstances. Idealist emphasis on moral development, intellectual depth, pursuit of truth, and engagement with humanity's greatest achievements should not be abandoned in favor of narrow instrumentalism or relativistic pluralism. However, neither should idealist principles be applied rigidly without consideration for cultural diversity, educational equity, practical needs, and changing social conditions.

The ultimate goal of education, as idealism reminds us, extends beyond transmission of information or development of marketable skills to encompass formation of whole human beings capable of living meaningful, virtuous, and intellectually engaged lives in community with others. By drawing thoughtfully from idealist traditions while remaining open to insights from other philosophical perspectives and empirical research, educators can work toward educational practices that honor both timeless human concerns and contemporary needs, both individual flourishing and social justice, both intellectual excellence and moral wisdom.

This study contributes to the ongoing project of reviving serious philosophical reflection within educational discourse, reminding us that technical questions about effective methods must be complemented by normative questions about worthwhile purposes. It affirms that education ultimately serves not merely economic functions but fundamentally human purposes of meaning-making, moral development, and collective flourishing. In an era of rapid technological change, social complexity, and global challenges, the wisdom embedded in idealist educational philosophy—suitably adapted and thoughtfully integrated—remains valuable for guiding educational practice toward genuinely humanizing ends.

### **Conflict of interests**

The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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