

THE RELEVANCE OF IDEALISM PHILOSOPHY TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF FREEDOM CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Educators must take control of the philosophical foundations of education for two key reasons. First, education is inherently normative; it requires prescriptive guiding principles, not merely descriptive. A philosophical understanding provides a framework to determine what should be done in education rather than observing it passively. Without such a foundation, education risks being misunderstood or reduced to mere technical practices, ignoring its deeper humanistic and moral dimensions. Second, while valuable, a purely scientific approach to education is insufficient. Education must be viewed holistically, and philosophy offers that comprehensive lens. Different philosophical schools, including Idealism, Realism, and pragmatism, present varied educational aims and methods interpretations. Among these, Idealism, which this paper focuses on, emphasizes the development of the mind and personality as the core purpose of education. In the Indonesian context, Pancasila serves as the foundational philosophy, shaping the nation's educational values. While exploring global philosophical perspectives is important, educational systems must align with Pancasila to remain culturally and ideologically grounded. Philosophical literacy allows educators to engage with ideas critically, filter those incompatible with national values, and incorporate those that enrich understanding without conflict. By revisiting and strengthening the philosophical foundations of education, especially through the lens of Idealism, educators can better understand their practice's purpose, direction, and ethical dimensions. This, in turn, supports the creation of meaningful, value-based educational experiences beyond procedural knowledge.

Keywords: Curriculum, Idealism, Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of education may consist of a series of assumptions derived from the philosophy about education, also as theory used as guiding principles (Muslim, 2023). The philosophical foundation of education is a system of ideas about education deduced or elaborated from a system of general philosophical ideas (Metaphysics, Epistemology, Axiology) advocated by a particular school of philosophy (Mubarok et al., 2021). This can be explained by Callahan and Clark in Foundations of Education as presented by Edward J. Power in Philosophy of Education, Studies in Philosophies, Schooling, and Educational Perspectives. Based on the two sources above, it can be understood that there is an implication relationship between ideas in the branches of general philosophy to educational ideas (Alam, 2020; Cinta et al., 2023; Kawuryan et al., 2021). The philosophical foundation of education encompasses ideas and concepts that are normative or prescriptive. It is considered normative because it doesn't merely describe how education currently exists in practice (the factual) but focuses on how education should be what it aspires to become. These ideal concepts are proposed by various philosophers and serve as guiding principles or starting points for shaping educational goals and practices. The framework of educational practice or studies (Noer et al., 2023).

In the universal practice of education, there are many diverse communities of people who give education different meanings. In Indonesia, education emphasizes mastering the foundations of the formation of a meritocratic society, meaning that it provides extensive lesson time for learning certain subjects. Education based on terminology is a translation of the term Pedagogy. This term comes from the Greek language, namely Paidos and Agoo. Paidos means the enslaved person, and Agoo means the guide. Pedagogy can be interpreted as an enslaved person who leads the master's child to learn. (Fadhly et al., 2024) Explains that the nature of education is an activity that involves teachers, students, curriculum, evaluation, and administration, which simultaneously processes learners to become more sophisticated (Prayetno, Imam et al., 2024).

Students must develop their knowledge, skills, and character within a structured academic framework. The philosophy of Indonesian education is deeply rooted in the cultural values embodied in Pancasila. These values should be instilled in learners by implementing national education across all levels and types of schooling. When determining the philosophical foundation of Indonesia's education system, two key perspectives must be considered (Hijriyah et al., 2022). This study stems from the fact that philosophical studies of education, particularly Idealism, are rarely used as a conceptual basis for formulating and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Most curriculum studies are technical, pragmatic, and focused solely on administrative or pedagogical aspects, neglecting the importance of a philosophical approach that can provide normative direction and values in educational practice. On the

other hand, the meaning of education in the Indonesian context requires the integration of universal and local values, as reflected in the Pancasila ideology. However, philosophical educational approaches that can bridge these two dimensions remain limited (Al Ayyubi et al., 2025).

This research offers something new by presenting idealism philosophy as a conceptual framework for reinterpreting the direction and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach emphasizes the development of cognitive aspects and the formation of students' character, morality, and personal integrity. This research also contributes by connecting the values developed in Idealism, such as rationality, freedom, and moral responsibility, with the noble values of Pancasila, thereby opening space for a synthesis between global philosophical thought and national identity. Through this approach, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a process of forming whole human beings with strong ethical, spiritual, and social awareness (Imam, Ayyubi, Nurfajriyah et al., 2025).

First, the view of the Indonesian human being. The philosophy of national education views Indonesian human beings as: Human beings are creations of God Almighty, endowed with their unique nature. They are individuals with inherent rights and responsibilities and social beings who must uphold their duties within a diverse society. This includes navigating the complexities of a multicultural environment, caring for the natural world, and contributing to advancing the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, especially as it faces ongoing challenges and changes within an ever-evolving global community.

In the philosophical view, national education is seen as a social institution that always interacts with other social institutions (Baity & Faiqoh, 2024). The philosophy of education is a fundamental formation of basic abilities, both concerning the power of thought (intellectual) and the power of feeling (emotional) towards human nature, then philosophy is also defined as a general theory of education. The philosophy of education stands independently with the advantage of having a link with general philosophy. However, the link is not important; what happens is an integration between philosophical views and the philosophy of education because philosophy is often interpreted as a general theory of education.

The realism school of philosophy asserts that human knowledge accurately reflects reality. According to Realism, the philosophical concepts can be categorized as follows: (1) Metaphysics (Realism): Reality is considered to be physical (materialism), a combination of material and immaterial aspects (dualism), or composed of multiple distinct realities (pluralism); (2) Humanology (Realism): Human nature is defined by one's capacity for action. The soul is viewed as a complex organism with the ability to think and reason; (3) Epistemology (Realism): Reality exists independently of human thoughts or perceptions. The mind can grasp reality, and knowledge is acquired through the senses. The truth of

knowledge can be verified by comparing it against factual evidence; and (4) Axiology (Realism): Human behavior is primarily governed by natural laws, which are discovered through science and secondarily influenced by customs or traditions that have proven their value over time.

In line with this philosophy, education should be standardized, compulsory, and begin at the earliest levels. While a uniform system is ideal, it is acknowledged that individuals achieve at different levels. Therefore, the education system should offer diverse pathways, especially at higher levels. Within this framework, educators are central in guiding the learning process rather than learners themselves. Effective learning materials align with students' interests and needs, but more importantly, they must be thoughtfully selected by educators to ensure they support broader educational goals. While addressing learners' interests is valuable, it should be seen as a strategy to enhance teaching, not the end goal itself.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses this as its primary method. Library research was chosen because it is appropriate for the conceptual and philosophical objectives of the study, which are to explore and analyze the relevance of idealism philosophy to the transformation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia (Masruri, 2023). This method allows researchers to examine relevant literature in depth, including classical sources of educational philosophy, the ideas of idealist thinkers such as Plato and Berkeley, curriculum documents, and national education policies. This approach is particularly suitable for educational philosophy studies, where the integrity of arguments and deductive logic are essential components of knowledge construction (Prayetno & Munirul, 2024).

The main reason for choosing the literature review method is that this research focuses not on collecting empirical data in the field but rather on exploring ideas, principles, and normative philosophical values. Idealism, as the object of study, is derived from the thoughts of thinkers and theoretical interpretations documented in academic literature (Prayetno, Mubaraq et al., 2024). Therefore, the sources used in this study include books on the philosophy of education, scientific journal articles, curriculum documents, and references discussing the application of philosophy in the Indonesian education system. Researchers can reconstruct idealistic thinking and systematically relate it to the national curriculum context through this approach.

The research began with identifying the main themes through a review of relevant literature on the philosophy of Idealism and the Merdeka Curriculum. Next, an analysis was conducted on the main dimensions of the philosophy of Idealism, namely metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology, as well as their implications for education. The next stage is to

link the values of Idealism with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila ideology. The analysis results are compiled in the form of a descriptive-analytical narrative synthesis. To clarify this process, the following is a flowchart of the research method:

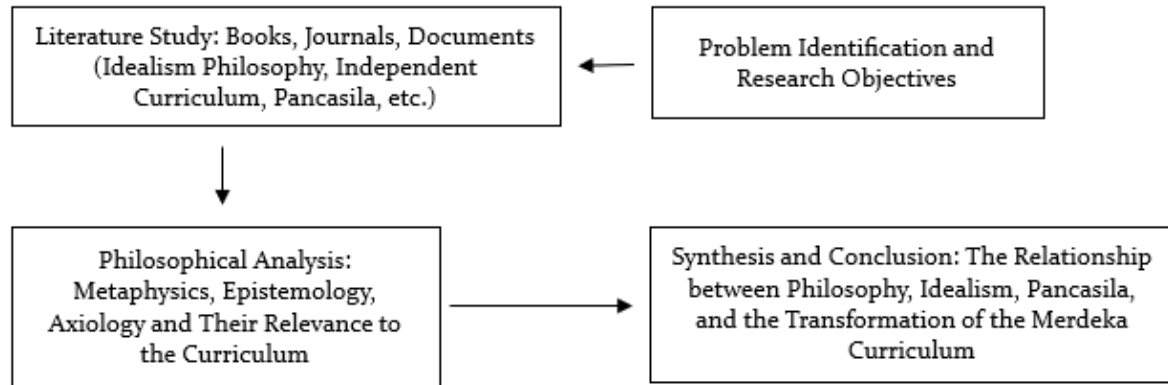


Figure 1. Research Method Flowchart

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Metaphysics, as a fundamental branch of philosophy, seeks to understand the essence of reality, what truly exists, and the nature of being. As we perceive it, the universe is composed of countless entities, such as rocks, water, plants, animals, humans, mountains, oceans, vehicles, books, and solar systems. These physical objects can be observed and experienced through the senses. However, reality is not limited to what is tangible. Philosophers recognize the existence of non-material elements, such as the soul, spirit, consciousness, values, and ideas, which cannot be directly perceived but are nonetheless integral parts of existence (Ikromi et al., 2025).

These intangible entities represent a higher level of reality that transcends physical matter. Throughout history, philosophers have posed fundamental questions about the nature of reality: What is real? Is reality purely material, or does it consist of something beyond physical objects? The answers to these questions have varied widely depending on each philosopher's worldview, reasoning process, and interpretive framework. For instance, philosophers from the Idealist school argue that reality is fundamentally spiritual or mental. They believe that the material world is not the ultimate reality but rather a reflection or imitation of a deeper, more perfect reality composed of eternal ideas or forms. One of the most influential Idealist thinkers, Plato, asserted that what we see and touch is merely a shadow of true reality, which exists in the realm of ideas. According to this view, a physical object like a chair is not real; its true essence lies in the idea or concept of the chair in the mind (Prayetno & Khofifah, 2024).

Contrary to Idealism, Materialist philosophers claim that only physical matter is real and all phenomena, including thoughts and consciousness, can be explained through material processes. Dualist thinkers, such as René Descartes, take a different stance by asserting that reality consists of two fundamental substances: the mental (mind) and the physical (body). Existentialist philosophers emphasize individual experience and the freedom to define reality through personal choices and actions. Meanwhile, phenomenology focuses on how things appear in consciousness, proposing that the way we experience and interpret phenomena is a part of reality (Fauzi, Al Ayyubi, et al., 2025). These differing metaphysical perspectives deeply influence the philosophy of education. If reality is viewed as spiritual and mental, then education must prioritize the development of the mind, soul, and moral character. It becomes a process of leading the individual toward truth, wisdom, and self-realization. If reality is seen as physical and empirical, education focuses more on scientific knowledge, technical skills, and mastery of the material world. Idealist metaphysics supports that education should guide learners toward eternal truths and values, shaping intellect, character, and virtue. In this sense, understanding the metaphysical foundation of reality is essential to designing educational goals, methods, and content that align with a broader vision of human development and the purpose of life itself (Fauzi, Hidayat, et al., 2025).

Philosophers from the Idealist school believe that reality is essentially spiritual rather than physical and mental rather than material. They argue that what we perceive with our senses, the visible and tangible world is not the ultimate reality. One of the most influential figures in this school of thought is Plato, who stated that the physical world is merely a shadow or imitation of a higher, more perfect reality known as the world of ideas or forms. According to Plato, the things we see and interact with are not real but reflections of eternal and unchanging ideas that exist beyond the physical realm. From the Idealist perspective, reality originates in the mind or spirit, and material objects manifest these deeper mental or spiritual truths. For example, when we consider a chair, Idealists assert that its true essence lies not in the physical object we sit on but in the idea or concept of the chair that exists in the realm of thought. The physical chair is only a temporary and imperfect representation of this ideal form. Thus, Idealism sees the mind as the source of all reality, emphasizing the primacy of ideas over matter (Nikma & Rozak, 2023). From the Idealist viewpoint, true reality originates from the mind or spirit what we perceive as material objects are, in essence, manifestations of mental or spiritual ideas. Take a chair, for example; according to Idealists, its true form is not the physical object we can sit on but the idea of the chair itself. The physical chair merely represents or imitates this deeper, ideal concept (Handayani & Nurfadilah, 2021; Muzaky & Sunarno, 2020; Van Vo & Csapó, 2021).

At the universal level, finite human minds exist within a purposeful world created by an infinite mind often called the Absolute. This perspective holds that an endless mind or spirit brings the universe into being. As such, everything within the universe, including us as human beings, is but a small part of this infinite mind or spirit (Suprianto, 2024). This metaphysical understanding of Idealism is echoed in the words of Parmenides, who stated, "What cannot be thought cannot be real." In other words, if the mind cannot conceive something, it cannot truly exist. Similarly, Schopenhauer famously claimed, "The world is my idea," emphasizing that the world's reality depends on the mind, the soul, or the spirit (Bakar et al., 2023).

Idealist philosophers maintain that human nature is spiritual and psychological rather than material. This means a human being is not primarily defined by physical attributes but by mental and moral capacities. According to Idealism, a person's defining characteristics are the faculties of thought, reason, imagination, and free will. These inner capacities allow humans to think abstractly, seek truth, make moral decisions, and reflect on their existence. Idealism views the human mind as central to what it means to be human. Through the mind, individuals can recognize and align themselves with higher values such as justice, beauty, and goodness, which Idealists believe are eternal and rooted in a divine or absolute source (Ahlerup & Hansson, 2011; Fuad & Masuwd, 2023; Nuryamin, 2020).

Because Idealism sees the universe as purposeful and governed by a higher moral order, human beings are also seen as purposeful as part of that universe. They are not random products of chance but are created with intention and endowed with the potential to fulfill meaningful roles in life. Human freedom is a key aspect of this view. Unlike deterministic philosophies that regard people as shaped entirely by external forces or biology, Idealism asserts that individuals can choose, direct their lives, and grow according to inner values. This freedom is grounded in reason, which allows people to distinguish right from wrong, evaluate their experiences, and pursue personal development.

In this context, human beings are not only rational but also moral. They are expected to live according to ethical principles that are considered universal and absolute. These moral laws are not invented by society but discovered through reflection and reason. Therefore, education in the Idealist tradition is designed to help individuals realize their true nature by cultivating their intellect and moral character. Rather than shaping individuals to fit external expectations or purely material goals, Idealism seeks to bring out what is already within the soul's capacity for truth, goodness, and freedom. By doing so, human beings can live not only as rational creatures but also as agents of moral purpose, contributing meaningfully to the harmony of society and the greater cosmic order (Lego, 2024).

Human nature is spiritual or psychological (Al Ayyubi et al., 2024; Arroisi et al., 2023; Karliani & Triyani, 2021; Kirabaev & Chistyakova, 2023; Steiner & Amabile, 2022). Each

individual possesses unique talents and abilities, which reflect their potential role and place within society or the state. One classical example of this idea comes from Plato's tripartite theory of the soul. According to Plato, every human being is made up of three parts of the soul: nous (reason or intellect), which represents rational thought; thumos (spirit or courage), which drives bravery and assertiveness; and epithumia (desire or appetite), which governs physical needs and passions. In every person, one of these elements tends to be dominant.

Epistemology: The Nature of Knowledge

The process of acquiring knowledge takes place in the mind humans come to know the world primarily through thinking (Bahrum, 2013; Prayetno, Mubaraq, et al., 2024; Sufyan & Hartono, 2023; Syamsuddin, 2020; Zarkasyi, 2021). However, knowledge is not gained by reason alone; intuition also plays a role in understanding reality. Some Idealist philosophers believe that knowledge is not newly acquired but remembered or recalled. Plato, for instance, held this view. He argued that the human soul is eternal and that all knowledge exists from birth. Learning, in this sense, is simply the process of remembering what the soul already knows. For Objective Idealists like Plato, ideas are eternal truths or essences that exist independently of any individual or personal experience. These ideas are not bound by time, space, or human perception. They exist in a realm of their own. On the other hand, Subjective Idealists, such as George Berkeley, take a different stance. According to Berkeley, human beings can only know what they directly perceive. In this view, knowledge is limited to the content of one's mind. What we know is not the external world but the ideas and experiences in our consciousness.

As for every stimulus received by the mind, it is essentially derived or sourced from God; God is the Infinite Spirit (Nata, 2023). In connection with the above, truth (true knowledge) is only possible for certain people with good minds, while most people only reach the level of opinion. The truth of knowledge is tested through a consistency or coherence test of its ideas. Therefore, the theory of validity is known as the Theory of Consistency/Coherence Theory. Example: "All beings are mortal (perishable or dead); Iqbal is a being. Therefore, Iqbal will die." This knowledge is true because the ideas are coherent or consistent. "The road is the lifeblood of the economy; Amin committed suicide by severing the lifeblood. Therefore, Amin has killed the lifeblood of the economy". This knowledge is false because the ideas are inconsistent/incoherent.

Axiology: The Nature of Value

Philosophers of Idealism agree that values are eternal. According to Theistic Idealism, eternal values reside in God. Good and evil, beautiful and ugly, are known to be on the same level as the idea of good, and the concept of beauty is consistent with the absolute good and beautiful in God (Nuryamin, 2020). Pantheistic Idealists identify God with nature.

Values are absolute and unchanging (eternal) because values are part of the rules that nature has determined (Winarti & Khusnah, 2021). Therefore, you can conclude that humans are governed by imperative and eternal moral values originating from the Absolute Reality.

The Role of Idealism Philosophy and Its Implementation

As you have understood through the description above, the general philosophical concept of Idealism (the nature of reality, human beings, knowledge, and values) has educational implications. These implications are outlined below:

Purpose of Education

The purpose of education is to support the growth of a student's mind and personal self. Schools should strongly emphasize intellectual development, moral values, aesthetic appreciation, self-realization, individual freedom, responsibility, and self-discipline to achieve this. All of these elements contribute to shaping the mind and building strong character. In other words, education is not only about academic learning. It is also about nurturing human potential and cultivating virtues that contribute to individual and social well-being (Dardiri, 2023). Since each person possesses unique talents, education should be tailored to help individuals discover and develop their specific abilities. When people are guided toward roles that match their strengths, society can function more harmoniously, following the principle of "the right person in the right place." In this way, education becomes a means of helping individuals find their rightful place and live in alignment with values and norms that originate from a higher, absolute moral order.

To achieve the educational goals described earlier, the Idealist approach to education includes both liberal and vocational (or practical) education. Liberal education nurtures students' rational and moral capacities, helping them think critically, reason ethically, and grow intellectually. Meanwhile, vocational education focuses on developing practical skills essential for life and work. The curriculum is typically organized around academic subjects, with content centered on subject matter. Because society and the Absolute are seen as guiding forces in shaping how individuals should live, the curriculum is designed to include enduring cultural values considered essential and timeless. As a result, the content taught in schools tends to be consistent across all students, reflecting a shared foundation of knowledge and moral principles. In line with this approach, Callahan and Clark have observed that the educational orientation of Idealism aligns closely with Essentialism. This educational philosophy emphasizes a core body of knowledge and values that every student should learn.

The structure and atmosphere of the classroom should create opportunities for students to think critically and apply moral reasoning to real-life situations within the context of their lessons (Huda et al., 2022; Maarif et al., 2023; Sabarudin et al., 2023). However, teaching students how to think is not enough. It is equally important that their

thoughts lead to meaningful actions. Effective teaching methods should help students expand their perspectives, promote reflective thinking, and encourage them to make personal moral decisions. They should also develop students' logical reasoning skills, provide opportunities to apply knowledge to social and ethical challenges, spark greater interest in the subject matter, and foster an appreciation for the values of human civilization (Fuad & Masuwd, 2023). As Hanif (2023) noted, Idealist philosophers often favor dialectical teaching methods through dialogue and deep questioning. Still, they also recognize the value of any process that effectively promotes genuine learning and intellectual development.

The Role of Teachers and Students

Idealist philosophers place high expectations on teachers. They believe that teachers should be exemplary figures, both intellectually and morally, serving as role models for their students. In fact, within the school system, no element is considered more important than the teacher. Teachers are expected to have deep knowledge of their subject matter and a strong understanding of their student's needs and potential. They must also embody moral integrity in both their beliefs and daily behavior. Beyond conveying information, teachers are responsible for cultivating creative thinking and helping students explore, analyze, connect, synthesize, and apply knowledge in ways that are meaningful to both life and work (Daud, 2023; Lingga et al., 2023; Lubis & Azzahra, 2021; Nasution et al., 2022; Taiba et al., 2023). In this view, the teacher plays a key role in shaping the educational environment, but students are not passive. They are encouraged to take an active and free role in developing their personalities, talents, and inner potential (Halawa & Tapilaha, 2024).

The relationship between the philosophy of Idealism and self-directed learning

The relationship between the philosophy of Idealism and self-learning is inseparable. Self-learning is part of the effort to fulfill the primary and secondary education system. With this concept, special strategies are chosen to free up various things in implementing education. Educators need to understand the philosophy of Idealism as a basis for knowledge, thinking, and implementing the concept of independent learning that is neatly arranged to reform the education system in Indonesia (Hanafi, 2019; Mubarok et al., 2021; Muslim, 2023; Noer et al., 2023; Nuryamin, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The idealist philosophy of education emphasizes the development of the student's mind and self as the central purpose of learning. From this perspective, education is about acquiring facts or skills and nurturing each individual's intellectual, moral, and personal growth. Regarding curriculum, Idealism supports a balanced approach that includes liberal education, which focuses on the cultivation of reason, ethics, and critical thought, and vocational or practical education, which equips students with the tools to apply their

knowledge in meaningful ways. Teaching methods inspired by Idealism aim to broaden students' intellectual horizons. Educators are encouraged to promote reflective thinking, stimulate moral reasoning, and help students develop logical thinking skills. Students should also be given opportunities to apply their knowledge in addressing real-world moral and social challenges, allowing education to become a tool for personal and societal growth.

Teachers play a vital role in this process. They are expected to be well-versed in their subject matter, deeply aware of their students' needs and potential, and to serve as moral role models through their beliefs and actions. More than just transmitters of knowledge, teachers should also act as guides who inspire creativity, critical analysis, integration of ideas, and applying knowledge to real life. While Idealism focuses heavily on inner development and intellectual formation, it also aligns in part with the philosophy of Realism, particularly in emphasizing the importance of preparing students to engage meaningfully with society. Education, therefore, is seen not only as a journey toward self-discovery and moral understanding but also as a foundation for social responsibility and contribution and responsibilities in living in society. Strict and systematic education is required to achieve this, supported by a comprehensive curriculum and organized learning activities.

The philosophy of Idealism in education emphasizes that the main goal of education is the holistic development of students' minds and personalities. Education is not merely a process of acquiring knowledge or practical skills but shaping one's moral, intellectual, and spiritual character. Regarding curriculum, the idealist approach promotes liberal education to sharpen the mind and ethical values and vocational education to support practical, real-life application. The role of teachers is central, not only as educators but also as moral role models and mentors who shape students' personalities.

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