

Teacher's Perspectives on the Role of Philosophical Foundations in Shaping Educational Policies and Classroom Practices

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' perspectives on how philosophical foundations shape educational policies and classroom practices. Interviews with six public school teachers, conducted using a qualitative descriptive design, revealed their awareness of various educational philosophies, including essentialism, progressivism, humanism, and constructivism, within the context of current reforms. The teachers perceive these philosophies as pertinent to addressing learning deficits and fostering comprehensive development. However, they encounter considerable discrepancies between the theoretical underpinnings of policies and the practical realities of their classrooms, primarily due to resource limitations and administrative burdens. The teachers' individual educational philosophies significantly shape their interpretation and application of educational policies. The study recommends the development of context-specific policies, a reduction in administrative tasks, and increased teacher participation in the policy-making process to improve the consistency between philosophical principles and practical implementation.

Keywords: Philosophical foundations, educational policies, classroom practices, teacher perspectives, and policy–practice

Introduction

Modern schools are still deeply rooted in philosophical roots, and this affects classroom practices, policy decisions, and curriculum development. Educational philosophies decide the aims and objectives of education, what knowledge is and how it can be known, the process of learning itself, etc. An appreciation of these philosophic underpinnings is essential if significant and coherent educational reform, as current discourses demand in the face of rapid social and technological change, is to be possible. Cross-national studies show teachers stated philosophy of education, for example, (progressive or essentialist) is related to the amount of autonomy they assume over curriculum and instruction decisions as well as the types of assessment and classroom structures preferred by them (Alemdar & Aytac, 2022). Taken as a whole, these studies suggest that philosophical orientations have real-world impacts beyond theoretical considerations: they significantly influence how policies are interpreted and implemented at the school classroom level in various school settings.

In the Philippines, macro-level reform programs including the K–12 program and PPST (Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers), incorporate values and learner-focused goals based on historical philosophical underpinnings of education (Bongco, 2020). Filipino teachers' efforts to translate these curricular policies in practice, I find, demonstrate the centrality of teachers' beliefs and interpretive practices: on the ground, teachers navigate national top-down mandates against classroom bottom-up realities, while their pedagogical decisions which are inflected by philosophical orientations condition policy successes (or failures) in instruction and assessment. National studies therefore point to the need for professional development that explicitly addresses teachers' philosophical assumptions so policy intentions and classroom practice can be better aligned.

Locally, research conducted within Philippine cities further illustrates how context mediates the translation of philosophy into practice. Teachers' preparedness and pedagogical choices varied according to their views on teaching and inclusion, according to a study on teachers' training and effectiveness in inclusive education that sampled schools connected to the University of Cebu (Talisay/Cebu area) (Masongsong et al., 2023). The Division of Davao City's research on teacher well-being and self-efficacy in Davao emphasizes the contextual pressures teachers encounter and how those pressures interact with their professional beliefs to affect classroom routines and policy execution (Haguyahay, 2024; Evardo, 2024). These local studies from Cebu and Davao highlight how teachers' philosophical stances are "lived" in particular school cultures and resource environments; hence, local research is crucial to comprehending how national ideologies and policies really play out in classrooms.

Generally, Philippine teachers' philosophical orientations play a critical role in shaping how national educational reforms are interpreted and enacted within classrooms. While the Department of Education (DepEd) continues to promote learner-centered, values-oriented, and competency-based policies under the K–12 and PPST frameworks, the effectiveness of these reforms ultimately depends on how teachers understand the philosophical principles embedded in them.

Similarly, this phenomenological qualitative study aims to investigate teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding how philosophical underpinnings influence and inform classroom practices and educational policy. The study intends to produce a comprehensive knowledge of the meaning's instructors assign to their pedagogical actions by revealing how they comprehend, internalize, and translate these philosophical ideas into their everyday teaching judgments. Context-responsive solutions that improve the congruence between policy goals and classroom realities and deepen teachers' philosophical foundation will be proposed based on insights gained from these lived experiences.

Methodology

This study will use a qualitative descriptive design to examine teachers' perspectives on how philosophical foundations shape educational policies and classroom practices. This method captures teachers' perspectives in real-world educational settings without changing any of the factors, allowing for a thorough grasp of their experiences and ideas.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive design was employed to obtain clear and accurate accounts of teachers' perspectives on how philosophical foundations shape educational policies and classroom practices. Instead of comparing groups, the study used semi-structured interviews to gather detailed insights from

participating teachers. All interviews followed a validated guide, were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to generate a descriptive summary of their views.

Participants/Respondents

The study will involve six (6) public elementary school teachers in Davao del Sur selected through purposive sampling, focusing on those with at least three (3) years of experience; participation in curriculum or policy programs; and teaching across various subjects to capture diverse perspectives. When needed, school administrators or curriculum coordinators may also provide additional insights on policy implementation.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a semi-structured interview guide specifically designed to explore teachers lived experiences, interpretations, and perspectives related to the philosophical foundations embedded in educational policies and classroom practices. The interview questions were directly anchored on the main research questions and their probing sub-questions, ensuring that the instrument captured insights on teachers' understanding of philosophical underpinnings, their personal educational philosophies, and their perceived alignment between policy expectations and classroom realities.

The initial version of the interview guide was carefully drafted based on existing literature on educational philosophy, policy implementation, and teacher belief systems, ensuring that each question meaningfully corresponded to the study's phenomenological orientation. Following this, the instrument underwent expert validation by a panel of three professionals in the fields of education, curriculum studies, and qualitative research. Their feedback helped refine the wording of the questions, improve clarity, and guarantee that the probes were open-ended, non-leading, and aligned with the interpretive nature of phenomenological inquiry.

Minor adjustments including rephrasing, adding follow-up prompts, and refining conceptual focus—were incorporated based on the experts' recommendations to strengthen the guide's ability to elicit rich, authentic, and nuanced descriptions from participants. Through this rigorous validation and refinement process, the semi-structured interview guide was ensured to be appropriate, contextually relevant, and effective in capturing the depth and complexity of teachers lived experiences regarding the role of philosophical foundations in shaping educational policies and classroom practices.

Data Gathering Procedure

In order to collect the relevant data for the study, the researcher first obtained permission to carry out the research and organized the required activities with the principals of the designated public elementary schools and the Davao del Sur Schools Division Office. After then, letters explaining their involvement in the study and requesting their voluntary participation through signed consent forms were delivered to the six teachers who had been specifically chosen. The interview schedule, data privacy policies, and each participant's rights and obligations were explained. Following the authorized interview guide, the researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant. When needed, additional information was also obtained from curriculum coordinators or school administrators to deepen our understanding of how policies are implemented in their individual institutions. To guarantee the accuracy and completeness of the data, interviews were audio recorded with the participants' consent. Following the collection of all interview recordings, the information was collated, transcribed, and given

to phenomenological analysis in order to find key statements, emergent meanings, and central themes that represented the teachers' actual experiences. The study's conclusions and outcomes were then developed and used as the framework for suggestions meant to improve the coherence of educational policies, classroom procedures, and philosophical underpinnings. Finally, the suggested insights were ready to be presented and taken into consideration by educational stakeholders.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data gathered from interviews, document reviews, and observations will be analyzed through thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Transcribed responses will be carefully coded and organized into categories to identify emerging themes related to teachers' views on philosophical foundations, educational policies, and classroom practices. Triangulation of multiple data sources will be used to ensure validity and consistency of the findings.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study to ensure the validity, trustworthiness, and integrity of the data. All participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, with participants fully briefed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was strictly maintained: participants' names were anonymized, and all data were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers. Measures were taken to prevent any harm, protect privacy, and maintain the overall quality of the research (Bhaskar, 2022; Martin et al., 2022; Bush et al., 2022).

The study also followed established ethical guidelines in qualitative research, including considerations for insider research and power dynamics with participants (Fleming, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Berg & Lune, 2017). Methodology and methods were carefully chosen to align with the research purpose and questions while ensuring an ethically responsible approach, safeguarding participants' rights, and preserving the integrity of the study.

Results and Discussion

Integration of Multiple Philosophical Foundations in Current Educational Policies

Across participants, teachers clearly recognized that current educational reforms, such as the K–12 program and the MATATAG Curriculum, draw on multiple philosophical foundations. Most identified a combination of essentialism, progressivism, and humanism, suggesting that these policies aim to balance mastery of fundamental skills, learner-centered practices, and overall student well-being.

Participant 1 shared, "The philosophical foundations in today's policies seem to blend essentialism, progressivism, humanism, and essentialism focuses on basic skills, progressivism on learner-centered approaches, and humanism on children's well-being." Participant 2 added that MATATAG emphasizes "basic reading and math skills, which is essentialism, but also integrates character formation and values education, reflecting humanism."

This theme highlights a move toward eclecticism, intentionally combining different philosophical principles to address complex educational realities. Theoretically, this reflects John Dewey's progressivism (learning by doing), William Bagley's essentialism (emphasis on foundational knowledge), and Carl Rogers' humanism (learner-centeredness and emotional growth). Psychologically, it aligns with constructivist learning, where students build knowledge through meaningful experiences, while also

supporting the affective domain emphasized in humanistic psychology. Overall, it shows a deliberate effort to balance academic competence with socio-emotional development.

Relevance of Philosophical Foundations in Addressing Current Educational Challenges

Teachers consistently emphasized that these philosophical principles are **crucial** in tackling contemporary challenges, such as post-pandemic learning gaps, student motivation, and mental health concerns.

Participant 1 explained, “Essentialism helps students master the basics, progressivism keeps them engaged, and humanism supports mental health.” Participant 3 added, “Without philosophy guiding us, education risks falling back into rote learning. Humanistic and learner-centered approaches keep our focus on students’ real needs.”

These reflections connect closely to the psychological foundations of education, particularly Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and Rogers’ self-actualization theory, which stress that emotional stability and a supportive environment are essential for learning. Teachers recognize that philosophy is not abstract; it has practical, daily relevance.

However, participants also noted gaps between policy ideals and classroom realities, citing challenges like limited time, large class sizes, and insufficient resources. As Participant 2 observed, “They say focus on well-being, but so many requirements for teachers can also stress the students.” Despite this, teachers remained optimistic, viewing philosophical frameworks as guiding “reminders” of education’s ultimate purpose: nurturing both intellect and humanity.

Influence of Teachers’ Personal Educational Philosophies on Classroom Practices

A strong pattern emerged showing that teachers’ personal educational philosophies heavily influence their teaching styles, classroom management, and assessment methods. Many described themselves as humanistic, progressivist, or constructivist, demonstrating alignment between belief and practice.

Participant 1 said, “Compassion comes first... teaching is not just about grades, but about growth.” Participant 2 emphasized, “Teach the child, not just the lesson,” reflecting a mix of progressivism and humanism. Participant 4 described education as “transformation, not mere transmission of knowledge,” illustrating a constructivist-humanist perspective.

In practice, these philosophies manifested in interactive lessons, student reflection, and emotional support strategies. Teachers frequently used group work, performance-based assessments, and flexible methods to accommodate individual differences. Participant 5 stated, “I use group work, exploration, and discussions... I avoid too much lecturing because I want students to talk.”

These practices align with progressive education’s learner-centered approach and Vygotsky’s social constructivism, emphasizing interaction and scaffolding. Psychologically, they reflect humanistic principles, nurturing intrinsic motivation, empathy, and student autonomy.

Misalignment Between Policy Ideals and Classroom Realities

Despite a clear understanding of educational philosophy, participants highlighted discrepancies between policy expectations and real classroom conditions, including overcrowded classes, excessive paperwork, limited materials, and insufficient training.

Participant 1 noted, “The policy says learning should be learner-centered, but how can we do that when one section has 45 students?” Participant 6 added, “Inclusive education is a great idea, but without SPED teachers and proper training, the burden falls on regular teachers.”

This reveals a philosophical-practical gap: while policies advocate for individualized learning, reality often forces teacher-centered approaches for efficiency. Philosophically, this reflects pragmatism, which emphasizes that ideas must be tested in practice (Dewey, 1938). Psychologically, it aligns with situated learning theory, where learning success depends heavily on context and available resources.

Teachers' Recommendations for Policy–Practice Alignment

Participants offered actionable suggestions to bridge the gap between ideals and realities. To enhance the effectiveness of educational policies, reforms should be contextualized to address the specific conditions of both rural and urban schools. Teachers should also be actively involved in the policymaking process to ensure that their insights and experiences inform reforms from the outset. Additionally, reducing excessive paperwork and compliance-related tasks would allow educators to dedicate more time to actual teaching and meaningful student engagement. Finally, providing improved resources and professional development opportunities can deepen teachers' understanding of educational philosophy and pedagogy, enabling them to implement policies more effectively in their classrooms.

Participant 1 recommended, "Policymakers should visit real classrooms, not just pilot schools." Participant 4 stressed, "We need ongoing professional development focused on philosophy and pedagogy, not just compliance."

These suggestions highlight participatory decision-making, echoing Dewey's democratic philosophy of education, which values collaboration among stakeholders. Psychologically, they reflect empowerment theory, which links teacher motivation and self-efficacy to improved student outcomes.

Conclusion

Building on the insights from the study, it becomes evident that teachers' understanding and application of educational philosophies play a crucial role in shaping classroom practices and student outcomes. While current policies provide a framework that integrates essentialism, progressivism, and humanism, practical challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and administrative demands often limit full implementation. These findings underscore the need for actionable strategies to bridge the gap between policy ideals and classroom realities.

Implications

Practice. Teachers should balance essentialism, progressivism, and humanism in their teaching—focusing on core skills, active learning, and student well-being. Despite classroom challenges, they can apply these philosophies through flexible, reflective, and compassionate practice.

Policy. Educational reforms must align with real classroom conditions. Policymakers should consult teachers, lessen administrative burdens, and provide sufficient support and resources to make learner-centered and inclusive teaching truly possible.

Education. Teacher education should strengthen understanding of philosophical foundations and how to apply them in real settings. Continuous, meaningful professional development and collaboration can help teachers connect philosophy with daily practice.

Research. Future research can examine how integrated philosophies influence learning outcomes and teacher motivation across different school contexts. Teacher-led studies can also show how theory translates into effective classroom strategies.

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