

The Urgency of Educational Philosophy in Designing Meaningful Learning in Primary Schools

Nurbaiti^{1*}, Afdhal Ilahi²

^{1,2}Institut Pendidikan Tapanuli Selatan



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ABSTRACT

Educational philosophy plays a crucial role in shaping the aims, processes, and quality of learning, particularly at the primary education level, which forms the foundation of students' holistic development. However, previous studies indicate a persistent gap between philosophical discourse and its practical application in classroom learning. This study aims to examine the urgency of educational philosophy as a foundation for designing meaningful learning in primary education. Using a qualitative literature review approach, this study analyzes selected empirical and theoretical studies related to constructivism, humanism, and progressivism in primary school learning contexts. The findings reveal that these philosophical perspectives contribute significantly to the development of student-centered, contextual, and reflective learning designs. Constructivism supports active knowledge construction, humanism emphasizes emotional well-being and personal development, while progressivism promotes experiential and problem-based learning connected to real-life contexts. The analysis further shows that the integration of these philosophical principles aligns with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in promoting differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. However, the literature also indicates that limited philosophical literacy among teachers often results in procedural and administrative-oriented teaching practices. This study concludes that strengthening teachers' understanding of educational philosophy is essential to ensure the effective design of meaningful learning in primary education. By grounding instructional practices in philosophical reflection, educational processes can move beyond administrative compliance toward more holistic and transformative learning experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Primary education plays a fundamental role in shaping students' cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development. At this foundational stage, learning is expected not only to promote academic achievement but also to foster values, character formation, and meaningful understanding that supports lifelong learning. Meaningful learning in primary schools requires instructional designs that are student-centered, contextual, and reflective, enabling students to actively construct knowledge rather than merely receive information (Zuhr & Nasir, 2023). However, achieving such learning remains a challenge in everyday classroom practice.

Educational philosophy provides a foundational framework that guides teachers in defining the purposes of education, selecting instructional strategies, and shaping learning experiences. Philosophical perspectives such as constructivism, humanism, and progressivism emphasize active student engagement, learner autonomy, emotional development, and holistic growth, all of which are essential for meaningful learning in primary education (Nurmaida et al., 2022). Despite their relevance, the extent to which these philosophical principles are understood and applied by teachers in real classroom settings remains uncertain.

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum represents a national effort to promote meaningful, flexible, and student-centered learning. This curriculum encourages differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile, which are conceptually aligned with constructivist and humanistic educational philosophies (Alimuddin, 2023). Nevertheless, several empirical studies report that classroom practices in primary schools often remain procedural, assessment-oriented, and teacher-centered, indicating inconsistencies between curriculum ideals and instructional realities (Zulkifli et al., 2023).

Previous research suggests that one of the key challenges in implementing meaningful learning lies in teachers' limited understanding of the philosophical foundations of education. Studies in primary and Islamic education contexts reveal that many teachers tend to prioritize technical and administrative aspects of teaching, while philosophical reflection on the purpose and meaning of learning is often overlooked (Rahmawati, 2026). As a result, learning activities may lack depth, contextual relevance, and meaningful student engagement.

Although educational philosophy has been extensively discussed in theoretical and normative educational discourse, studies that critically connect philosophical perspectives with meaningful learning design in primary schools remain limited. Existing research generally examines constructivism, humanism, and progressivism separately, focusing either on conceptual discussion or curriculum implementation without sufficiently explaining how these philosophical orientations collectively function as practical foundations for instructional design.

Furthermore, previous studies tend to emphasize technical aspects of curriculum implementation, such as teaching methods, assessment systems, and learning models, while giving limited attention to teachers' philosophical understanding as a determining factor in meaningful learning. As a result, meaningful learning is often implemented procedurally rather than reflectively, causing inconsistencies between curriculum ideals and classroom practices.

In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, this issue becomes increasingly important because the curriculum fundamentally promotes student-centered, differentiated, and project-based learning approaches that are philosophically rooted in constructivist, humanistic, and progressivist traditions. However, empirical evidence suggests that many teachers still experience difficulties in translating these philosophical principles into authentic classroom practice due to limited philosophical literacy and reflective pedagogical understanding.

Unlike previous studies that mainly position educational philosophy as an abstract theoretical discourse, this study conceptualizes educational philosophy as an operational and reflective foundation for meaningful learning design in primary education. This study specifically integrates constructivism, humanism, and progressivism into a unified analytical framework to examine their relevance within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Therefore, this qualitative literature review seeks to critically analyze the urgency of educational philosophy in designing meaningful learning in primary schools by synthesizing empirical and theoretical studies related to philosophical literacy, instructional practice, and curriculum implementation. This study contributes theoretically by offering an integrative philosophical perspective on meaningful learning,

while practically providing insights for strengthening reflective pedagogical practices and teacher professional development in primary education.

Therefore, this study seeks to empirically examine the urgency of educational philosophy in designing meaningful learning in primary schools by exploring teachers' understanding of philosophical principles and how these principles are manifested in their instructional practices. Using a qualitative research approach, this study aims to provide empirical evidence on the relationship between educational philosophy and meaningful learning design, thereby contributing to the development of educational theory and supporting the effective implementation of meaningful learning in primary education.

Literature Review

This literature review focuses on empirical studies that examine the relationship between educational philosophy and instructional practices in primary education, particularly in the context of meaningful learning. Recent empirical studies emphasize that educational philosophy plays a significant role in shaping instructional practices and learning quality in primary education. Rather than functioning merely as a normative discourse, educational philosophy influences how teachers design learning activities, interact with students, and interpret curriculum objectives. Studies in contemporary educational contexts indicate that limited philosophical understanding among teachers often results in mechanistic, teacher-centered, and assessment-driven learning practices (Atnelie et al., 2026).

Constructivism is one of the most frequently cited philosophical foundations for meaningful learning in primary schools. Empirical research demonstrates that constructivist-oriented teaching encourages active student engagement, contextual understanding, and deeper conceptual learning. (Refi Mariska & Abdul Khobir, 2023) found that constructivist methodologies significantly increased students' participation and understanding in primary Islamic education classrooms. Similarly, (Rahmawati, 2026) reported that teachers who applied constructivist principles under the Merdeka Curriculum framework were more successful in promoting reflective and interactive learning environments. These findings suggest that teachers' understanding of constructivist philosophy directly influences the quality of learning design.

Humanistic philosophy also contributes substantially to the creation of meaningful learning environments, particularly in primary education where students' emotional and psychological development is critical. Recent studies show that humanistic approaches foster supportive teacher-student relationships, enhance student motivation, and create psychologically safe learning spaces. (Bahaking Rama, 2026) found that teachers who adopted humanistic principles were more effective in facilitating holistic student development. In addition, Evanirosa et al. (2022) reported that the implementation of child-friendly school programs aligned with humanistic educational values positively affected students' emotional well-being and classroom engagement.

The Merdeka Curriculum, currently implemented in Indonesia, is philosophically grounded in progressive, constructivist, and humanistic principles. It emphasizes student autonomy, differentiated instruction, and project-based learning as key strategies for meaningful education. However, empirical evidence suggests that the philosophical foundations of the curriculum have not been fully internalized by teachers. Zulkifli et al. (2023) found that many teachers continue to rely on traditional instructional approaches

due to limited understanding of the philosophical assumptions underlying the curriculum. This gap indicates that curriculum reform alone is insufficient without strengthening teachers' philosophical literacy.

Several recent studies further confirm that teachers' limited engagement with educational philosophy affects the effectiveness of learning design. Research by Ma'rifah and Asroni (2024) demonstrated that integrating constructivist principles into instructional practice required not only methodological training but also conceptual understanding of philosophical foundations. Likewise, studies conducted in Indonesian primary education contexts highlight that professional development programs often emphasize technical skills while neglecting philosophical reflection, resulting in superficial implementation of meaningful learning strategies (Syaifuddin, 2022; Ramadhannisa, 2024).

Despite the growing body of empirical research on constructivism, humanism, and curriculum reform, few studies explicitly examine the urgency of educational philosophy based on teachers' philosophical understanding and its manifestation in classroom practices. Most existing studies discuss philosophical perspectives conceptually or evaluate curriculum implementation separately, without empirically linking teachers' philosophical literacy to meaningful learning design. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by qualitatively exploring how teachers understand educational philosophy and apply it in designing meaningful learning in primary schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative literature review approach to critically examine the urgency of educational philosophy in designing meaningful learning in primary education. The study focused on synthesizing empirical and theoretical literature related to constructivism, humanism, progressivism, and meaningful learning within primary school contexts. A qualitative literature review was conducted to critically examine the urgency of educational philosophy in designing meaningful learning in primary education. This approach enables an in-depth analysis of philosophical perspectives and their implications for instructional practices without relying on field data.

Data Sources and Selection

The data sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and educational policy documents related to educational philosophy, meaningful learning, and primary education. The literature was obtained from academic databases such as Google Scholar, SINTA-accredited journals, ERIC, and reputable international publishers.

The literature search was conducted using several keywords, including "educational philosophy," "meaningful learning," "constructivism," "humanism," "progressivism," "primary education," and "Merdeka Curriculum." The search process focused on studies published between 2016 and 2026 to ensure the relevance and currency of the reviewed literature.

A total of 38 scholarly sources were initially identified through database searches. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 24 sources were selected for in-depth analysis. The inclusion criteria consisted of:

1. Studies focusing on primary education contexts;
2. Studies discussing educational philosophy, constructivism, humanism, progressivism, or meaningful learning; and
3. Empirical or theoretical works directly related to instructional practices and curriculum implementation.

Meanwhile, sources that did not explicitly relate philosophical perspectives to meaningful learning design or instructional practice were excluded from the analysis. The selected literature was reviewed critically to identify recurring themes, conceptual relationships, and practical implications related to the role of educational philosophy in meaningful learning design.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The analysis process involved three stages:

1. Organizing the literature based on key philosophical perspectives;
2. Identifying recurring themes related to meaningful learning design; and
3. Synthesizing findings to explain the role of educational philosophy in shaping instructional practices.

This process allowed the researcher to systematically interpret patterns and relationships across the reviewed studies.

Research Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility of the analysis, this study applied source triangulation by comparing findings across multiple scholarly works and philosophical perspectives. Analytical consistency was maintained through repeated reading and careful alignment of interpretations with established frameworks of educational philosophy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on a qualitative analysis of selected scholarly literature, this study identifies educational philosophy as a fundamental foundation in the design of meaningful learning at the primary school level. The synthesis of empirical and theoretical studies consistently highlights three dominant philosophical perspectives—constructivism, humanism, and progressivism—as key references underpinning meaningful learning practices in primary education.

The reviewed literature indicates that constructivist philosophy is widely recognized as the primary driver of meaningful learning. Constructivism conceptualizes learners as active agents who construct knowledge through interaction, experience, and reflection rather than passive recipients of information. Numerous studies report that constructivist-oriented instructional designs emphasize inquiry-based learning, collaborative activities, project-based learning, and contextual problem-solving, all of which contribute to deeper conceptual understanding and sustained learning outcomes (Nurmaida et al., 2022; Ramadhannisa, 2024).

In addition, the analysis reveals that humanistic philosophy plays a crucial role in shaping learner-centered and emotionally supportive learning environments. Humanistic perspectives emphasize students' psychological needs, intrinsic motivation, and holistic personal development. The literature consistently associates meaningful

learning with instructional practices that respect individual differences, encourage self-expression, and foster positive teacher-student relationships. Studies indicate that humanistic principles are reflected in differentiated instruction, empathetic classroom interaction, and the creation of psychologically safe learning spaces (Evanirosa et al., 2022; Nurmaida et al., 2022).

Furthermore, progressivism emerges in the reviewed literature as a complementary philosophical foundation that strengthens experiential and problem-based learning. Progressivist philosophy emphasizes learning through experience, real-life problem solving, and social interaction. The studies analyzed suggest that progressivist approaches enable students to connect academic content with everyday life and societal contexts, thereby enhancing the relevance and meaning of learning experiences.

The synthesis of findings indicates that constructivism, humanism, and progressivism are not applied independently in contemporary educational practice. Instead, the literature shows that these philosophical perspectives are often integrated within student-centered learning models and modern curriculum frameworks. Table 1 summarizes the philosophical contributions to meaningful learning as identified through the literature analysis.

Table 1. Philosophical Contributions to Meaningful Learning in Primary Education

Philosophical Perspective	Core Principle	Implications for Learning Design
Constructivism	Knowledge is actively constructed by learners	Inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, collaborative activities
Humanism	Emphasis on emotional well-being and personal growth	Differentiated instruction, empathetic guidance, supportive classroom climate
Progressivism	Learning through experience and problem-solving	Contextual learning, real-life applications, experiential tasks

Overall, the results of this literature-based analysis indicate that meaningful learning in primary education is strongly influenced by teachers' philosophical understanding. The literature consistently demonstrates that when philosophical foundations are well understood, learning design tends to be more reflective, contextual, and holistic, integrating cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning.

Discussion

The findings of this qualitative literature-based study reinforce the argument that educational philosophy is not merely a normative or theoretical discourse, but a practical foundation for designing meaningful learning. The reviewed literature confirms that the absence of philosophical grounding often results in mechanistic, teacher-centered, and assessment-driven instructional practices, which limit students' opportunities to develop critical thinking, creativity, and reflective abilities (Sagala, 2019; Zulkifli et al., 2023).

Constructivist and progressivist philosophies provide a strong conceptual basis for student-centered learning that emphasizes active engagement, inquiry, and experiential learning. These perspectives align with classical educational theories proposed by Dewey and Piaget, which conceptualize learning as a transformative process shaped by experience and interaction rather than the simple transmission of knowledge. The literature reviewed in this study supports the view that such approaches are essential for developing higher-order thinking skills and meaningful understanding in primary education.

Humanistic philosophy further enriches meaningful learning by addressing the affective and ethical dimensions of education. The literature consistently highlights that emotionally supportive and respectful learning environments contribute significantly to students' motivation, confidence, and engagement. Humanistic approaches position teachers as facilitators who support students' academic and personal development, fostering empathy, autonomy, and self-actualization. This perspective is particularly relevant in primary education, where students are in a critical stage of emotional, social, and moral development (Rogers, 1983; Evanirosa et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, the Merdeka Curriculum reflects the integration of constructivist, humanistic, and progressivist philosophies through its emphasis on differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. However, the reviewed literature reveals a persistent gap between curriculum ideals and classroom practices. Many studies report that teachers tend to implement curriculum policies procedurally, without sufficient philosophical reflection, resulting in superficial adoption of meaningful learning strategies (Syaifuddin, 2022; Zulkifli et al., 2023).

The discussion also highlights structural challenges identified in the literature, including limited philosophy-based professional development, an overemphasis on cognitive assessment, and heavy administrative demands. These conditions often constrain teachers' capacity to consciously integrate philosophical principles into instructional decision-making. As a result, educational philosophy remains implicit rather than functioning as an explicit foundation for learning design.

Therefore, this study supports the conclusion that strengthening teachers' philosophical literacy is essential for improving the quality of meaningful learning in primary schools. Based on the synthesis of existing studies, philosophical reflection should be systematically integrated into teacher education and professional development programs. By doing so, teachers can move beyond technical instructional competence toward reflective, ethical, and learner-centered pedagogical practices.

In conclusion, this literature-based qualitative study confirms that educational philosophy plays a crucial role in the design of meaningful learning in primary education. The integration of constructivist, humanistic, and progressivist perspectives enables learning experiences that are not only academically effective but also meaningful, contextual, and transformative. Strengthening the philosophical dimension of teaching is therefore essential for realizing the broader educational goals envisioned in contemporary curriculum reforms.

CONCLUSION

This literature-based qualitative study concludes that educational philosophy plays a central and strategic role in the design of meaningful learning in primary education. The synthesis of previous empirical and theoretical studies demonstrates that constructivism, humanism, and progressivism constitute essential philosophical foundations that support student-centered, contextual, and holistic learning practices.

The findings indicate that meaningful learning is most effectively achieved when teachers possess a clear understanding of these philosophical perspectives. Constructivism encourages active knowledge construction and inquiry-based learning, humanism emphasizes students' emotional well-being and personal development, and progressivism promotes experiential and problem-based learning connected to real-life

contexts. The integration of these philosophies enables learning designs that address not only cognitive outcomes but also affective and social dimensions of student development.

In the Indonesian context, the Merdeka Curriculum reflects the alignment of these philosophical principles through its emphasis on differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. However, the reviewed literature consistently reveals a gap between the philosophical ideals embedded in the curriculum and their implementation in classroom practices. This gap is largely attributed to teachers' limited philosophical literacy and the predominance of procedural and administrative approaches to curriculum enactment.

Therefore, this study highlights the importance of strengthening teachers' philosophical understanding as a key strategy for improving the quality of meaningful learning in primary schools. Teacher education and professional development programs should integrate philosophical reflection alongside pedagogical and technical training. In addition, educational policies should support learning cultures that value reflective practice, holistic assessment, and ethical decision-making in teaching.

In conclusion, educational philosophy should not remain confined to abstract discourse but must function as a practical foundation for instructional design in primary education. Strengthening the philosophical dimension of teaching is a crucial investment in fostering learners who are not only academically competent but also emotionally mature, socially responsible, and morally grounded.

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***Nurbaiti (Corresponding Author)**

Institut Pendidikan Tapanuli Selatan
Jl. Sutan Muhammad Arif, Kelurahan Batang Ayumi Jae, Kecamatan Padangsidempuan Utara,
Kota Padangsidempuan, Sumatera Utara.
Email: nurb9388@gmail.com

Afdhal Ilahi

Institut Pendidikan Tapanuli Selatan
Jl. Sutan Muhammad Arif, Kelurahan Batang Ayumi Jae, Kecamatan Padangsidempuan Utara,
Kota Padangsidempuan, Sumatera Utara.
Email: afdhaliilahi08@gmail.com
