

Comparison of Concepts: The Nature of Education and the Purpose of Education

Hasnawi^{1*}, Iskandar¹, Saifuddin¹, Zarkasyi¹

¹ Al Muslim University

Article Info

Article history:

Received January 8, 2026

Revised January 21, 2026

Accepted January 22, 2026

Keywords:

the nature of education, the goals of education, the philosophy of education, national education.

ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental human need that plays a vital role in shaping the quality of individuals and the civilization of a nation. In the study of philosophy and educational science, discussions on the nature of education and its objectives occupy a central position because they serve as the conceptual basis for the implementation of education. The nature of education relates to the meaning, essence, and basic nature of education, while the objectives of education relate to the direction, results, and achievements to be achieved through the educational process. This article aims to examine in depth and compare the concepts of the nature of education and its objectives based on the views of experts, schools of educational philosophy, and Indonesian national education policy. The method used is a literature study with a descriptive-analytical and comparative approach. The results of the study indicate that the nature of education and its objectives are two interrelated and inseparable concepts. A comprehensive understanding of the nature of education is the main foundation in formulating educational objectives that are humanistic, contextual, and oriented towards the development of the whole person .

This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.



Corresponding Author:**Hasnawi** | Al Muslim University

Email: hasnawi.bugak@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Education plays a very strategic role in human life. It serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge and skills, but also as a vehicle for the formation of values, attitudes, character, and personality (Dewey, 1938; Ki Hadjar Dewantara, 2009). Through education, humans are guided to understand themselves, their environment, and the social and cultural realities around them, enabling them to function meaningfully in society (Freire, 2005; Tilaar, 2012).

In the context of globalization and rapid technological development, education faces various complex challenges, such as changing social values, demands for 21st-century competencies, and a moral and character crisis (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). These conditions require a deep understanding of the philosophical foundations of education to

ensure that educational practices do not lose their direction and purpose (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

One of the most fundamental philosophical foundations of education is an understanding of the nature and purpose of education. The nature of education answers the fundamental questions of what and why education is provided, while the purpose of education addresses the direction and outcomes of education (Gutek, 2014; Noddings, 2016). Differences in views on the nature of education will directly influence the formulation of educational goals, curriculum design, teaching methods, and evaluation systems (Print, 1993; Schiro, 2013).

Therefore, a comprehensive and comparative study of the nature of education and the goals of education is essential, particularly for educators, students, and educational stakeholders, in order to develop coherent, meaningful, and contextually relevant educational practices (Biesta, 2015; Tilaar, 2012).

Formulation of the problem

Based on this background, the problem formulation in this article is as follows:

1. What is the concept of the essence of education according to experts and schools of educational philosophy?
2. What is the concept of educational goals from a theoretical perspective and national education policy?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the nature of education and the goals of education?
4. What is the relationship between the nature of education and the goals of education?
5. What are the implications of understanding the nature and purpose of education in educational practice in Indonesia?

Writing purpose

The purpose of writing this article is to:

1. Describe the concept of the essence of education theoretically and philosophically.
2. Reviewing the concept of educational goals according to experts and national policies.
3. Comparing the concepts of the nature of education and the goals of education systematically.
4. Explain the implications of these two concepts in educational practice.

Benefits of Writing

This article is expected to provide the following benefits:

1. Theoretical benefits, namely enriching scientific studies in the fields of philosophy and educational science.
2. Practical benefits, namely being a reference material for educators and students in understanding the basics of education.

2. Theoretical Basis

The study of the nature and purpose of education cannot be separated from the framework of educational philosophy and educational theories that have developed throughout the history of human thought. Educational philosophy provides an ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundation for what education is, how knowledge is acquired, and why it is conducted (Gutek, 2014; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

Ontologically, education is understood as the process of shaping humans as beings with rational, moral, social, and spiritual potential. From this perspective, humans are not viewed as passive objects, but rather as subjects who actively develop themselves through interaction with their environment and culture (Dewey, 1938; Noddings, 2016). Therefore, the essence of education is always linked to particular views of humanity and life (Biesta, 2015).

Epistemologically, education is concerned with the process by which knowledge, values, and skills are acquired and constructed. Philosophies of education such as idealism, realism, pragmatism, and constructivism provide different frameworks for how students learn and how teachers should teach (Schiro, 2013; Gutek, 2014). Idealism emphasizes the cultivation of reason and universal values, realism stresses the mastery of objective reality, while pragmatism and constructivism emphasize experience, inquiry, and problem-solving as the core of learning (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1970).

Axiologically, education is always directed toward specific values and goals. In this context, educational goals concern not only the achievement of academic competence but also the development of character, ethics, and social responsibility (Noddings, 2016; UNESCO, 2021). Values such as humanity, justice, and sustainability therefore become key orientations in formulating educational goals (Biesta, 2015).

In modern educational theory, the relationship between the nature and purpose of education is dialectical. The nature of education provides the philosophical basis for what education means, while the purpose of education represents the operational realization of this understanding in the form of learning objectives, competencies, and learning outcomes (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Print, 1993). Consequently, differing philosophical views on the nature of education lead to different educational objectives, curricula, instructional methods, and evaluation systems (Schiro, 2013).

In the context of the nation-state, educational goals are also influenced by ideology, culture, and national development priorities (Tilaar, 2012). In Indonesia, Pancasila and the National Education System Law function as the normative framework that guides national education goals toward the development of individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, moral, and responsible citizens (Republic of Indonesia, 2003; Tilaar, 2012).

Based on this theoretical framework, this study positions the essence of education as a fundamental philosophical concept, while educational goals are understood as normative-operational constructs that guide educational practice. This framework is used to compare expert perspectives and educational policies in order to achieve a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding (Gutek, 2014; Biesta, 2015).

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a library research method. Data were obtained from various written sources, including educational textbooks, national and international scientific journals, scientific articles, and laws and regulations related to education (Zed, 2008; Creswell, 2014). Data collection was carried out through several stages: (1) identification of relevant sources, (2) classification of data based on thematic categories, (3) content analysis, and (4) conceptual synthesis (Krippendorff, 2018; Zed, 2008). Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach to explain and interpret concepts, as well as a comparative approach to examine similarities and differences between the nature of education and educational goals (Babbie, 2020; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

4. Result

Based on an analysis of various literature sources discussing educational philosophy, educational theory, and national educational policy, several main conceptual findings were obtained regarding the relationship between the nature of education and educational goals.

First, the literature shows that the essence of education is consistently understood as a process of developing human potential holistically, encompassing intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual aspects. The views of experts such as Ki Hadjar Dewantara, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Paulo Freire emphasize that education is not simply a process of transferring knowledge, but rather a process of shaping humans as conscious, independent, and responsible subjects. Thus, the essence of education is humanistic, dynamic, and oriented toward developing personal integrity.

Second, the goals of education, from various theoretical perspectives and national policies, generally aim to develop individuals with knowledge, character, and the ability to play an active role in social life. These goals focus not only on academic achievement but also on the development of values, attitudes, and life competencies. In the Indonesian context, the national education goals, as formulated in the National Education System Law, reflect this orientation by emphasizing faith, piety, noble character, skills, and civic responsibility.

Third, the comparative results show a close relationship between the nature of education and its objectives. The nature of education serves as a philosophical foundation that determines the direction of educational objectives. When education is understood as a process of humanization and liberation, the objectives of education are directed toward the formation of critical, personable, and dignified individuals. Conversely, when education is understood narrowly as a skills training process, the objectives tend to be technocratic and instrumental.

Fourth, literature analysis also shows that differing philosophical views on the nature of education result in variations in educational goals, curricula, and learning strategies. Idealism, pragmatism, and progressivism, for example, place varying emphasis on the intellectual, experiential, and social development of students. However, all these views agree that education aims to improve the quality of human life.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the essence of education and the goals of education are two inseparable concepts. They form a conceptual unity that determines the

direction, meaning, and practice of education, both in theory and in education policy and implementation in Indonesia.

5. Discussion

The Essence of Education

Understanding the Essence of Education

The essence of education refers to its most fundamental meaning. Education is understood as a conscious and planned effort to develop human potential holistically. Education is not only concerned with intellectual aspects, but also encompasses moral, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects.

Etymologically, education comes from the word *educare* which means to guide and care for, and *educere* which means to bring out or develop the potential that exists within humans.

The Nature of Education According to Experts

Various education experts have put forward diverse views on the nature of education, including:

1. Ki Hadjar Dewantara stated that education is a guide in the life of growing children, namely guiding all the natural powers that exist in children so that they as humans and members of society can achieve the highest safety and happiness.
2. John Dewey viewed education as a continuous process of experience (*education is a process of living, not a preparation for future living*). Education functions to reconstruct experiences so that individuals are able to face life's problems.
3. Jean Piaget viewed education as a process of cognitive structure formation through active interaction between individuals and their environment. Education should encourage students to think critically and independently.
4. Paulo Freire defined education as a process of human liberation from oppression through critical consciousness. Education should not be "banking style," but rather dialogic and liberating.
5. Herman H. Horne stated that education is a continuous process of adjustment of humans who develop physically and mentally, consciously and freely, towards God and the world around them.
6. Redja Mudyahardjo views education as a conscious effort carried out by families, communities, and the government through guidance, teaching, and training activities that last throughout life.

From the views of these experts, it can be concluded that the essence of education emphasizes the process of developing human potential in a complete and sustainable manner.

The Essence of Education from the Perspective of Educational Philosophy

In the study of educational philosophy, the nature of education can be viewed from several perspectives, including idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, and progressivism. Each perspective places a different emphasis on the meaning of education.

The Nature of Education as a Humanization Process

Education is essentially a process of humanization, namely the process of humanizing humans so that they are able to live according to the values of humanity, justice and dignity.

Educational Goals

Understanding the Purpose of Education

Educational goals describe the ideal conditions to be achieved through the educational process. These goals serve as the direction and guideline for all educational activities.

Educational Goals According to Experts

Educational experts formulate the goals of education as efforts to develop individual potential, build character, and prepare individuals to be able to live responsibly in society.

Goals of Indonesian National Education

Indonesia's national education goals are formulated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. These goals reflect the values of Pancasila and the needs of the Indonesian nation.

Types and Classification of Educational Objectives

Educational objectives can be classified into general objectives, specific objectives, institutional objectives, and instructional objectives.

Comparison of the Nature of Education and the Goals of Education

Conceptual Equation

The essence of education and the goals of education are both oriented towards human development and improving the quality of life.

Conceptual Differences

The essence of education is philosophical and abstract, while the goals of education are operational and concrete.

The Relationship between the Nature and Purpose of Education

The essence of education serves as the philosophical basis for formulating educational goals. Educational goals are a practical expression of the essence of education.

Implications of the Nature and Purpose of Education in Practice

A proper understanding of the nature and purpose of education has important implications for curriculum development, learning strategies, the role of teachers, and educational evaluation systems.

Challenges and Relevance of Education in the Modern Era

Education in the modern era faces the challenges of globalization, digitalization, and sociocultural change. Therefore, understanding the nature and purpose of education needs to be continually contextualized to remain relevant.

6. Conclusion

The essence of education and the purpose of education are two fundamental concepts that are interrelated and inseparable. The essence of education provides the philosophical basis for the meaning of education, while the purpose of education provides the operational direction for implementing education. A comprehensive understanding of these two concepts is crucial for realizing education that is meaningful, humanistic, and oriented toward the development of the whole person.

References

Babbie, E. (2020). *The practice of social research* (15th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Biesta, G. (2015). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Routledge.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.

Dewey, J. (2004). *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan.

Freire, P. (2005). *Education of the Oppressed*. Jakarta: LP3ES.

Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.

Gutek, G. L. (2014). *Philosophical, ideological, and theoretical perspectives on education* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.

Ki Hadjar Dewantara. (2009). *Education*. Yogyakarta: Supreme Council of the Taman Siswa Association.

Ki Hadjar Dewantara. (2009). *Pendidikan*. Majelis Luhur Persatuan Taman Siswa.

Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Noddings, N. (2016). *Philosophy of education* (4th ed.). Westview Press.

OECD. (2019). *Future of education and skills 2030: OECD learning compass 2030*. OECD Publishing.

Ornstein, A. C., & Hunkins, F. P. (2018). *Curriculum: Foundations, principles, and issues* (7th ed.). Pearson.

Piaget, J. (1970). *Science of education and the psychology of the child*. Orion Press.

Print, M. (1993). *Curriculum development and design* (2nd ed.). Allen & Unwin.

Republic of Indonesia. (2003). Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. Ministry of National Education.

Schiro, M. S. (2013). Curriculum theory: Conflicting visions and enduring concerns (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Tilaar, H. A. R. (2012). Pendidikan, kebudayaan, dan masyarakat madani Indonesia. Rineka Cipta.

Tilaar, HAR (2012). *Education, Culture, and Civil Society in Indonesia* . Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.

UNESCO. (2021). Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education. UNESCO Publishing.

Zed, M. (2008). Metode penelitian kepustakaan. Yayasan Obor Indonesia.