A Lens on Idealism and Pragmatism Philosophies and their Learning Influences in EFL: Synthesis Literature Review

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Abstract

The current paper discusses the two most widespread and contradictory educational philosophies of classic German Idealism and modern American pragmatism. Their perspectives of what is truth and what is the best way to distinguish the reasoning idealists from the experienced pragmatists. The implementations of Idealism and pragmatism have affected the education process for several ages and reflect various social changes. The role of schools, educators, environment, teachers, and learners are not the same in both philosophies. However, on reviewing the chronological transmission from Plato's Idealism to Dewey's pragmatism, the resemblances and differences are elaborated here with examples. Furthermore, how these philosophies helped founding advocators for perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism.

Keywords: *Educational Philosophies, Idealism, Pragmatism, Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism, Reconstructionism, learning theories, EFL.*

Introduction:

The love of wisdom is the essence of the eternal quest for truth that originates from philosophy. In the 6th century BC, ancient Greek thinkers, the first philosophers, inquired about secular issues derived from sacred traditions or personal revelations, reasons, and observations. Thus, expanding philosophical branches and fields enhances its implications in education. According to Webster's dictionary, education and teaching aim to develop an individual's knowledge, skills, and character. In other words, education peruses to bring out potential.

Education is the key to facilitating the process of learning, where the learner acquires and develops their awareness of knowledge, values, and skills to fulfill their capabilities and possibilities towards being a positive and influential person. According to Lamichhane (2018, 24), education aims "to enable learners to do something that he/she could not do before." The best education aims to direct educational activities to develop a citizen socially, culturally, mentally, physically, and psychologically. Additionally, education development is a foremost international concern to improve the character of learners.

The implications of education stand over four ancient basic backgrounds. The oldest system is Idealism which does not seek perfection. Instead, it considers the human spirit as the most element in life. Plato claimed that the ultimate reality consists of ideas in which a person's potential abilities are gained through logical reasoning, unlike Socrates, who believed in the power of question-answer and dialogue. Next, the raised of Naturalism believed in the reality of the material world(nature) as the source of knowledge. Nature controls the inside and outside of the human being through the laws of nature. The famous Darwin's theory, struggling to survive, supports Naturalism, where a person adjusts to his existence. The third philosophy tackled reality which Aristotle, the father of realism, adapted. In realism, "importance must be given to observation, experimentation, and activities" Lamichhane (2018, 28). This corresponds with what we have today in ESL/EFL classrooms as task-based learning. The fourth philosophy focuses on learning through experiences, which is why experimentalism or Pragmatism" leads to progressive schools. Well, practitioners of language learning can tell from their perspectives how learning by doing, as Deway advocates, encourages language learners to elicit the meaning and structure from the context. From the pragmatic insight, the teacher sounds facilitator and mediator between the target language and the learner.

Problem Statement:

The educational system is designed according to a philosophical view that shapes the curricula, activities,

processes, and procedures of teaching and learning (Rhalmi, 2018). Understanding the philosophical background of education allow educators to polish their profession and elaborate on why they do such conscious and unconscious practices while planning, administrating, teaching, assessing, and evaluating the educational signs of progress. The deficiency in building a base for day-to-day pedagogical activities causes a blurred vision, resulting in an unclear path. Therefore, it is critical to grasp the emergences of such philosophies and adopt one or more with modifications to the modern era.

Research Questions:

This synthesis literature review paper aims to explore the following questions:

1. What is the influence of Idealism and Pragmatism on the educational process?
2. How did Idealism philosophies help founding advocators for perennialism and essentialism in the EFL context?
3. How did pragmatism philosophies help founding advocators for progressivism and reconstructionism in the EFL context?

Research Objectives:

The main question of this synthesis review is to state the influence of Idealism and Pragmatism on the educational process. The main question leads to exploring the role of schools, educators, environment, teachers, and learners in both Idealism and Pragmatism philosophies. In addition to investigating philosophical advocators for educational theories of perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism?

Significance of the study:

As English language education expands globally, EFL educators must acknowledge what path is the best to fulfill the purposes of language learning. Philosophical perspectives and language learning theories are the basis for building solid practices and professional cognitive background. Educators can adopt one or more by reviewing the functional impacts of these educational philosophies and theories. Awareness of the philosophy of education facilitates the role of the modern EFL teachers

who aren't only professionally developed and skilled but also open to adapting a novel perspective in the digital era.

Methodology:

This literature review follows the descriptive analytical methods to elaborate on the interrelation between the educational philosophies through reviewing and analyzing the related literature. The deductive approach in analyzing the various perspectives of educational philosophies and theories draws clear distinctions as well as assemblances between Idealism, pragmatism, perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism, Reconstructionism

Synthesis Literature Review Discussion:

1. What is the influence of Idealism and Pragmatism on the educational process?

Idealism is a philosophical approach that has as its central tenet that ideas are the only actual reality, the only thing worth knowing. Socrates and Plato were the founders of Idealism (Rhalmi, 2018). Plato established the essence of Idealism about 400 BC in his famous book "The Republic." In his book, he described two worlds; the eternal, permanent, universal mental world vs. the world of appearance (senses), which is disordered and imperfect as it changes. (Cohen and Gelbrich,1999).

The mind is the light for everything, even the spirit" self-realize." In other words, ideas are absolute, while truth and values are universal and can be identified by mental entities (Rhalmi, 2018). The idealist assumes that we have direct cognitive access only to our mental states in the form of ideas motivated by epistemology and metaphysics (DeVries,2018).

The evident idealist pioneers were Descartes and Kant (DeVries,2018). Their attributions lay in crystalizing the framework for Ideal thinking. Their insights into the material and non-material existence are somewhat of a mixture between being ideal and real. Idealism recognizes human nature thoroughly in which the education process considers all aspects as one entity. Plato states that learning consists of rediscovering knowledge we already have and possess in our minds. Thus, the mind makes a coherent recognition of things. The way to rediscover the knowledge is by using Socratic questioning and reasoning because the physical entities are considered sources of

errors. Theoretically, critical and logical thinking plus Socratic questioning are the methodologies of ideal students. Another outstanding contribution of the idealist, Descartes in education, is the "Cartesian doubt" that states ("I think. Therefore I am"). Doubting is a tool for students to discover the truth (Rhalmi, 2018). In this sense, the ideal teaching method, according to the idealist, is on handling ideas through lecture, discussion, and Socratic dialogue, and character is developed through imitating models and heroes (Cohen and Gelbrich,1999).

In the philosophical opinion of Plato, to understand the truth, one must pursue knowledge absolute mind. (Cohen and Gelbrich,1999). To Idealism, schools are where students discover eternal principles and values (Rhalmi, 2018). Thus, according to Idealism, brighter students rule the state, whereas less able students collect data to maintain the state, not rule it.

The ideal teacher is a presenter and analyzer to enable transforming ideas that can change lives. In Idealism, the theory is a priority over the practice, unlike pragmatism where vocational subjects are more favored. Strict discipline is needed to control the school environment. The curriculum is concerned with basics and traditions rather than students' interests. It is more subject matter of mind like studying philosophy, history, literature, and religion (Cohen and Gelbrich,1999). The hierarchical organization of curricula that relate ideas and concepts to each other constitutes cultural heritage in different disciplines. For instance, Philosophy and Mathematics are highly focused on cultivating abstract thinking. History and literature rank high due to their nature of morality and cultural methods. Language is emphasized too as a discipline of communication, while the sciences are considered the lowest in the hierarchy. (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

An excellent example of Idealism is the religious schools, The Christian schools in both aspects. Catholics and Protestants believe God is represented as beyond who created the order of nature. Idealism in the Christian era included protagonists like Kant, Hegel, and Hocking. To them, thinking is an interior activity rather than an external activity, as for pragmatists. The prerequisite of thinking and reasoning is self-consciousness. In this sense, education is the process for learners to explore the self. In other words, education happens within. Teachers as saints

must embody the Christian principles that form the knowledge. Religious and spiritual studies are priorities (Kinnear,1963)

On the other hand, pragmatism is a sizeable evolutionary step away from Idealism and utilizes some late idealistic thoughts. (DeVries, 2018) In the 19th century, pragmatists like Charles Peirce derived the contradiction of idealism perspectives from pragmatism. He believed that the thought must produce action rather than linger in the mind and focus on the reality of experience. The dynamic universe makes reality constantly changing, and by applying and experimenting, problems arise, and we learn best (Cohen and Gelbrich,1999). Pragmatism philosophy is tightly joined with John Dewey's and Rousseau's views. "Pragma" is a Greek word that means "a thing done." Truth is dynamically developed (DeVries,2018).

It has been argued that pragmatism is the chronological revolution of Idealism. It utilizes some of the strengths of late idealistic thoughts. Common dominators are shared by idealists such as Hegel, for example, and a pragmatist. These include an agreement of epistemological realism, the employment of a rich conception of experience, deductive and functional theory of concepts, the sociality of reason, and an emphasis on expressing within through the outer material world for the spirit's sake. Although Hegel, the idealist, shared an ideal, accurate, and pragmatic vision, he was not a pragmatist. The idealist considers ideal reality, in contrast to the pragmatist who considers the notion of the absolute ideal. (DeVries,2018). Metaphysics was the subject of the critic of Hegel, while more pragmatists were concerned with many metaphysical questions and principles. Therefore, the role of experience is essential in pragmatism. (Emundts, 2013).

The pioneer pragmatic John Dewey believed that learners must interact with each other and their environment to foster social democracy. It emphasizes the autonomy of learners from different ethics and cultural backgrounds. To that end, the center is the learner's needs and interests to enable more activities and projects for society. Their best teaching methods are problem-solving, experiments, projects, and field tours

Teachers are facilitators for providing problematic solving situations where critical thinking and inquiry are

needed to learn. The pragmatic teacher facilitates integrated learning by providing a stimulus to problematic questions or situations to be solved through working on projects, tours, volunteering, critical reading, and inquiry research. According to (Lamichhane (2018, 29), "A pragmatic teacher helps in the ready-made forms; the teacher should encourage the learner through active interaction with the learning situation." Firmanto, Degeng, Rahmawati & Chusniyah (2019) stated that pragmatism encourages learning formation literacy by using experiences as a method of communication or interaction with new things. Increasingly, society accepted to use of scientific explanations for phenomena. The teacher's role in directing the learning process (experience) with no interference with their attitudes toward learners' interests and needs is needed. To Dewey, education is a process for improving the human condition, and schools are prepared environments within the larger social environment for problem-solving and practicing scientific methods (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

Another example of the effect of German Idealism on USA education is the foundation of establishing kindergarten (children's garden) in the US by Froebel and Harris. Froebel was a proponent of idealist pedagogy, and Harris also adapted the idealism principles. Both lied on Idealism as a source of administrative philosophy. The focus is on the 3- and 4-year-old children who learn through play. After a time, the ideal administrative turned progressive, and the formal curriculum turned child central. (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018)

Most American schools encourage task-based curricula, extra-curricular activities, field tours, and volunteering." Voluntarism: A Difference that Makes the difference between German Idealism and American Pragmatism" (Giladi & Wilson, 2018). The pragmatic school is concerned more with the outcomes and how to enhance the learners' adaptation. The curriculum should unify mental disciplines to solve problems and prepare students for daily living and future careers as well-prepared, influential citizens. (Cohen and Gelbrich,1999).

Surprisingly, Shermis (1982) states that Judo-Christian orientation education in the 19th century values the conflicting perspectives of John Dewey and pragmatism. Shermis investigated the beliefs of Earl Johnson (1894), who related the expansion of the role of

pragmatic education into verses from the Judo-Christian religions. Johnson called for the importance of social studies and humanities derived from Christianity to solve social conflicts. Science as a guide helps to discover the order of nature that evolves scientific inquiries and choice-making. Teachers create a climate for learners to express themselves and feel secure in the classroom. Besides, teachers should help learners resolve intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. Another familiar aspect shared with Dewey is that schools must use intelligent tools. So, what makes Earl Johnson unique is the dualism in keeping the religious aspect with the theology and philosophy of pragmatism.

2. How did Idealism philosophies help founding advocators for perennialism and essentialism in the EFL context?

Perennialism and Essentialism global theories were originally the products of the philosophy of Idealism and realism. Firstly, perennialism absorbs the ancient principles of Aristotle and Plato and the medievalist into a novel orientation of cultural conflicts presented in the 20century. It is the revival of ideal ancient faith systems in modern problem forms (Mosier,1951). Ornstein & Hunkins (2018) stated that perennialism stood the test of time as human nature, value and truth are eternal. Hutchins, an advocate of perennialism, believed that a person's function is the same in every society where the role of education is to improve people. Perennialism considers education to be eternal and sustainable. It purses the development of learners' rational and moral powers to prepare the intellectual elite for ruling society. The perennialism curriculum is universal (one curriculum for all) in which all human beings possess the exact essential nature. To illustrate, it is not a specialist curriculum; instead, it is general for appreciating the classics regardless of the learner's interests. As a result, classrooms are centered on teachers who know better, the knowledgeable, and are exemplary for learners. Finally, the order in the classroom is vital.

Similarly, the theory of essentialism allows teachers and administrators to handle the wheels to drill knowledge, skills, and values into the students. The emphasis is on the academic content, and reading is fundamental to mastering the subjects. Conversely, teachers are supposed to intellectually and morally be models as a "fountain of

knowledge and virtue." Learners are expected to work hard and have no room for fun. There are too many academic standards and excellence. For essential proponents, modern society requires incorporating technology into education, "digital literacy." The objective of digital usage is to enable learners to create more and be inventors. Generally, "Education aims to foster in students, our future citizens, a reaffirmation of commitment to their society and a renewal of valuing their culture's contributions." (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

3. How did pragmatism philosophies help founding advocators for progressivism and reconstructionism in the EFL context?

Progressivism developed from pragmatic philosophy. It is considered a contemporary reform movement in political, social, and educational affairs between the 1910s and 1920s. This perspective polished the saying of Dewey that democracy and education go hand in hand. Curricula are interdisciplinary to foster problem-solving and scientific projects. In progressivism, the teacher is the group leader for activities. The progressive transition (from the 1940s to 1950s) classified learning into three groups: child-centered, activity-centered, creative, and neo-Freudian. Progressivists refused many former visions like the authority of teachers and textbooks, memorization, drilling, and the separation of individual experiences and social reality. Overall, progressivism leads to the expansion of radical schools. Nowadays, the progressive revolution calls for a relevant curriculum that reflects the demand for 21st-century workers who are adaptable, creative, and digitally fluent. STEM fields highly receive attention and demands from fulfilling the desired progressive goals. (Ornstein & Huskins, 2018).

Reconstructionism is a theoretical fruit of pragmatism in the 1960s. For the progressive educator, all phenomena are equally worth experience. Education is a reconstruction of experience, a discovery of valid phenomena, and a subsequent description of their consequences. It is a problematic factor of existence (Mosier,1951). Reconstructionists' methods, including analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of problems, are insufficient unless the learners and teachers construct a change. The reconstructionism advocators gave greater emphasis to society-centered education that addressed the needs of all social classes. Society is constantly changing,

which is why the curriculum is changeable and modified to adapt to the transformation of educational, political, economic, and social factors.

Furthermore, schools are institutions for social reform and justice. Democracy is the path to reconstructing society by incorporating reform strategies in schools. (Ornstein & Huskins, 2018).

The last point discussed here is why EFL teachers need to know which philosophy to follow in EFL contexts. It is a question that aims at guiding EFL teachers throughout their teaching practices. It is a question addressed to all educators and stakeholders for decision-making to cope with the unstoppable developments (Uzun, 2012). As we can see from the detailed discussion of the two philosophies, language learning is significant. Nonetheless, two novel terms in EFL contexts show the power of the pragmatism point of view. They are pragmalinguistic, related to grammar competence, and sociopragmatic, related to language performance in society. (Fatah & Ibrahim, 2020).

The aim and vision of educational programs and harmonizing the values gained from old or modern traditions are the key to preparing the young generation for the challenges of modern times. To utilize this functional nobility in education, an ESL teacher can reflect on some philosophical questions before any applicable teaching style, such as what is the nature of the person to be educated? What is the nature of the input, and how it be organized? What behavior trend should one exhibit to carry out one's philosophical position?

The learner must be the center of the educational procedures. For instance, for the academic level learners seeking English as an academic requirement in all disciplines, the learners are viewed actively as the human asset. A task-based curriculum is the famous educational material provided for university students. So, is that enough? Or should the teacher provide the list of academic vocabulary and specialized terminology?

As an EFL faculty member, I believe pragmatism works when acquiring and practicing a language. Engaging in concrete communicative activities and imposing mental/intellectual and sensational challenges stimulate the desire of the learner to learn the target language (in this situation, English). In this regard, and as

John Dewey argued, education starts with the needs and interests of the learners. The language teacher's job is to promote activities that provide opportunities for transforming the new and real-life situations that relate to the student's interests. Literacy is acquired through experiments.

The evolvement calls for a relevant curriculum that reflects the demand for 21st-century workers who are adaptable, creative, digitally fluent, and focused on STEM fields. With the global expansion of EFL learners, regardless of their differences and cultural backgrounds, mingling activities that address various interests and differences enable the effective interaction between the learner and the foreign materials. The connection between school and society becomes related to the gate for personal, social, and economic changes and developments. That is to say that the outcomes and how to enhance the learners' adaptions are the core concern of the pragmatic school to prepare learners for everyday life and future career as well as foster democracy.

Conclusion:

Philosophy is the process of answering questions. Many social and historical issues have been raised in the debate on the importance and effectiveness of education, i.e., direct or indirect, capacities and potentialities, liberal vs. vocational, priorities of the personal development or citizenship, and the overlap among the concept of educating, teaching, training, and indoctrination, and so on. To get answers to these debatable inquiries, philosophers scoped the problems of education according to the nature of humans and their relation to the universe aiming at the relationship between fields and various components of the educational system.

The influence of German Idealism on American pragmatism cannot be denied as both have some agreements or points of convergence like the priority of systems. Idealism is a historical improvement over an authority-based system that neglects the significance of intellectual activities essential in pragmatism. Hence, the experience is central to the philosophy of pragmatism, whereas to Idealism, it is the classical truth and the metaphysics.

The educational theories that emerged from the idealism and pragmatism philosophies shaped the practices of teaching foreign languages, especially EFL, in terms of the priorities of the role of schools, educators, environment, teachers, and learners. These perspectives' transmissions of theories are contradictory. The certainty of the world, according to Perennialism, contrasts with the immediate uncertainty of the world to the progressivist. Progressivism argues for the ability of the democratic faith of the individuals to solve social problems, whereas perennialism states that logical and metaphysical principles can rule. The perennialists inductive activities contrast with the inductive method of experience for progressivists.

Recommendations:

This paper suggests several recommendations as follows:

1. It is recommended to raise all teachers aware of the philosophical view of pedagogy. So, they can adopt one of the followings: attending group discussions and workshops, reflecting on journals or blogs with similar or various disciplines to share their point of view, and how philosophies can be transformational in enhancing pedagogical processes.
2. Professional development (In-service) programs for all educators must tackle how the theoretical and philosophical aspects can be attributed to better practices.
3. Pre-service teacher preparation programs should include a focused course on the philosophy of education and learning theories to enable prospective and novice teachers to enhance their pedagogical procedures.
4. In the EFL context, it is recommended that the EFL teachers reflect periodically on the best practices and transform success to other contexts and across cultures.

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