



## Teachers' Attitudes Towards Educational Philosophy and Multicultural Education

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**Abstract:** This article explores the interplay between the educational philosophies adopted by teachers and their attitudes towards multicultural education. The study reveals how philosophical orientations influence the willingness and ability of teachers to embrace diverse cultural perspectives in their teaching practices. The theoretical framework highlights significant connection between educational philosophies and multicultural education, offering insights into how teacher preparation programs can align their curricula with the principles of equity and inclusion to foster culturally responsive teachers.

**Keywords:** multicultural education; essentialism; perennialism; progressivism; constructivism

### 1. Introduction

The world has undergone rapid changes, and the ethnic, religious, linguistic, and sexual diversity within each country has evolved. This diversity can result in challenges, such as unequal access to social and economic opportunities and democratic rights. As a result, countries have been compelled to develop policies aimed at addressing the potential issues arising from such diversity. Consequently, reforms in educational services have become a central focus of these policies (Gezer,

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2018). In this context, nations have started updating their educational systems, philosophies, and curricula.

The practical implementation of curriculum changes can only occur if teachers embrace the reforms. This is because, without a shift in teachers' educational mindset to align with the new curriculum approach, the reforms will remain confined to the curriculum and fail to be put into practice (Gezer, 2018).

In this regard, adapting the education process to contemporary trends requires teachers to move away from traditional approaches and adopt modern ones, while also considering the perspectives of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. As a result, topics such as educational beliefs, educational philosophies, democracy education, and multicultural education, essential for today's society, have become central themes in teacher training research. Based on this, the present study examines the relationship between the educational philosophies adopted by teachers and their attitudes toward multicultural education.

The diversification of student populations worldwide underscores the need for teachers who are culturally competent and inclusive in their teaching approaches. Multicultural education, as a pedagogical framework, aims to empower students of diverse cultural backgrounds, promoting equity, social justice, and mutual respect in learning environments (Banks, 2019). However, the extent to which teachers embrace and effectively implement multicultural education often depends on their underlying educational philosophy.

Educational philosophies, such as essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, and constructivism, shape how teachers perceive their role in the classroom, as well as their attitudes toward curriculum design, pedagogy, and student engagement. These orientations can either facilitate or hinder the adoption of multicultural practices, making it imperative to understand the correlation between these philosophies and teachers' readiness to engage in multicultural education (Gezer, 2018).

This article examines this relationship among teachers, identifying the philosophical orientations that align most closely with positive attitudes toward multicultural education. The study aims to inform teacher preparation programs on fostering reflective and inclusive practices among future teachers.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Educational Philosophies**

Educational philosophy is a discipline at the intersection of education and philosophy that examines educational theories and practices from a comprehensive perspective (Gezer, 2018). It seeks to identify and analyze challenges in education while exploring the concepts, ideas, and principles that guide and shape educational policies and practices.

Educational philosophy examines and questions various aspects of education, including its purpose, content, methods, and the relationship between educational theory and practice, as well as the limitations and challenges inherent in education. It is also described as a branch of philosophy that analyzes and interprets educational thoughts and practices, aiming to reorganize education based on these interpretations (Sönmez, 2019, apud Gezer, 2018).

There are various approaches to classifying educational philosophies in the literature. For example, Wiles (2009) categorize them into six groups: perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, re-constructionism, naturalism, and existentialism. However, the most commonly accepted classification includes four main categories: perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and re-constructionism (Demir, 2013).

Perennialism emphasizes timeless and universal truths, focusing on the great works of literature, philosophy, and science that have shaped human thought. It advocates for a curriculum centered on enduring ideas and intellectual development rather than contemporary issues. The goal is to cultivate rational thinking and moral virtues through classical education (Wiles, 2009). Perennialists believe education should be the same for all, emphasizing reasoning and critical thinking over vocational or utilitarian aims (Ozmon, 2012).

Essentialism stresses the importance of core knowledge and skills that all students need to become productive citizens. This philosophy prioritizes traditional disciplines like reading, writing, math, and science, aiming to instill discipline, hard work, and respect for authority. Essentialists advocate for teacher-centered instruction, emphasizing mastery of foundational content (Wiles, 2009). The approach is structured and standardized, preparing students for societal roles while maintaining high academic standards (Gutek, 2014).

Progressivism focuses on student-centered learning, emphasizing experience, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Rooted in John Dewey's educational theories,

it values active learning through projects, collaboration, and real-world application. Progressivists argue that education should be relevant to students' lives, addressing their needs and interests while fostering social responsibility and democratic values (Wiles, 2009). The curriculum is flexible, adapting to the learners rather than adhering to a rigid structure (Schiro, 2013).

Reconstructionism advocates for education as a means of addressing social injustices and transforming society. This philosophy emphasizes critical examination of societal issues, such as inequality and environmental challenges, encouraging students to become agents of change. Reconstructionists believe education should challenge the status quo and promote a vision of a better, more equitable world (Wiles, 2009). It integrates social activism and critical pedagogy, fostering global awareness and ethical responsibility (Counts, 1932).

Perennialism and essentialism are rooted in the philosophical traditions of idealism and realism (Sönmez, 2014, apud Gezer, 2018). These philosophies prioritize content in the teaching-learning process, viewing students as passive recipients of knowledge and teachers as active transmitters. Due to these shared characteristics, perennialism and essentialism are collectively referred to as *Traditional Educational Philosophies*.

Progressivism and reconstructionism place students at the center of the educational process, emphasizing active student participation in learning. In these approaches, the teacher's role is to guide and support students throughout their educational journey. Due to these shared characteristics, progressivism and reconstructionism are collectively referred to as *Contemporary Educational Philosophies* (CEP) (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

The philosophy of education provides guidance for the teaching-learning environment and offers insights to teachers on applying teaching-learning theories in practice (Gezer, 2018). Educational philosophies provide a framework for how teachers perceive their role in the learning process.

**Table 1. Differences between Traditional and Contemporary Educational Philosophies**

<b>Educational Philosophy</b>	<b>Function of Education</b>	<b>Role of Teachers</b>	<b>Role of Students</b>
<b>Traditional Philosophies of Education</b>			
Perennialism	Imparts timeless and universal knowledge and values.	Acts as central figures, experts in liberal arts and sciences, employing deduction and Socratic methods (Demir, 2013).	Expected to follow teacher's guidance strictly and take personal responsibility for learning.
Essentialism	Shapes students based on prevailing cultural norms and societal integration.	Authoritative figures modeling societal culture, focusing on delivering solutions and enforcing discipline when necessary.	Primarily passive, tasked with memorization and improving abilities through repetition and effort (Omstein & Lewin, 2006).
<b>Contemporary Philosophies of Education</b>			
Progressivism	Promotes democratic values and critical thinking for real-life problem-solving.	Facilitators who tailor the educational process to student interests, using cooperative and discovery methods (Lee, 2011).	Central to learning, actively engaging in a democratic and collaborative environment.
Reconstructionism	Drives social reform and addresses global challenges.	Advocates for societal change, emphasizing practical solutions to issues like inequality and environmental concerns.	Active participants aiming to reimagine society through discussion, collaboration, and critical analysis (Demir, 2013).

As shown in previous table, essentialism and perennialism emphasize traditional academic content and standardized practices, which may conflict with the adaptive, student-centered nature of multicultural education. In contrast, progressivism and constructivism prioritize experiential learning, critical inquiry, and cultural relevance, aligning closely with the principles of multicultural education (Dewey, 1938).

## **2.2. Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education is an approach designed to provide students from diverse backgrounds – such as ethnicity, race, religion, language, social class, and cultural group – equal educational opportunities (Bennett, 2007). This approach seeks to value students' diversity as a resource in education and to align instructional activities with their varied experiences and perspectives. Additionally, multicultural education aims to preserve each student's cultural heritage while fostering tolerance and respect for differences (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2010).

Banks (2019) defines multicultural education as a transformative approach that integrates diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum while addressing systemic inequities. It challenges traditional Eurocentric paradigms, emphasizing cultural inclusivity and equity in the classroom. Effective implementation of multicultural education requires teachers to adopt practices that validate and celebrate students' diverse cultural identities while promoting critical thinking and social responsibility.

The impact of multicultural education extends to curricula, teaching strategies, teacher-student-parent relationships, and how the overall nature of education is understood in schools. Garcia (2009) describes multicultural education environments as spaces that enhance intercultural awareness, promote critical thinking, and support democratic lifestyles. Such learning environments prioritize cultural diversity in teaching and encourage students to express themselves while appreciating the differences in their surroundings.

To achieve these goals, teachers must demonstrate flexibility, sensitivity, and equity. A pluralistic perspective and intercultural awareness are very important for teachers to successfully implement multicultural education. Even with students prepared for a multicultural approach, education cannot achieve its objectives without teachers who embrace and embody these principles.

## **3. Educational Philosophy and Multicultural Education: A Connection**

The connection between educational philosophy and multicultural education lies in their shared commitment to equity and holistic development. While traditional philosophies prioritize content, contemporary philosophies align closely with the principles of multicultural education by emphasizing the active role of students and the importance of diverse perspectives. Progressivism and reconstructionism, for

example, advocate for collaborative learning and social reform, making them particularly relevant to multicultural education (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

Educational philosophy serves as a foundation for understanding the values, beliefs, and practices that guide teaching and learning. When connected to multicultural education, it helps create a framework that respects and integrates cultural diversity within educational systems.

Progressivism, rooted in the ideas of John Dewey, emphasizes experiential learning, critical thinking, and addressing students' real-world needs. This philosophy aligns closely with multicultural education because it prioritizes active learning and recognizes the importance of diverse cultural contexts in shaping students' experiences. Progressivist educators encourage inclusive teaching methods, collaborative learning, and problem-solving activities that value students' diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The focus on social responsibility and democratic values in progressivism supports multicultural education's goal of fostering inclusivity and equity in classrooms (Banks, 2019; Dewey, 1938).

Reconstructionism views education as a tool for societal reform, making it deeply relevant to multicultural education. Advocates of this philosophy argue that schools should challenge social inequalities, including racism, sexism, and cultural biases, by fostering critical consciousness in students. Reconstructionist educators integrate multicultural content into curricula, encouraging learners to question societal structures and engage in social activism to promote justice and equality (Counts, 1932; Sleeter & Grant, 2008). Multicultural education's focus on empowering marginalized groups aligns with reconstructionism's vision of education as a challenging force.

Although perennialism traditionally emphasizes universal truths and classical works, its relevance to multicultural education lies in the reinterpretation of "universal" knowledge. Multicultural educators adopting a perennialist approach strive to expand the canon of knowledge by including diverse cultural perspectives in the curriculum. By broadening the definition of enduring ideas, educators ensure that students learn from a wide range of cultural traditions, fostering respect and understanding of global diversity (Gutek, 2014).

Essentialism's focus on a core body of knowledge can appear at odds with multicultural education, which emphasizes diversity. However, essentialism can support multicultural goals when the "core curriculum" is thoughtfully designed to include the contributions of various cultural groups. For instance, essentialist

educators can create balanced curricula that teach fundamental skills and knowledge while representing the experiences and histories of underrepresented communities (Banks, 2019).

The connection between educational philosophy and multicultural education highlights the importance of grounding educational practices in thoughtful, inclusive, and reflective frameworks. Philosophical approaches like progressivism and reconstructionism emphasize active learning and social justice, which align seamlessly with multicultural education's goals.

Educational philosophy and multicultural education are key components of modern teaching and learning. Together, they provide a foundation for creating inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive classrooms. By embracing the principles of multicultural education and adapting teaching practices to reflect diverse perspectives, educators can foster environments that empower all students to succeed.

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