Contemporary Educational Philosophy and its Relationship to Building a Knowledge Society

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to highlight the relationship between contemporary educational philosophy and the production of a knowledge society. This will be achieved by utilizing modern mechanisms, specifically integrating technological tools into the teaching-learning process. This integration represents one of the core challenges and stakes presented by contemporary educational philosophy, primarily through the digitization of knowledge, including educational knowledge.

Keywords: Contemporary Education, Digital Environment, Educational Curricula, Digital Pedagogy, Knowledge Society.

Introduction and Problem Statement:

The dawn of the twenty-first century witnessed the global advent of what is commonly known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterized by a digital transformation that permeates all aspects of life through technology and digitalization. Its origins can be traced back to the United States in the 1990s, when digital media began to profoundly shape individual lives, becoming an integral part of daily routines. As noted in a prominent publication, an increasing number of routine daily activities can now be facilitated through digital technologies, including tablets, mobile phones, and personal computers, enabling home internet access. Consequently, navigating contemporary society without these technologies is becoming increasingly challenging[1].

The widespread adoption of digital technologies, with their diverse forms and applications, has significantly impacted the human social structure and cognitive frameworks, including educational knowledge. Digital technology is now extensively utilized in education, giving rise to the concept of digital education. This, in turn, has

necessitated curriculum reform within the teaching-learning process, leading to the emergence of digital pedagogy. This context prompts the following inquiry:

- ➢ What is meant by the philosophy of education?
- ➢ What are the historical contexts that produced it?
- ➢ What is its relationship to the knowledge society?

1.1 Contemporary Educational Philosophy and Digital Education

Educational philosophy encompasses a set of principles, beliefs, assumptions, and postulates, coherently structured to guide educational endeavors and processes across political and pedagogical domains[2]. Education has been a subject of extensive scholarly inquiry across various academic disciplines, particularly philosophy. The genesis of education is inextricably linked to the emergence of humanity, as early humans sought to develop practical mechanisms for controlling their environment. Subsequently, educational and pedagogical methodologies were refined to enhance human, social, and cultural capacities for adaptation.

Education is fundamentally a social process aimed at constructing and fostering cohesive societies. Its significance lies in its capacity to drive social and economic development for both individuals and communities. This recognition is widely shared among educators, sociologists, economists, and policymakers, who view investments in education as critical for human capital development, comparable to investments in natural resources. The objective of sound education is to cultivate individuals across psychological, spiritual, ethical, and intellectual dimensions, encompassing physical, cognitive, psychological, spiritual, ethical, and social growth. Furthermore, it contributes to societal advancement across economic, social, cultural, spiritual, and political domains[3].

The concept of education has evolved, reflecting the diverse perspectives of researchers and specialists, as well as the prevailing philosophical paradigms and their implications for educational needs. These needs vary across historical periods and societies. In early civilizations, rudimentary tools were employed in educational practices that relied on sensory experiences and interactions with nature. Subsequently, educational methodologies advanced. Notably, the Quran, in the story of Adam as detailed in Surat Al-Baqarah[4], alludes to the earliest educational endeavor, where God imparted knowledge of all names to Adam. This narrative, along with other Quranic accounts, underscores the historical reliance on oral instruction, divine revelation, and narrative pedagogy.

1.2 Educational Philosophy in Ancient Civilizations

In ancient civilizations, particularly in Greek philosophy, Plato asserted that the proper educational process should be conducted by the state, detached from the emotional influence of the family. He advocated for placing children in institutions to

receive appropriate education and training, arguing that parental emotions could corrupt the learning process. His educational philosophy comprised the following stages:

- ✓ **From age seven to seventeen**: Education focused on physical training through sports and spiritual development through music, aiming to rectify bodily matters while music was intended for spiritual harmony.
- ✓ **From age seventeen to twenty**: The emphasis was on military arts. [5]

Plato emphasized the avoidance of coercion in the learning process, and his school concentrated on generalizing education and making it compulsory, as well as fostering civic values and preparing individuals qualified to serve the state. Notably, his educational philosophy relied on simple means reflecting the culture of his era, yet his educational ideas remain a refuge for numerous philosophers, educators, and pedagogues. We observe how Plato presents a method for preparing a good citizen through the educational process.

In Chinese civilization, the Chinese people are considered to have a unified culture, and their cities are among the oldest and most historically rich. Their scholars hold a higher position than their soldiers, being regarded as heroes. [6]Their educational philosophy is primarily based on preserving traditions and social values. Education in Chinese civilization was characterized by routine and stability. Education was considered the foundation of economic wealth, social status, and political power. Therefore, Chinese monarchs urged their people to occupy their time with education and study, as it was deemed the best factor for success and achieving a sound social order. Education was considered beneficial for both teachers and learners in Chinese culture, allowing teachers to evaluate their knowledge, address their shortcomings, and enhance their expertise with each teaching endeavor. The educational system ensured the establishment of a primary school in every village with 25 families, a secondary school in every city with 500 families, and a university in every city with 2500 families. Education was open to all without discrimination, provided they demonstrated competence[7].

Notably, education in China before the renowned philosopher Confucius was formal, with teachers being state employees. Confucius introduced a new approach to education, becoming the first teacher to practice education privately, making it accessible to the general public rather than being exclusive to the nobility and aristocracy[8]. The ancient Chinese educational system followed three stages: during the primary stage, from age ten to thirteen, children learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. No exams were conducted until the end of the third year to assess their comprehension of major educational subjects. These were known as major exams, distinct from minor exams conducted by teachers. The secondary stage, from age thirteen to nineteen, was divided into two phases: from age thirteen to seventeen,

students were taught music, poetry, dance, and archery, followed by an exam to assess their thinking and scientific development, granting a diploma known as the small diploma. From age seventeen to nineteen, the larger exam was conducted, granting a large certificate to those demonstrating comprehension of major subjects and ethics. The third stage, university education, involved teaching students natural sciences, songs, music, chariot driving, rituals, and traditions. University education continued until age thirty for males, the age of marriage, and until age twenty or twenty-three at the latest for females[9].

It is worth noting that Confucian educational philosophy is based on ethics, respect for elders, and ancestral heritage, contributing to China's distinguished civilization and reputation among neighboring nations. Their educational system resembles modern educational systems. Educational philosophy in ancient civilizations, in its educational role, relied on educational means related to memory, rote learning, and dependence on the educator as a knowledge transmitter, as well as tablets and paper books.

1.3 Educational Philosophy in the Middle Ages

When examining the philosophy of education in the Christian Middle Ages in Europe, it is evident that the early Christian periods lacked educational and cultural ideas until the second half of the century. Their intellectual focus was on consolidating their doctrine, as they faced continuous challenges. Consequently, their early periods of spreading Christianity were characterized by war and organization, leading to neglect of educational matters and preoccupation with disseminating the teachings of the Christian religious movement[10].

In contrast, the Islamic civilization in the Middle Ages was distinguished by its philosophy of spreading Islamic education, which originated from the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Islamic education aimed to cultivate righteous individuals globally, unlike Western educational approaches that focused on creating good citizens within their nations. This is because Islamic education is a dualistic science, encompassing both worldly and spiritual aspects, striving to nurture individuals according to the principles of the Quran and the Prophet's Sunnah, suitable for all times and places[11].

Islam mandated education and highlighted its virtues in numerous Quranic verses. God Almighty stated in His Wise Book, making the first Quranic verse about the obligation to seek knowledge" God Almighty states: 'Recite in the name of your Lord who created. Created man from a clinging substance. Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught man that which he did not know.[12]' [Quran, 96:1-5] Furthermore, God elucidates in His Wise Book the virtue of scholars,

stating: 'Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only men of understanding will be reminded.[13]' [Quran, 39:9]"

These and other verses indicate the duty to seek knowledge. It is worth noting that the Holy Quran and Islamic law did not limit the encouragement to seek only religious knowledge but included all beneficial sciences and knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also urged the pursuit of knowledge, as narrated by Al-Bukhari: "Whomever God intends good for, He grants him an understanding of the religion." And: "Whoever takes a path seeking knowledge, God facilitates a path to Paradise for him. The angels lower their wings in approval of the seeker of knowledge, and everyone in the heavens and the earth, even the fish in the depths of the water[14], seek forgiveness for the scholar" These and other verses and hadiths highlight the virtue of knowledge, which God made an act of worship. Islam equated men and women, as well as the rich and the poor, in the pursuit of knowledge.

The divine message was disseminated through various institutions, including mosques, which are considered Islamic landmarks established during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Scholars and learners gathered in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and the Grand Mosque in Mecca, as well as in other mosques worldwide, and homes and gatherings, both private and public, discussing various fields of knowledge, including literature, history, biographies, sermons, and lessons, and providing religious rulings to those who asked[15]. In addition to mosques, *Katatib* (plural of *Kuttab*) served as small places for teaching children reading, writing, and memorizing the Quran[16]. It is said that *Katatib* existed before Islam, but their spread increased significantly after its advent, with their primary function being education. Muslim Arabs had two types of *Kuttab*: public, located in mosques and used for memorizing the Quran and teaching Islamic doctrines, and private, located in scholars' homes and used for teaching reading and writing[17]. According to Dr. Hussein Abdul Ghani Abu Ghada, in his presentation at the Third Waqf Conference in Saudi Arabia, education in *Katatib* was not limited to children but extended to adults and girls. After the spread of Islam, the conquerors established *Katatib* in every town they opened[18]. The curriculum for children in *Katatib* varied according to location, as Ibn Khaldun mentioned in a chapter of his *Muqaddimah*: "The methods of teaching in Islamic cities vary." He noted that the people of the Maghreb focused on teaching the Quran, while the people of Andalusia combined teaching the Quran with poetry, correspondence, Arabic grammar, and calligraphy. The people of Africa often combined teaching the Quran with hadith, and the people of the East did the same[19].

The dissemination of knowledge in Islamic philosophy was not limited to mosques and *Katatib* but also extended to palaces, gatherings, *Zawiyas*, *Ribats*, and other places where writing, reading, and memorizing the Quran were taught.

With social change, Arabs developed their philosophy of urban knowledge dedicated to education, establishing schools, institutes, and universities. In the ninth century AD, several universities were established in Salamanca, Cordoba, and other Spanish cities, focusing on all sciences and providing opportunities for free intellectual research[20]. Curricula were developed, and systems for examinations and certificates were established. Scholars delved into educational thought, including Imam Al-Ghazali (may God have mercy on him), whose educational philosophy aimed to please God Almighty. The purpose of religious and worldly knowledge was to seek God's pleasure. He emphasized ethics in building and seeking knowledge, as he outlined in his book *Minhaj al-Muta'allim* (The Student's Methodology) a set of foundations and principles for science, learners, and teachers. He began by explaining the virtue and status of knowledge, dividing sciences into two categories: religious and non-religious. Non-religious sciences were further divided into blameworthy and non-blameworthy. Blameworthy sciences included magic and sorcery, which do not benefit society and are prohibited. Non-blameworthy sciences included all sciences that benefit humanity[21]. According to Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali's methodology, knowledge must be beneficial and aim to draw closer to God Almighty. Al-Ghazali then discussed the conditions for a teacher, stating that a teacher must be proficient in the science he presents, honest and sincere, of noble lineage, avoid associating with princes and rulers, and be dignified and elderly[22].

In his methodology for teaching learners, he emphasized the necessity of accommodating learners, especially beginners, saying: "The teacher must first be kind and respectful to a beginner, and make him feel comfortable because a beginner is like a wild bird, who only becomes tame with gentleness. Knowledge is challenging for him, so he must be treated according to his nature, and not be alienated so that he does not listen to his words or follow his orders[23]." The teacher must discipline the learner before teaching him, assess his intelligence level to determine his comprehension capacity, and not give him more knowledge than he can absorb. He should not combine intelligent and slow learners, as this is unfair to both. He should repeat the lesson until the learner understands, without becoming angry. Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali preferred good speech with the learner and stated that it is not permissible to teach those who do not respect and appreciate knowledge, as this is a waste of effort and time. He also emphasized the need to carefully select words for the learner and address him with eloquent speech to reach his soul and benefit from his knowledge. The teacher should not withhold his knowledge, should practice what he teaches, have sincere intentions, and teach gradually, from the important to the more important. He should not be arrogant with the learner and should consider his comprehension level[24]. Al-Ghazali (may God have mercy on him) did not neglect to set conditions for the learner. Therefore, the educational process in Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy requires the presence of a teacher, direct communication with the learner, the use of memory, repetition in the teaching process, and the use of simple expressions.

1.4 Educational Philosophy in Modern (Industrial) and Contemporary (Digital) Societies

The advent of major scientific revolutions and discoveries in physics, chemistry, and astronomy, coupled with the decline of the Catholic Church's authority, the expansion of Protestant Christian thought, and the transformation of society from an agrarian feudal system to an industrial one through the French, English, and American Revolutions, and the Western interaction with Islamic civilization through the Crusades (albeit at different periods beginning in the late sixteenth century), led to a radical shift in philosophical, social, and educational thought. This era witnessed the emergence of natural educational philosophy, spearheaded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as a result of the intellectual revolution against traditional thought. Rousseau, in his book *The Social Contract* (considered the bible of the French Revolution), argued that the goal of any political and social system is to guarantee people's rights, freedoms, and equality for all. His book *Emile, or On Education* is regarded as the constitution of natural educational philosophers. Rousseau divided education into stages according to the child's natural needs, emphasizing the belief in the child's innate goodness, the importance of direct experience in sensory-based learning, especially in early education, and the gradual introduction of books and abstract ideas. He also stressed the importance of gradual learning, attention to the learner's desires, and freedom in choosing experiences. Rousseau highlighted the significance of the emotional aspect in cognitive development, recognizing that education is not limited to information provision but also involves the learner's psychological and personal development. He valued manual labor for moral education and respect for work, aiming to create a well-rounded individual[25]. This natural educational philosophy focused on the child's needs, making them the center of the educational process and relying on senses and experience as crucial educational tools.

The revolt against Greek and Roman philosophy, particularly Platonic idealism, led to the emergence of modern idealism. René Descartes, for instance, sought to establish a Christian educational philosophy based on certainty and conviction. He criticized the education he received in prominent European schools, finding it sterile. Education in medieval Europe focused on theology and ancient languages, neglecting mathematics. Descartes criticized this type of Jesuit education and inadvertently laid the foundation for modern education. He advocated for equal opportunities in knowledge and understanding, asserting that education is a right for all. He also emphasized that thinking is not enough; one must know how to use it effectively. Success depends on the rules of thinking that guide the mind, rather than imagination and memory. Education plays a crucial role in forming correct ideas. Descartes, in his modern idealism, stressed the importance of free inquiry and conscious intellectual conviction over blind beliefs based on authority, advocating for scientific skepticism to reach truths. He argued that children should not be treated as machines[26].

The modern era saw the development of various educational methods and methodologies. John Dewey, in his pragmatic educational philosophy, criticized traditional education based on idealism, deeming it unsuitable for the era's philosophy and the demands of new social life. Dewey believed that schools should have an integrated relationship with homes, as children created schools, not the other way around. He argued that schools should reflect real life, and effective education should impart skills, not just store information[27]. Dewey's era witnessed a new philosophy of education based on empirical foundations, influenced by Kant and William James. Most American philosophers were influenced by European idealism, as many came from Europe, dominated by theoretical Greek thought, rather than empirical thought. After the American Revolution, pragmatic philosophies emerged, focusing on reality in knowledge construction. The child became the center of the educational process, and educators were to focus on integrating home and school, aligning children's social and school activities, and linking schools with productive activities in the environment[28]. Dewey's philosophy was a response to the era's requirements, and methods like the project method reflect this philosophy.

The late twentieth century witnessed significant developments in information systems and technology, known as the Third Industrial Revolution, and now we live in the Fourth, leading to the emergence of digital education. Digital education has become part of knowledge economies and sustainable development, defined as "a method of education using modern communication tools, such as computers and their networks, including audio, video, graphics, search tools, electronic libraries, and internet portals, whether remotely or in classrooms, using all types of technology to deliver information to the learner in the shortest time, with the least effort, and the greatest benefit.[29]" It can also be defined as "aiming to create an interactive environment rich in applications based on computer and internet technologies, enabling students to access learning resources anytime, anywhere[30]." These definitions highlight that digital education relies on electronic media connected to the internet, used in the educational process to provide new learning methods, especially for those unable to access education physically. Digital knowledge methods pose a significant challenge in the digital knowledge society, with the first challenge being the creation of digital environments in digital schools. Additionally, teaching digitization skills to teachers and learners is essential.

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