



Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives of Child-Centred Education

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Child-centred education is an educational approach that places learners at the centre of the teaching and learning process. The approach emphasizes learners' interests, abilities, developmental stages, and active participation in classroom activities. It developed as a reaction against traditional teacher-centred methods that viewed learners as passive recipients of knowledge. Philosophically, child-centred education promotes freedom, creativity, experiential learning, and holistic development, while psychologically it is based on cognitive, emotional, and social development theories. Modern educational research supports the importance of child-centred practices in promoting critical thinking, creativity, motivation, and learner well-being (Campbell & Løkken, 2023). This article examines the philosophical and psychological foundations of child-centred education, its principles, benefits, and challenges in contemporary educational systems. The study concludes that child-centred education remains an effective approach for promoting independent learning, creativity, and total child development.

Keywords: Child-centred education, philosophy of education, psychology of learning.

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Introduction

Education is a lifelong process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for personal and societal development. Modern educational systems have gradually shifted from teacher-centred approaches to learner-centred methods that recognize the uniqueness of every child. Child-centred education focuses on the interests, needs, abilities, and developmental levels of learners rather than concentrating entirely on the teacher or curriculum.

The approach encourages learners to participate actively in the learning process through exploration, discovery, creativity, and practical activities. According to Veraksa, Sheridan, and Colliver (2021), child-centred learning creates opportunities for learners to express their ideas, make decisions, and participate meaningfully in educational activities. Similarly, Catalano et al. (2023) explained that child-centred education supports personality development and emotional growth by creating flexible and supportive learning environments.



The philosophical and psychological perspectives of child-centred education provide the theoretical foundation for this educational approach. Philosophically, it supports freedom, individuality, and experiential learning, while psychologically it emphasizes child development, motivation, cognition, and social interaction.

Concept of Child-Centred Education

Child-centred education refers to an educational approach that places the child at the centre of the teaching and learning process. It recognizes learners as active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge. The method encourages learning through activities, problem-solving, collaboration, and real-life experiences. According to Chen, Rouse, and Morrissey (2024), play-based and activity-oriented learning enhances children's decision-making abilities and supports meaningful participation in learning activities. Furthermore, Chafouleas and Iovino (2021) stated that child-centred education promotes equity, inclusion, and emotional well-being by addressing the holistic needs of learners. This approach seeks to develop learners intellectually, socially, emotionally, morally, and physically. Child centered education refers to a participatory learning environment which provides the learner with sufficient opportunities to be actively engaged in the learning process resulting from teaching. Sometimes learning can take place without being deliberately taught by a teacher.

Child-centered method is a style of instruction that is responsive, collaborative, problem-centered and democratic in which both learners and the instructor decide how, what and when learning occurs. A Child-centered method includes practical activities such as panel discussions, quizzes, projects, role plays, debates, field trips and discovery learning. Child-centered methods also include active learning in which learners solve problems, formulate questions of their own choice, and answer questions. Child-centered methods have repeatedly been shown to be superior to the traditional teacher-centered approach of

instruction

Philosophical Perspectives of Child-Centred Education

Freedom and Individual Development

The philosophical perspective of child-centred education emphasizes the freedom of learners to develop according to their abilities, interests, and needs. This perspective believes that education should not force children into rigid systems but should encourage natural growth and self-expression. Catalano et al. (2023) argued that child-centred educational practices support children's individuality and creativity while promoting emotional and social development. The philosophy also maintains that learners should be given opportunities to participate actively in classroom activities and decision-making processes.

Experiential Learning

Child-centred education emphasizes learning through experience, exploration, and activity. Educational experiences are designed to connect classroom learning with real-life situations. Learners therefore understand concepts better when they interact directly with learning materials and environments. According to Chen et al. (2024), active participation and play-based learning strengthen children's cognitive engagement and critical thinking abilities. This philosophical perspective supports the idea that learning becomes more meaningful when children discover knowledge through practical experiences.

Holistic Development

Another philosophical principle of child-centred education is the holistic development of learners. Education is expected to develop the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and moral dimensions of the child. Street (2021) noted that modern educational policies increasingly emphasize child well-being and total development as essential goals of education. Child-centred education therefore focuses not

only on academic achievement but also on emotional security, confidence, creativity, and social competence.

Psychological Perspectives of Child-Centred Education

Cognitive Development Perspective

The psychological foundation of child-centred education is strongly connected to cognitive development theories. These theories explain how children think, learn, and process information at different developmental stages. Mo (2025) explained that cognitive development interventions improve children's understanding, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities when learning activities match their developmental needs. Child-centred classrooms therefore provide age-appropriate learning experiences that encourage exploration and discovery.

This psychological perspective recognizes that children learn actively by interacting with their environment rather than through passive memorization.

Social Interaction and Learning

Child-centred education also emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the learning process. Learners develop communication skills, cooperation, and understanding through interaction with teachers and peers.

Veraksa et al. (2021) emphasized that collaborative classroom practices encourage learners to share ideas, participate in discussions, and build confidence. Group activities, peer learning, and classroom discussions therefore contribute significantly to learners' social and emotional development.

Motivation and Emotional Well-Being

Psychologically, motivation and emotional well-being play important roles in effective learning. Children learn better when they feel safe, valued, encouraged, and emotionally supported.

Campbell and Løkken (2023) found that positive psychology, optimism, and growth mindset practices improve children's well-being and learning outcomes. Similarly, Chafouleas and Iovino (2021) explained that positive educational environments support learners' emotional health and academic engagement. This perspective highlights the importance of creating supportive and inclusive classrooms where learners are motivated to participate actively.

Technology and Human-Centred Learning

Modern psychological perspectives on child-centred education also recognize the role of technology in supporting individualized learning. Human-centred educational technologies are designed to address learners' needs and improve classroom participation. According to Alfredo et al. (2023), human-centred learning analytics and artificial intelligence can help teachers personalize instruction and monitor learners' progress effectively. Technology therefore supports child-centred practices when used appropriately.

Principles of Child-Centred Education

Children can fully demonstrate their abilities, and their possibilities for development become the biggest, when they do something voluntarily. And good educational aims will be achieved more easily if they are based on clear principles and are linked to children's daily activities. The following principles guide child-centred education:

Principles of 'Child-Centered Education' that develops independence and self-reliance

One of the educational aims during early childhood is to develop independence and self-reliance. In this context, 'independence' refers to the ability to think without needing to follow instructions. Therefore, independent children can make their own judgments and achieve tasks after a continuous process of trial and error. However this does not mean that they

simply behave selfishly without considering others in any way. Independent children are able to make their own decisions after considering many relevant factors, such as other people or the surrounding situation, but they are not controlled by any 'authority'. So, how should early childhood educators behave towards children in order to develop independence? Firstly, they have to attach importance to the *voluntariness* of children (e.g. their own ideas, will and plans). However, if teachers leave children to do as they like, they will not develop. The task of teachers is to see whether children can achieve self-realization. Teachers have to discuss and drop hints to help children when they are stuck or lose interest in their play. In other words, well-thought-out educational interventions are necessary.

Respect the pace of development of each child

It seems that the crucial point in early childhood education is that it is rooted in, and also fulfills the life of, the children. It is fundamental that teachers to prepare for a variety of possible activities so that children can get started on what they are most interested in doing, and can develop that activity. In other words, children themselves decide what they do - teachers do not just introduce "activities of the day" based on detailed plans. Therefore, there will be as many curricula and timetables of activities as there are children. Teachers should keep a close watch on each child, join in their play, and assist or make an educational intervention when necessary. They should assess the development stage of each child and give assistance so that s/he can take a new step forward.

'Zone of Proximal Development'

Vygotsky's concept, 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) can assist the teacher to recognize individual differences in development and identify the development level of a particular child. The zone of proximal

development refers to the 'possible level' that children can achieve under adult guidance. This shows the distance between the actual developmental level that children have already achieved, and the level of potential development. The teacher should act as a 'scaffold', providing the minimum support necessary for a child to succeed and take a step up to the next level. So, how can teachers identify the zone of proximal development of each child?

Three points are important: teachers' previous experiences, the child's ability to imitate, and his/her life history.

1. **Teachers' previous experiences** help teachers them to assess how they should speak to, and to what extent they should help, a child. For instance, they may think, "This boy is just like the one I took care of before. It takes some time for him to get started, but once he starts, I'm sure he can accomplish this task by himself because he has ability to concentrate, like a boy I helped last year". Teachers can assume the zone of proximal development of the child based on such previous experience. It is better to avoid giving too many hints or instructions to a child. Drop a small hint at the beginning of a task, and change the way you speak to the child until s/he can go to the next step.
2. **Imitation** is another aspect of the zone of proximal development. If children are able to imitate how teachers and/or peers achieve a task, they will nearly be able to complete the same task on their own. Taken together, a teacher's previous experience and a child's ability to imitate provide a stronger indication of the zone of proximal development.
3. **Life History** helps a teacher to assess developmental potential and think about how to behave towards particular children. But do not compare one child's life history directly with that of another child. Compare a child's present situation with similar situations in their own past experience. All children can take a step forward if the teacher knows their life

histories and strong/weak points, and then acts as a scaffold.

Develop child independence

Child centred educators have the following roles. Firstly, to evaluate the development level of each child, and decide how to aid and understand what he/she desires or thinks immediately. Secondly, to provide a physical and psychological environment appropriate for child development. Thirdly, to help children widen their activities and develop their ideas and the ability to think. In order to fulfill those roles, teachers should consider carefully: (1) how they provide a good environment (i.e. prepare appropriate materials so that children can develop through daily activities), (2) how they establish human relationships in the class (i.e. develop a reciprocal and cooperative relationship), (3) how they speak to children (i.e. use words and expressions appropriate for their development level and give small hints rather than give instructions).

Advantages of Child-Centred Education

Child-centred education provides numerous benefits to learners and society. It promotes creativity, critical thinking, communication skills, confidence, and independence. Learners become more motivated because they actively participate in learning activities.

Campbell and Løkken (2023) observed that positive learning environments improve learners' motivation and emotional well-being. Similarly, Chen et al. (2024) found that play-based and participatory learning strengthens cognitive development and decision-making abilities.

The approach also encourages cooperation, social interaction, and problem-solving skills that prepare learners for real-life situations.

Challenges of Child-Centred Education

Despite its advantages, child-centred education faces several challenges. Large class sizes often make individualized instruction difficult.

Inadequate teaching materials and insufficient teacher training may also affect effective implementation.

According to Veraksa et al. (2021), balancing teacher guidance with learner independence can sometimes be challenging in classroom practice. Furthermore, examination-oriented educational systems may discourage flexible and activity-based learning methods.

The successful implementation of child-centred education therefore requires adequate resources, trained teachers, supportive policies, and effective classroom management.

Conclusion

Child-centred education is an important educational approach that places learners at the centre of teaching and learning activities. Philosophically, it promotes freedom, experiential learning, creativity, and holistic development. Psychologically, it is supported by theories of cognitive development, motivation, emotional well-being, and social interaction.

Modern educational studies continue to support the effectiveness of child-centred education in improving learners' creativity, participation, confidence, and academic achievement (Campbell & Løkken, 2023; Chen et al., 2024). Although challenges such as inadequate resources and large class sizes exist, the approach remains highly relevant in contemporary education because it prepares learners for independent thinking and meaningful participation in society.

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