

## The Philosophical School Of Empiricism in Early Childhood Education

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### ABSTRACT

This journal aims to explain briefly but deeply about the philosophy and its application in the world of education. The main focus of this journal is to examine the main teachings of empiricism, the types and characteristics of this school of thought, and how these thoughts influence education, especially early childhood education. To obtain relevant and accurate data, the author uses a literature study method by reviewing various literature sources that support the research topic. Empiricism is a school of philosophy that believes that knowledge comes from experience and sensory observation. Therefore, learning according to this view should emphasize direct experience and real interaction with the environment. In the context of early childhood education, empiricism encourages an active, concrete, and exploratory activity-based learning approach for children. One of the main figures in this school of thought is John Locke. He put forward the concept of tabula rasa, namely that a child's mind is initially like a blank sheet of paper that will be filled through experience. Locke's view provides a strong basis for the importance of the role of education in shaping an individual's personality and knowledge from an early age.

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## INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is the art of criticism that does not merely limit itself to destruction, or as if afraid to bring its positive views. Franz Magnis Suseno(2000:21)emphasized that the criticality of critical philosophy in the sense of never being satisfied, never leaving something as finished, even happy, to reopen the debate, there is always a dialectical way in the sense that every truth becomes more correct with each round of thesis-antithesis and synthesis. Philosophy is like a giant standing upright and stepping over everything in its path. This is because all knowledge comes from philosophy, including the value system adopted and the intended goals. The shadow that follows the steps of this giant philosophy has awakened a treasure trove of knowledge that is useful for human life. This is because the critical nature of philosophy is shown by three approaches, namely the ontological, epistemological, and axiological approaches. Ontologically, the nature of its existence is questioned.

Epistemologically, the essence of knowledge is explored from its source and origin, and all essences are studied in depth for their value, purpose, and benefits for human life (Beni Ahmad Saebani and Koko Komaruddin, 2016). Axiology is a field of philosophy that investigates values. Values will not arise by themselves; values arise because humans have a language that is used in everyday interactions (Jalaludin and Abdullah Idi, 2009). The initial stage in the education system that aims to educate children is early childhood education (PAUD). At this stage, children learn from birth to the age of 6 years. Because the issue of fine motor skills in early childhood is included in the issue of children's development in making small motor movements. These movements will, of course, always develop following the child's growth, so that they can develop their talents better. For example, a 4-month-old baby's development is very dependent on touch in order to be able to grasp an object. Meanwhile, a 3-year-old child can already arrange puzzles well. Likewise, children above that age have different and better development (Nurlaila, 2019).

Based on WHO data, the problem of early childhood development in Indonesia reached 7,512.6 out of a total of 100,000 children. These children have a level of delay in development compared to other normal children. According to WHO, these figures are indeed more experienced by countries with low to high incomes.

Empiricism is one of the schools of thought in the epistemological approach. Empiricism, that the results of education and development depend on the experiences gained during life. This experience is obtained outside of oneself based on the available stimuli. The figure in this school is John Locke (1632-1704), an English philosopher, who argued that children in this world are like blank paper or a wax-covered tablet (*tabula rasa*) that has not been written on. The adherents of empiricism, the adequate source of knowledge is experience. What is meant by experience here is the experience of birth that concerns the world and the experience of the soul that concerns the human person. Meanwhile, human reason only functions to organize and manage materials or data obtained through experience (Hamidah, 2016).

## METHODS

To obtain relevant and in-depth results following the research objectives, the author uses a descriptive qualitative research method. This method was chosen because it allows the author to explore information comprehensively and in-depth through a non-numerical approach. In data collection, the author uses a literature study technique, namely by reviewing, searching for, and collecting various information from written sources that are closely related to the topic of discussion. These sources include scientific books, academic journals, relevant articles, papers, and information from the internet that can be scientifically accounted for. Through this technique, the author tries to understand and interpret the thoughts of empiricist figures and how their views are applied in the field of education. The data collected is then presented descriptively, namely by describing and explaining the information that has been obtained to form a complete understanding of the research topic.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### History of Empiricism

Epistemology comes from the Greek, consisting of two words, namely episteme and logos. Episteme means knowledge, and logos means science, so epistemology means the science of knowledge. There are two words that need to be given an understanding in the definition, namely, the words science and knowledge. Knowledge is everything that is known. Science is knowledge that is arranged systematically and methodically. Knowledge is a mental state. Knowing something is forming an opinion about an object (Bakhtiar, Amsal, Filsafat Agama, 1999).

According to Conny Semiawan, in A. In Susanto's book, epistemology is a branch of philosophy that explains philosophical problems around the theory of knowledge. Epistemology focuses on the meaning of knowledge that is related to the concept, sources and criteria of knowledge, types of knowledge, and so on. D.W. Hamlyn said that epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and scope of knowledge, the basis and assumptions and in general, it can be relied on as an affirmation that people know. It can be concluded that epistemology is the science that studies knowledge. In epistemology, there are several schools of thought, one of which is the Empiricism school.

### Definition of Empiricism

The Empiricism school comes from the word empire, meaning experience. The main figure of this school is John Locke (1632-1704). The original name of this school is "The School of British Empiricism". However, this school has more influence on American thinkers, thus giving birth to a school of philosophy called "environmentalism" and a psychology called "environmental psychology", which is relatively new (Syah, 2002).

(Ahmadi & Uhbiyati, 1991; Thoib, 2008). The opinion of this empiricist is known as pedagogical optimism, because educational efforts are very optimistic that they can influence child development, while heredity has no effect at all (Suryabrata, 2002; Purwanto, 2004). This school of thought assumes that the growth and development of human life is determined entirely by experiential factors that are outside of the human self, both those that are intentionally designed through formal education and unintentional experiences received through informal, non-formal education, and the surrounding environment. Some environments that play a role in the education process include the school environment, family, and society. In this process, the senses play a very important role in the ongoing education process and become a real thing in educational practice.

The empiricism school of thought is widely developed in the Western world, especially in the United States. Another opinion also says that the word Empiricism etymologically comes from English, namely "empiricism" and "experience". These two words are rooted in Greek, namely "empeiria" and "experientia", which mean "experienced in", "acquainted with", and "skilled in". While in terminology, empiricism is a school of thought in which this school of thought believes that the source of all knowledge must be sought from experience, the view that all ideas are abstractions formed by combining what is experienced from that experience, according to this school of thought, sensory experience is the only source of knowledge, and not reason. Therefore, empiricism is likened to a school of thought that

chooses experience as the main source of knowledge, both external experience concerning the world and internal experience concerning the human person.

Empirical science is the forerunner of knowledge that is conceptualized in the senses. The senses in question are all five senses possessed by humans, starting from the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and touch. These five senses will be the tools to capture experiences that make a human understand and comprehend what they have not known so far. Empiricism emphasizes that knowledge and knowledge are obtained through experience, with experience providing a guarantee of certainty regarding that knowledge.

Experience obtained by using the five senses as a whole is stored in memory and manifested into something good for the future as wisdom that occurs in Therefore, adherents of this philosophy make empiricism the basis for decision making to apply a concept and no longer rely on where the knowledge comes from. Adherents of empiricism believe that experience is what is believed to be viewing objects as something that is captured by the five senses and then channelled into the brain and forming an understanding that has been recognized by the five senses before. For followers of the empiricist school, the highest justice lies in experience and is the basis for decision-making both in everyday life and in social life. The empiricist school believes that a person's experience is evidence of the knowledge that is obtained and held firmly, and if something is found that requires explanation, the words that appear and the facts shown must be proven by experience (Marilang, Fitri Maylan Haq, 2024).

Empiricism opposes the opinions of the adherents of realism, which are based on certainties that are a priori. According to the opinion of adherents of empiricism, the method of science is not a priori but a posteriori, namely, a method based on things that come, happen or exist later.

### **Education in the Empiricist Perspective**

There are several main figures that can be discussed in the empiricism school; these figures are John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, George Berkeley, and David Hume. They highlight sensory experience as the main source of knowledge and reject the idea of innate ideas. However, not all empiricism figures provide external understanding and explanations of education. One of the figures who explains education is John Locke.

#### **John Locke**

In addition to improving his abilities in the field of health through direct practice with Sydenham, Locke's introduction to Lord Ashley also added to Locke's experience in politics. A year after arriving in London, Locke wrote an "Essay on Toleration", which was very different from the two works he wrote in 1660-1662. In 1669, Lord Ashley involved Locke in the establishment of a new colony in Carolina, especially in making the Carolina constitution. Locke carried out his duties in assisting Lord Ashley until he left England for France in 1675.

#### **About Knowledge**

One of Locke's most influential thoughts in the history of philosophy is about the process of humans gaining knowledge. He tried to explain how humans gain knowledge. According to Locke, all knowledge comes from human experience. This position is an

empiricist position that rejects the opinion of rationalists who say that the main source of human knowledge is from reason or thought.

### **The Process of Humans Gaining Knowledge**

From the combination of two forms of human experience, external experience and internal experience, what Locke called 'simple ideas' are obtained, which function as empirical data. There are four types of simple ideas:

1. Views that are only accepted by one human sense. For example, colour is accepted by the eyes, and sound is received by the ears.
2. Views received by several senses, for example, space and movement.
3. Views produced by the reflection of human consciousness, for example, memory.
4. Views that accompany the moments of the process of acceptance and reflection. For example, a sense of interest, a sense of wonder, and time.

Three types of complex views are formed:

1. Substance or something that stands alone, for example, knowledge about humans or plants.
2. Modi (the way something exists) or a complex view whose existence depends on the substance. For example, day is the mode of day.
3. Causal relationship (causality). For example, the causal view in the statement: "water boils because it is heated to a temperature of 100° Celsius".

### **About Religion**

Locke's view of religion is deistic. He considers Christianity to be the most reasonable religion compared to other religions, because Christian teachings can be proven by human reason. The understanding of God is also structured by evidence. Locke starts from the fact that humans are rational beings, so it must be caused by the existence of a Creator Figure, absolute and almighty, namely Allah.

### **On Psychology and Epistemology**

Locke's thoughts on the human mind have influenced the fields of psychology and epistemology. Some philosophers and thinkers after him who were influenced by Locke were David Hartley (1705-1757), Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1747), James Mill (1733-1836). And Etienne Condillac (1715-1780).

### **Empiricism and Education**

Empiricism is a school of philosophy based on sensory experience. Based on the thinking of this school, humans will gain knowledge based on their experiences, for example, when humans touch fire and feel heat. Humans know it is hot after gaining experience by seeing it. Likewise, knowledge about other objects can only be obtained through experience (Wahyuni et al., 2022).

### **The Main Teachings of Empiricism**

Poedjawijatna (1997:105) stated that empiricism is useful in philosophy in general because with this empiricism, philosophy pays more attention to humans as a whole. The main teachings of empiricism are:

1. The view that all ideas or concepts are abstractions formed by combining what is experienced.

2. Sensory experience is the only source of knowledge, and not reason or ratio.
3. Everything we know ultimately depends on sensory data.
4. All knowledge comes directly, or is concluded indirectly, from sensory data (except for some definitional truths of logic and mathematics).
5. Reason itself cannot give us knowledge of reality without reference to sensory experience and the use of our five senses. Reason is tasked with processing materials obtained from experience.
6. Empiricism, as a philosophy of experience, recognizes that experience is the only source of knowledge.

From several views on the empiricism school of thought above, according to the author, empiricism is a philosophical doctrine that emphasizes the role of experience in gaining knowledge. So that everyone who claims to know must be able to prove what knowledge is based on experience that can be known by human senses.

**Other teachings in the empiricism school are:**

1. The view that all ideas or concepts are abstractions formed by combining what is experienced.
2. Sensory experience is the only source of knowledge and not reason or reason.
3. Everything we know ultimately depends on sensory data.
4. All knowledge comes directly, or is concluded indirectly, from sensory data (except for some definitional truths of logic and mathematics).

**Types of Empiricism**

Several types of empiricism schools can be described as follows:

1. Empirio - Criticism  
Also called Machism, a subjective-idealistic school of philosophy. This school was founded by Avenarius and Mach. The core of this school of thought is to "cleanse" the understanding of experience from the concepts of substance, necessity, causality, and so on, as a priori understandings.
2. Logical Empiricism  
Logical empiricists hold the following views:
  - a. There are limits to empiricism. The principles of formal logic systems and the principles of inductive conclusions cannot be proven by referring to experience.
  - b. All true propositions can be described (reduced) to propositions about sensory data, which are more or less sensory data that exist immediately.
  - c. Questions about the deepest nature of reality are meaningless.
3. Radical Empiricism  
A school of thought that holds that all knowledge can be traced back to sensory experience. Anything that cannot be so is considered not to be knowledge.

**Main Characteristics of Empiricism**

1. Theory of meaning  
The theory of empiricism is usually stated as a theory of the origin of knowledge, namely, the origin of ideas or concepts. In the Middle Ages, this theory was



summarized in the formula *Nihil Est in Intellectu Quod Non Prius Feurit in Sensu* (there is nothing in our minds except preceded by experience). This statement is Locke's thesis in his book "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding", which was issued when he opposed the teaching of innate ideas to rational people. The soul (Mind), when born, is empty like a white paper with no writing on it, and every idea it obtains must come through experience, which here means sensory experience. Hume emphasized this theory in the opening chapter of his book "Treatise of Human Nature (1793) by distinguishing between ideas and impressions. All the ideas we have come up with impressions, and those impressions include sensing, passion and emotion.

## 2. Theory of knowledge

According to rationalists, there are several general truths, such as every particular event has a cause, the basics of mathematics and several basic principles of ethics and these truths are true in themselves, which are known as a priori truths obtained out of rational intuition. Empiricism rejects this because there is no ability for rational intuition. All the truths mentioned above are truths obtained through observation, so they are a posteriori truths.

## Early Childhood Education

### 1. The Nature of Early Childhood Education

According to Suhandi, education is a process of interaction between educators or teachers and students or the environment, consciously, regularly, planned and systematically to help develop the potential of students as much as possible so that they are able to pursue further education (Suyadi, 2012).

Meanwhile, according to Syafril and Zelhendri Zen, education is guidance given by adults who are usually parents, educators or teachers for the development of children until they reach adulthood with the aim that children are capable enough to carry out their life tasks with the help of others (Syafril, 2017). According to another opinion, the definition of education, according to Indonesian education expert, namely Ki Hajar Dewantara, states that education is a conscious human effort to improve morals, through schools, so that children are more advanced and professional both physically and spiritually (Ruminiati, 2016).

From the several definitions above, it can be concluded that education is a process for students that continues until the student reaches a moral adult. This process takes place over a certain period. If the student has reached a moral adult, then he is fully capable of acting independently for the welfare of his life and his community.

Efforts to foster and educate early childhood can be carried out through a formal and non-formal educational institution that organises early childhood education. Early childhood learning activities aim to help children grow and develop optimally through a play-while-learning approach. According to Haryanto, early childhood education is the provision of efforts to stimulate, guide, care for and provide appropriate learning activities to produce abilities and skills at an early age (Fadlillah, 2014).

Meanwhile, according to Maemunah Hasan, early childhood education is a level of education before elementary education, which is an effort to foster children from birth

to the age of six years, which is carried out through providing stimulation regarding education to help their growth and development. And its development both physically and spiritually so that children have various readiness to enter further education, which is carried out on formal and informal channels (Hasan, 2009).

Ki Hajar Dewantara argues that early childhood education is learning where children learn not yet using their minds, but children learn in infancy. Early childhood education can be in the form of games, singing, storytelling, caring for plants, flowers and vegetables (Dewantara, 2013). According to the 2003 Law on National Education in Article 1, number 14, early childhood education is an effort to foster children from birth to the age of six years, which is carried out through providing stimulation to children both physically and spiritually, so that children are ready to enter further education.

It can be concluded that early childhood education is education that is carried out formally or non-formally from infancy to the age of six years, which aims to prepare early childhood children to face further education.

## 2. Early Childhood Education Objectives

The objectives of early childhood education to be achieved are the development of knowledge and understanding of parents, educators or teachers and parties related to the field of education and development experienced by early childhood. Other objectives of early childhood education are (Sujiono, 2009):

- a. To form quality Indonesian children, namely children who grow and develop according to their level of development, so that they have adequate potential, so that they can enter basic education and can follow according to their age stages and influence their adult life.
- b. To help prepare children to achieve readiness in learning (academic) at school.
- c. Early intervention by providing stimulation so that it can foster hidden potentials, namely from the dimensions of child development (language, intellectual, emotional, social, motoric, self-concept, interests and talents).
- d. Conduct early detection of possible disorders in the growth and development of potential possessed by early childhood.

## 3. Implications of Empiricism Views on Education

According to John Locke, education is an experience that every human being wants to experience because it encompasses the development of the personality of the human being itself. Character formed from experience will lead a person to a good pattern of understanding, of course, through that experience, which will enable a person to be able to relate to others. Experience should be used as a process to educate and build the character of each human being. According to him, humans will develop humanely through the experiences they have. Many things are obtained through experience, and even assessments of a person can be made through the educational background they have (Renna, 2022).

The implementation of John Locke's view, education is an effort to develop human behaviour and is based on human experiences in their interactions with other humans in various environments, namely schools, families and communities. In their interactions with other people, a person who experiences a process called the education process is trying to



build a good life in various environments for a conducive change in life together with others. Good education aims to develop good character in each individual in life, together with people. That good character is produced based on observations of human senses. John Locke explained that the things that humans learn in life are knowledge obtained based on their sensory experiences. The empiricist view reaches a generally accepted conclusion that every individual can control themselves to shape their character and thoughts according to the development of each person's identity. To be in that position, experience and education are needed as the main factors that determine the development of each individual, so that it does not become their concern for innate abilities.

The psyche of the individual child who is born is likened to a blank paper where the pattern and shape of the paper is determined by the person who uses it, or how the paper can be used or written (Siddiq and Salama, 2018). Education is an integral part of human life. This means that education is the most important element in making changes, so that it is inseparable from real experiences from infancy, even from the mother's womb to old age, humans always learn to be able to shape themselves.

In this theory, John Locke uses two terms, namely

1. Sensation, which modern empiricists often refer to as sense (sense-data).
2. Ideas, not ideas in Plato's lessons, but rather in the form of perceptions or thoughts or understandings that suddenly come to an object and properties (qualities) such as red, round, heavy.

This school of thought emerged against the reaction of rationalism. That rationalism says that truth is reason, then according to empiricism, the basis is human experience obtained through the five senses. Rationalism, René Descartes put forward a strong argument for a rational approach to knowledge. Living in a state full of ideological conflict, Descartes wanted to base his beliefs on a foundation that had absolute certainty. To that end, he conducted various in-depth tests on everything that was known. Empiricism considers experience as the main source of knowledge that develops gradually. This experience develops over time and is influenced by various factors such as education, social interaction and daily experience. Therefore, the empiricist view recognizes that education and learning are processes that are not instantaneous, but require continuous experience of certain situations and conditions. Every person's life experiences, from the simple to the complex, are the basis for character formation and understanding (Wafiq et al. 2025).

## CONCLUSION

Some understandings of the concept of empiricism are quite diverse, but the essence is experience. Empiricism is a school of thought in philosophy that states that all knowledge comes from human experience. Empiricism rejects the assumption that humans have brought natural knowledge within themselves when they were born.

The figure of the Empiricism school in education is John Locke. John Locke is considered the founder of empiricism in the thinking process. He argued that all knowledge

comes from sensory experience. Empiricism sees humans as born as blank slates (tabula rasa). The consequence of this view is to position children as objects of education.

Starting children's education from an early age, children will have the foundation to grow and develop into intelligent, creative individuals with good personalities. Efforts to foster and educate early childhood can be carried out through formal and non-formal educational institutions that organize early childhood education. Early childhood learning activities aim to help children grow and develop optimally through a play-while-learning approach.

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