

Critique Of The Impact Of Positivism On Modern Schooling Curriculum Processes In The Context Of Value Education

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Abstract

This article examines the culture of positivism, its features, and its impact on the school curriculum. It examines the impact of positivism on the whole schooling process, with special reference to ethical and moral education. Furthermore, the author's presents a critique of the culture of positivism and its rigid adherence to fact-value distinction based on rationality and objectivity that proved to be status-quoist. The objective of this article is to demonstrate how positivism supports a form of domination undermining critical consciousness by ignoring the values-moral dimension of education. Specifically, the author claims in the article that the curriculum can never be value neutral and that, fundamentally, education is a moral quest. The article concludes by drawing from some recent critical work on the fallacious notion of ethical neutrality and arguments against positivistic values. Finally, it concludes that by abandoning the culture of positivism, curricula and textbooks must be re-examined and redesigned so that addressing values and ethical challenges explicitly in classrooms becomes the primary purpose of education.

Keywords- Value Education, Moral Education, History of Value Education, Logical Empiricism, Logical Positivism.

In the enlightenment period, there were paradigm shifts that took place in the eighteenth century. It led to an increase in belief in the scientific method of knowledge construction. The emphasis has shifted to an empirical method for knowing the truth. This led to great success in the scientific field. These scientific inventions and discoveries altered the cultural and intellectual landscape of the world. So the world is celebrating a new age of objectivity, reason, and science. This has a huge impact on every part of life. It was difficult not to be influenced by the spectacular success story of science, and thus science became knowledge in itself, with the characteristics of being real, objective, and foundational.

Positivism and scientific discoveries have resulted in the industrial revolution, increased trade and commerce, an emerging bourgeoisie, and the rise of colonialism. People saw immense possibilities in science and were strong adherents of a positivistic scientific culture and mode of enquiry. Hence, the language of science was irresistible. The political-economic establishment was sustaining it. So, with increasing economic output due to scientific discoveries, credit was given to science as a major force. As a result, at a certain point in history,

positivism emerged as the dominant voice in the discipline.

The Culture of Positivism and its Features

The Science of Empiricism, the fundamental paradigm of science, rose to prominence in the 18th century and came to be known as the Enlightenment, or the intellectual and philosophical activity of science. It asserts that knowledge can only be acquired through the senses. This was appealing. It aimed to grant "scientific status" to any field based on precision, objectivity, causation, and value neutrality. This achievement has had a profound effect on the social sciences. It is claimed that if the techniques of natural research were carefully adhered to, the social sciences could achieve the same remarkable success as natural science. This application of natural science methods to the social sciences is known as positivism. Comte was the first to advocate this strategy for constructing knowledge in the social sciences. The Frankfurt School defined positivism in the broad sense as an amalgam of diverse traditions that included the work of Saint-Simon and Comte; the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle; early Wittgenstein; and the more recent logical empiricism and pragmatism that

predominate in the social sciences in the West. Each of these traditions has a complex history, but each has contributed to the development of social inquiry methods patterned after the natural sciences and focused on observation and quantitative analysis.

To understand Positivism, we need to understand its features, which are as follows:

Scientism: Positivism takes empiricism to an extreme by claiming that whatever cannot be verified by sensory experience cannot be explained, is unknowable or unreliable, and is thus not true knowledge. In summary, scientific positivism holds that non-scientific claims to knowledge are meaningless, deceptive, subjectively variable, and thus capricious and dubious (Young, 1989).

Reductionism: Reductionism is represented by analytical, atomistic, or mechanical viewpoints. It studies wholes by reducing them to their constituent parts. Reductionism became the main method of science because Descartes thought that all problems could be broken down into smaller problems and then solved. On the epistemological level, the sources of knowledge are divided into disciplines that operate more or less in watertight compartments. The Enlightenment is also known as the "age of reason," and other modes of thinking are considered to be either irrational or anti-rational.

Objectivity: Descartes' object division has had far-reaching consequences. On the epistemological level, it has the implication that authentic knowledge about man can be obtained by measurement. Another development emanating from the notion of objective knowledge is the existence of truths expressed as facts. Scientific endeavours have to do with the establishment of a coherent body of facts. Because these facts are supposed to have universal application, only empirical truth warrants attention while the role of values is relegated to the domain of faith.

Lukacs (1971) pointed out that technocrats' principle values are efficiency and order rather than spontaneity and variety, and they judge the successes and failures of social institutions in impersonal, objective, and quantitative terms rather than in human and qualitative terms. Standardisation has become a particular feature of formal education systems. The core values that can be identified are control, order, efficiency, and standardisation.

Responding to the question of ethics, Logical positivists are in favour of fact and value distinctions. One of the leading logical positivists, Hume, claims that there seems to be a significant difference between positive statements (about what is) and prescriptive or normative statements (about what ought to be), and that it is not obvious how

one can coherently move from descriptive statements to prescriptive ones. This is called Hume's law or Hume's guillotine, and it is the thesis that, if a reasoner only has access to non-moral and non-evaluative factual premises, the reasoner cannot logically infer the truth of moral statements. This is-ought problem is closely related to the fact-value distinction in epistemology. According to it, moral language does not describe objective facts but rather expresses subjective preferences. This thesis started to gain momentum during the Enlightenment. Instead of seeing morality as focused on external facts having to do with what is truly and objectively valuable for human beings, it is claimed that things are morally valuable only insofar as they happen to be valued by us. This is called the Hume guillotine, in which he gives two laws, one about the distinction between facts and values and the other about the is-ought gap. Hume's position is clearly that of moral anti-realism. He assumes that moral properties do not have an attitude-independent existence. There are no moral facts, but merely expressions of personal moral feelings.

Thus, the central assumption by which the culture of positivism rationalises its position on theory and knowledge is the notion of objectivity, the separation of values from knowledge, and the strict separation of fact and value distinction.

Positivist Impact on the School Curriculum: Undermining Moral Education

Positivism influences all aspects of life and social institutions. Consequently, it has an effect on education and the educational process. In the entirety of our curriculum and educational practises, positivist ideology is reflected. Intentionally or unintentionally, our textbooks reproduce the positivist notion of knowledge construction because they are written by subject-matter experts who have achieved success in this positivistic model of education. Thus, curriculum development and education are caught in a positivist loop. The curriculum is designed by those who achieve success in this model, who then reproduce it by emphasising positivistic values even more. Thus, a close examination of the curricula reveals that they are replete with abstract concepts that are far removed from the concrete experiences of students while remaining objective and morally neutral. This is the consequence of their positivist worldview and values.

Although all of these are significant values and characteristics of the positivist culture that guides the development of our curriculum, the author will focus on its objection to ethics and moral or character education in schools. Since logical

positivists differentiate between fact and value and consider values to be subjective, values have no place in school curricula. They emphasise that it is a personal domain that must be fostered by primary social institutions such as family, society, and religion. Thus, education and the curriculum become neutral phenomena, and knowledge is presented from a neutral standpoint, ignoring ethical and normative perspectives.

Various education scholars have recently critiqued this positivistic philosophical tradition. They assert that positivism employs factual value distinctions incorrectly. This is explained in the following section.

A Critique of the Culture of Positivism

The legacy of positivistic philosophy is the culture of positivism, which encompasses those convictions, attitudes, procedures, and conceptions that continue to exert a profound and pervasive influence on contemporary times. Postmodern philosophy, in particular the Frankfurt school of thought and feminist researchers, is responsible for many of the criticisms that have been levelled against positivism. These academics also highlight how the positivist culture impairs critical consciousness and promotes a false rationality as a result. In addition to this, they contend that this is not an epistemological error but rather has political motivations behind it. This section will discuss each of these arguments in detail.

Natural and Social Reality are different

Giddens (1998) critiqued the method of positivism by arguing that what is applicable in the domain of nature is not necessarily applicable in the domain of human society. Because natural and human reality are two different realms of enquiry. And unlike nature, society consists of self-reflexive agents who think, argue, contest, and, through their practises and actions, transform the world. Positivism thus undermines the creativity, reflexivity, and agency of social actors. Positivist dualism distinguishes between subject and object, fact and value, and knower and known. He called this "cold objectivity" and said that this represented alienation from his or her own self. Moreover, situated within a number of false dualisms (facts vs. values, scientific knowledge vs. norms, and description vs. prescription), and under the wisdom of neutrality, scientific knowledge and all theories become rational on the grounds of whether they are efficient, economic, or correct.

Schuck (1987) observed that while natural scientists have already agreed that we do not and cannot know absolutely, many social scientists still

cling to empirical research models as a means of conformation.

False Fact - Value Dichotomy

Many scholars critique logical positivist facts and value distinctions. They criticise Hume's is-ought distinction. One of the fundamental critiques of logical positivism is that knowledge comes out of positivism claims with ethical neutrality, as the very notion of objectivity is based on the use of some normative criteria. Hence, this emphasis on objectivity and facts is in itself based on values, and it is not itself a fact. So the point is that intellectual inquiry and research free from values and norms are impossible to achieve. Thus, to separate values from facts and social inquiry from ethical considerations is pointless. According to the Frankfurt School, the suppression of ethics in positivist rationality precludes the possibility of self-critique, or more specifically, the questioning of its own normative structure. Facts become separated from values; objectivity undermines critique. By functioning within an operational context free from ethical commitments, positivism wedded itself to the immediate and celebrated the world of facts. By substituting what is for what should be, it represses ethics as a category of life and reproduces the notion that society has a life of its own, independent of the will of human beings. The neutralisation of ethics effectively underscores the value of historical consciousness as well as public discourse on important political issues. Instead, we are left with a mode of reasoning that makes it exceptionally difficult for human beings to struggle against the limitations of an oppressive society. Finally, inherent in this perspective is a passive model of man. The positivist view of knowledge, "facts," and ethics has neither use nor room for a historical reality in which man is able to constitute his own meanings. Thus, questions concerning the social construction of knowledge and the constitutive interests behind the selection, organisation, and evaluation of "brute facts" are buried under the assumption that knowledge is objective and value-free. Information or "data" taken from the subjective world of intuition, insight, philosophy, and non-scientific theoretical frameworks is not acknowledged as being relevant. Values, then, appear as the nemeses of facts and are viewed at best as interesting and at worst as irrational and subjective emotional responses.

Education and Curriculum cannot be Value Neutral

Apple (2006) claimed that present curricular and teaching practises are relatively impotent in exploring the nature of the social order of which they are a part. He explained that claims to

neutrality carry less weight, and it is a mistaken belief that by not taking a political stance, we are being objective or neutral. He elaborated on this point by reiterating that the neutrality claim ignores the fact that the knowledge that gets into schools is already a choice from a much larger universe of possible social knowledge and principles. Selected curricula are a form of cultural capital that reflect the beliefs of powerful segments of society. So the choice of content isn't based on what's best for everyone, but on the values of powerful groups. So we cannot claim we are being neutral as social and economic values are already embedded in all aspects of schooling, like the design of the institutions we work in, in the "formal corpus of school knowledge" we preserve in our curricula, in our modes of teaching, and in our principles, standards, and forms of evaluation. He concluded that since these values now work through us, often unconsciously, the issue is not how to stand above the choice. So we must understand whose values this entire education paradigm is based on, and we must be aware of which values one must ultimately choose.

Thus, from the above, it can be concluded that this false notion of neutrality in the curriculum is serving some elitist interests, which undermines critical consciousness that questions every form of authority and hegemony. So we need to develop a curriculum that gives students space to reflect on ethical issues and the struggles of marginalised sections of society.

Schooling should be a site of Resistance

Kumar (2009) claimed that conflicts are not allowed to be discussed in school because it is assumed that children should not be exposed to traumatic events and that education should not be politicised. But for Kumar, however, all educational activity is always already political and ideological, while the reluctance to discuss traumatic events with children reveals the isolation of classrooms from children's everyday lives and the education system's lack of understanding regarding the socialisation of children. Hence, the curriculum remains aloof from children's everyday realities as they skirt the discussion of social conflicts happening in society.

Hence, for schooling to be a site of counter-socialisation, we should abandon our ethical neutral stance. Only then can schools function as a counter-socialisation site. The curriculum should be designed to provide avenues for challenging the norms of oppressive social structures. And this is only possible if there is room in the curriculum and textbooks to discuss ethical issues in the teaching of school subjects.

Education is fundamentally a Moral Quest

Pathak (2009) contended that defending neutrality is a form of fascist politics because it hides what is behind educational goals, preventing people from understanding the ideological role that education plays in producing specific forms of knowledge, power, social values, agency, and world narratives. So we can say it is impossible for education to be neutral. And those who argue that education should be neutral are really arguing for a version of education in which nobody is accountable. The people who produce that form of education become invisible because they are saying it's neutral. He went on to say that education is fundamentally about moral and ethical quests: transforming our consciousness, beliefs, aspirations, and worldviews. So he emphasises the dialogical process of learning within the study of academic subjects like social sciences or sciences, in which we should also reflect on moral and ethical questions. This is in tune with the ancient Indian tradition of education, which was bigger than just intellectual development and knowledge of some selected subjects alone.

Pathak (2009) emphasised the distinction between inner realisation and mere intellectual preparation in the Indian philosophical tradition. So, truth is self-awareness. So education is by no means mere knowledge of the phenomenal world; instead it is essentially a penetrating journey to the inner world—an awareness and realisation of inner feelings, emotions, patterns (Pathak, 2009). So our curriculum should include more humane and integral thinking that evolves a mediation between reason and emotion, objectivity and subjectivity.

Positivism legitimises specific interests under the guise of being Value-free

Giroux (1997) claimed that it should be realised that education is never value neutral. Selection of certain knowledge for representation in the curriculum is always based on what values the textbook authors give importance. The choice of curriculum is based on the value they share and the desire to propagate and socialise students through the curriculum of a particular subject.

He states that "objectified" knowledge as it operates in the classroom obscures the interplay of meaning and intentionality as the foundation for all forms of knowledge. He concludes that it is not only a conceptual problem but it also plays a decisive role in shaping classroom experiences. Regardless of how a pedagogy is defined, whether in traditional or progressive terms, if it fails to encourage self-reflection and communicative interaction, it provides students with the illusion rather than the substance of choice. Additionally, it promotes manipulation while denying critical

reflection. He criticized not only the positivistic celebrated objective feature and its impact on curriculum and textbooks, but he also makes arguments against context-free knowledge. Giroux (1997) claimed that when knowledge takes on the appearance of being context-free knowledge, it is divorced from the political and cultural traditions that give it meaning. In this way, knowledge is only viewed as technical knowledge rather than emancipatory. On one level, it means that classroom knowledge can be used in the interest of either emancipation or domination. It can be critically used and analysed in order to break through mystifications and modes of false reasoning, or it can be used unreflectively to legitimise specific socio-political interests by appearing to be value-free and beyond criticism. As a result, positivistic knowledge in the curriculum and textbooks is only used to legitimise the specific interests of some groups under the guise of being value-free and avoiding ethical concerns.

Giroux (1997) made the point that social studies knowledge does more to provide logical justification of prevailing institutional arrangements, forms of conduct, and beliefs that eschew social conflict and social injustice. The alleged innovative, discipline-centered social studies curriculum has built its reputation on its claim to promote critical inquiry. Instead, this approach appears to have created "new forms of mystification which make the social world seem mechanistic and pre-deterministic" (Giroux, 1997). Giroux (1997) claimed that there is little in the positivist pedagogical model that encourages students to generate their own meanings, to capitalise on their own cultural capital, or to participate in evaluating their own classroom experiences. The principles of order and control in positivist pedagogy appear inherently opposed to such an approach. He is against the arbitrary division between objective and subjective knowledge. The behavioural and management approaches to such pedagogy, particularly at the level of middle and secondary education, reduce learning to a set of practises that neither define nor respond critically to the basic normative categories that shape day-to-day classroom methods and evaluation procedures (Giroux, 1997).

Thus, based on the above detailed examination of the culture of Positivism and its critique, we need to re-examine our curriculum in the context of value/moral education. For that, we need to re-examine our strict adherence to the culture of Positivism and question its ethical neutrality stance. But despite this, values and morals are not still given sufficient consideration in contemporary educational practises. It can be attributed to the politics of curriculum decision-making to

safeguard the interests of some special and powerful groups. To maintain a form of hegemony and power and to maintain an exploitative social order, some elite social groups with power in educational decision-making attempted to avoid ethical goals of education in favour of academic goals. In the curriculum and textbook, there is insufficient space for students to reflect on their experiences, their marginalisation, and the daily social injustice they face. Instead, influenced by positivism, these ethical issues were presented in an objective, abstract, and context-free manner, which failed to engage students in a meaningful way. The concepts and values of social justice, democracy, and equality, etc., remain concepts to be comprehended rather than values to be practised daily. Therefore, context-free and abstract knowledge serve both the function of maintaining hegemony and the function of serving elites by justifying the exclusion of values and ethical issues from the curriculum. Thus, the need of the present education system is to abandon outdated values of Positivism, so that the curriculum and textbooks should be redesigned in a way that students can share their experiences, discuss and reflect on ethical issues in their classroom.

Conclusion

The modern curriculum, as discussed in this article, undermines discussion of ethical and moral issues. This is due to positivistic notions of objectivity, reductionism, and value neutrality. Modern education and schools were seen as neutral institutions whose only function was to promote intellectual development and subject-based knowledge. However, as arguments given by leading philosophers and sociologists of education suggest, education can and will never be value neutral. The broad educational goals, curriculum objectives, and textbook development are all based on values adopted by education policymakers and curriculum development educators. So education under the shield of value neutrality actually undermines critical consciousness. Furthermore, as scholars have argued above, education in its most fundamental sense is an ethical quest, and thus we should redesign the curriculum with ethical and moral development goals in mind.

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