

# An Empirical Enquiry Into The Teachers' Philosophical Beliefs And Their Actual Classroom Practices: A Case Of Pakistan

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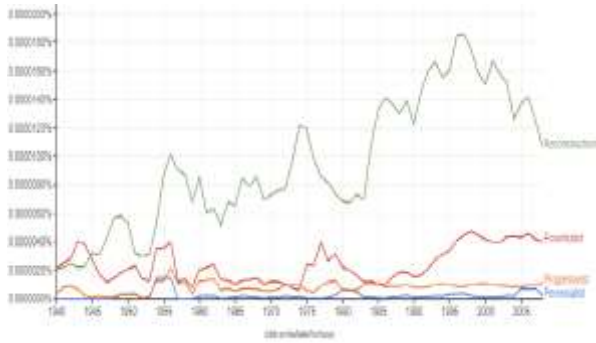
## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study is to determine whether teachers' philosophical beliefs about teaching and their classroom practices are aligned. Further, the focus is on the prevailing educational theories i.e., perennialism, essentialism, reconstructionism, and progressivism. Philosophical beliefs of the conservative, i.e., the perennialist teachers who believe that human nature remains the same everywhere hence education system needs to be the same in different eras and places while the essentialist teachers believe that the purpose of education is adjustment with existing society by learning essential knowledge and skills. Unlike the progressivists, teachers believe that education is an ongoing process which changes with changing needs with human beings' new experiences. Similarly, the reconstructionist/critical theorists believe that purpose of education is to rebuild societies based on democratic values through social consciousness and creative dialogue. The study is descriptive, and the survey method was used to collect the data. The population of the study consists of all primary and elementary school teachers working in Gujranwala, Pakistan. A stratified random sampling technique was used through which 150 teachers were selected. The researcher developed two instruments, i) Teachers' Philosophical Beliefs Inventory (TPBI) and Teachers' Classroom Practices Observation Checklist (CPOC). Frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistics while Chi-square correlation was applied to find out the association between teacher's philosophical beliefs about teaching and their classroom instructional practices. Results of the study revealed that the majority of teachers prefer philosophical beliefs having an orientation in Progressivism and Perennialism. This research also found that most school teachers are practicing Essentialist classroom instructional practices during their classroom interaction with students.

## INTRODUCTION

Being a professional requirement, the majority of the teachers study educational philosophy as a course, hence they are expected to be informed of the related educational theories, particularly the philosophical ones like perennialism, essentialism, progressivism to

reconstructionism/ critical theory. The purpose of the study is to investigate into as whether the practicing teachers follow their educational philosophy in their practices. In the history of education, there is a progression of philosophical beliefs and related practices from the most conservative to the most liberal.



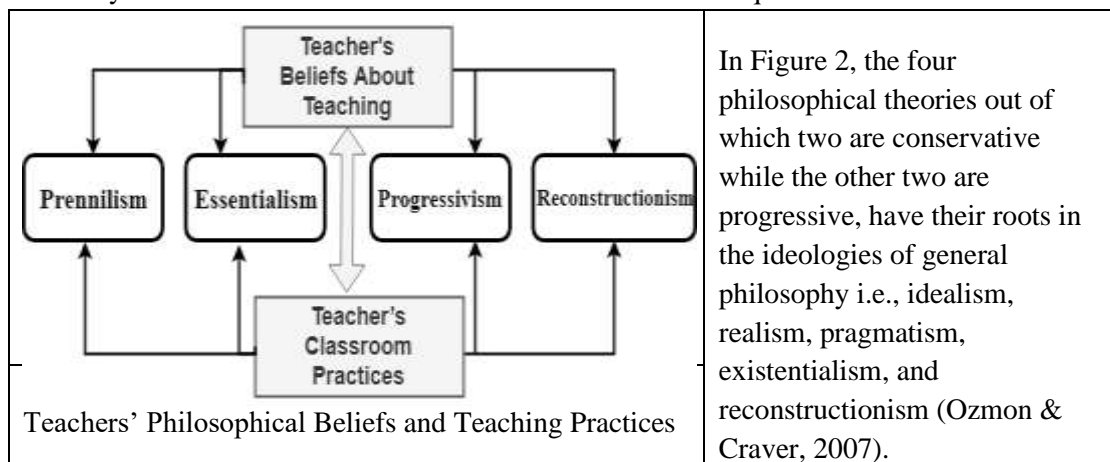
Accordingly, figure 1 shows word frequency in literature, reflecting certain philosophical beliefs and preferences during the last eighty years. Hence it is interesting to explore whether our teachers are updated and aligned with the given graphical trend in their beliefs and practices as mentioned in the above Google Ngram.

It would ultimately be helpful for the teachers, trainers and policymakers to better understand and develop the prevailing educational system aligning with the pedagogical trends based on the advanced philosophical beliefs and educational practices for the professional development of the educators (Conti, 2007; Elias & Merrium, 1995).

classroom is said to be led by what they believe, and these beliefs often serve for instructional decisions and judgments (Pajares, 1992; Fullan and Stegelbauer, 1991). Thus philosophy, therefore, works as a lighthouse that directs and guides schools’ policies and teachers, instructional planning and practice (Graham & Havlick, 2005).

Understanding the role of the belief system in teaching is essential to make the right decisions in the field of education Handal and Herrington (2003). The philosophical beliefs are described to reflect through instructional decisions, teaching-learning activities, and evaluation in the classrooms. All the instruction system in fact, according to Johri (2005), needs to revolves around the objectives of education, which are the reflection of philosophical underpinnings that emerge from the ideals of the society. Generally what teachers do in the

The variables under consideration of the study include philosophical beliefs..... a set of ideas ..... embedded into the social discourse of the relevant society .....that guide teachers’ actions and provides a framework for thinking about educational issues” (Kauchak & Eggen, 2011; Olivia, 2001, and Ornstein, 2003). Based on the given context, the following conceptual framework of the study illustrates the inter and intra-dependence of the said variables of which alignment and interdependency are to be enquired.



In Figure 2, the four philosophical theories out of which two are conservative while the other two are progressive, have their roots in the ideologies of general philosophy i.e., idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, and reconstructionism (Ozmon & Craver, 2007).

The given ideologies have their repercussions which influence the educational practices of professional teachers as liberal, behaviourist, progressive, humanistic, and radical (Zinn, 2004). “True professionals know not only what they are to do but also knowledge of the principles and reasons for so acting”, as concluded by Elias & Merriam, 1995.

Classroom practices are, at the first stage a part of the plan, which is the product of the teacher’s teaching philosophy and consequently influences learners’ actions during teaching and learning activities (Elbaz, 2018). Furthermore Conti, 2007 and Zinn, 2001 aptly classified the five educational philosophies that ultimately determine teacher-centered or learner-centered classroom approaches.

It is a common observation that most teachers blend their instructional practices with their personal past experiences as learners and deal with their students to perform teaching-learning activities strictly following the teachers in full social control in the classroom. The reported situation paves the way for the researcher to conduct the current study to assess the compatibility or contradiction between teachers’ philosophical beliefs and their classroom practices.

To meet this purpose, the following research questions are to be answered based on the data analysis results of the study.

How many of the practising teachers have perennial, essential, progressive and critical theory-based instructional beliefs?

How much of the teachers’ teaching practices relate to their relative identified philosophical theories?

Identified teachers having Essentialist philosophical beliefs do not differ significantly from their classroom practices.

A) Identified teachers having Progressivist philosophical beliefs do not differ significantly from their classroom practices.

B) Identified teachers having Reconstructionist philosophical beliefs do not differ significantly from their classroom practices.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current study aims to explore the relationship between the teachers’ philosophical beliefs about education and its application to their instructional practices during classroom teaching.

“A philosophy of education is a conceptual framework embodying certain values and principles that render the educational process meaningful (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).” Similarly, Arslan (2015) and Ornstein (2003) emphasized that Philosophy is an integral part of the life of the community which comes out of the experiences and situations of the people. It is a disciplined way of thinking which helps us to deal with the ultimate. Yaldir (2009) emphasized that our thinking directs our actions and according to Wikipedia philosophy is a way of thinking. Philosophy works as a lighthouse that directs and guides individuals and organizations (Graham & Havlick, 2005).

Philosophy guides all our actions and it is not time bound as Arslan (2015) purposes philosophy as “being on the road forever”. The philosophy of education emerges and evolves from the theories of human development highlighting the educational objectives, and methods and co-relating them with education and society (Wikipedia, 2005). Beatty, Leigh & Dean (2009) suggest Philosophy not only effect the classroom but design and classroom environment. They suggest that teachers can develop greater authenticity in the classroom by deepening their

understanding of their own philosophical ideas and beliefs

An educational philosophy typically includes; terms, aims, objectives, curricula, methods and the teaching-learning transaction, the role of society, and the roles of teacher and student. Zinn (2004) adapted six educational philosophies into five liberal, behavioural, progressive, humanistic, and radical. These philosophies have roots in traditional schools of philosophy (Elias and Merriam, 1995; Zinn, 2004). The differences in these philosophies are based upon the concept of the role of the learner, the knowledge, and the part of the teacher and the aim of the curriculum (Conti, 2007).

Before moving further it's worth mentioning Gutek (2004), to differentiate between philosophy, ideology and theory regarding their definition, domain, elements and role, which is described as that philosophy is a way of thinking about the world, the universe, and society. It works by asking very basic questions about the nature of human thought, the universe and the connections between them. It claims universal applicability where everywhere and anytime is relevant to everyone. Ideology is the ideas and beliefs that give groups a sense of belongingness or identity and provides their agenda for action (p-142). It is applicable in specific historical, political and economic situations with specific conditions and groups of people. Based on identity and ideas of social change. We get a clear idea of identity, and membership belongingness of a specific group in a historical context to improve the situation.

Gutek (2004) identified following basic ideologies provide the bases to certain philosophical theories or beliefs.

i) Idealism: An Idealist strives for perfection to attain their set ideals. An

idealist teacher assists and stimulates the students to get maximum spiritual and intellectual growth by preferring discussion methods and imitation.

ii) Realism: A realist emphasises a practical understanding of things. Humans are rational beings who can know and act according to existing principles. An Idealist teacher has content knowledge and pedagogical skills derived from existing generalizations.

iii) Pragmatism: Knowing is connected with doing. Pragmatists think the scientific method is the best way and design of teaching.

iv) Existentialism: This educational philosophy emphasizes that the aim of education cannot be set according to antecedent goals without considering the student's struggle to create the essence.

v) Postmodernism: Postmodernism is contemporary philosophy which denies the ideas of metaphysics and insight by reason. According to Ozmon & Craver (2007), there are five traditional philosophies which provide the foundation for most educational practices.

On the base of the given ideologies, the following philosophical Theories of Education are important for theorizing the current study.

**Perennialism:** General and core values should be the curriculum for everyone. Universal truths and timeless values are assets and the great work of art and literature should be core studies. Purpose of education, the role of school and the organization of the curriculum as coming from humanity's enduring and universal characteristics. It is impressed by the recurring feature of human experience across time and space. Great books are the source of wisdom based on universal and recurring truths. Division of subject matter into the refined structure, order, and sequence. School is an intellectual agency

that has the primary purpose to develop human reason and knowledge by introducing great work. At a higher educational level, subjects should be integrated into generalizations instead of specialization.

**Essentialism:** Basic education and standards of schooling, instruction, teaching, and learning need to be the focus. Basic ideas, traditional values, defined skills and a body of knowledge are essential. Literacy, computational skills and subjects like history, math, science, language, and literature have fundamental importance. Teaching should be planned, deliberate, and efficient by using those instructional methods that have stood the test of time. The curriculum should consist of basic skills and subjects. Schools are places of order and discipline that role is strictly academic. Transmit and preserve the crucial elements of human culture.

Progressivism theory has the following characteristics like simulating children's growth and development through activities that encourage self-expression, initiative, and creativity. Children will decide the curriculum according to their interests, need, and interaction with the environment. The curriculum provoked inquiry and emphasis on activities and problem-solving. Collaborative learning and group cooperation.

The teacher works as a facilitator rather than a taskmaster. Geared Student's collective growth including emotional, physical, social and intellectual instead of only academic. Students will be better builders of the world without the imposition of external aims. Human beings have a built-in capacity to improve their situation. Educate students in an open, unstructured and informal environment. Prefer innovative instructional methods with learning by doing and field trips. Allows children to set their own beliefs through reflection while interacting with the environment.

**Reconstructionists /Critical Theory** has the following characteristics:

The aims of education are related to larger social, political and economic goals of establishing greater equality and equity for people. Critical theorists see education as the ideological conflict between different competing groups and classes. School is a microcosm of a larger society.

Students' autobiographies, images, and reflections create their own knowledge and value system rather than imposing other constructed versions. The purpose of education is to create rather than transition and feeding of knowledge. All subjects have equal importance. The curriculum will begin with students' own life stories rather than following a dominant class-approved curriculum. Teachers will make a collective effort to reform their profession and will help students to achieve their identity. To uplift less favoured groups of people by raising their consciousness. Uncovering exploitative power and relationship to bring about reforms

An American educator, Theodore Brameld and Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, are popular reconstructionists who emphasise that society constantly needs reconstruction and that social change involves both reconstruction of education and the use of education. In reconstructing society societal function of education is a central premise teachers and schools should serve as agents for a just society (Ozmon & Craver, 2007). Reconstructionists declare that schools and teachers should serve as agents to both address social inequities and enact the ideals of democracy (Kauchak & Eggen, 2005). Teachers encourage students to be social catalysts of change. Teachers influenced by reconstructionist philosophy emphasize teaching students to expose hidden biases and inspiring students to influence the world today (Kauchak & Eggen, 2011).

Olivia (2001) and Ornstein (2003) while depicting the four major sub-clauses of educational philosophies, form them into two broad sections; traditional and contemporary. They set their co-relation with their respective orientations. Ornstein (2003) linked the philosophical orientation of Perennialism and Essentialism with idealism and realism and categorize it as the traditional philosophy of education. Progressivism and Reconstructivism with origin in pragmatism Tagged as contemporary philosophies of education. Ornstein (2003) also elaborate that philosophies borrow concept and overlapped with each other. This categorization is useful for understanding and applying them. Moreover, Diehl (2005) further elaborates on Ornstein ideas, and philosophies that meditate between immediate experience and experiment and promote the intelligent development of values. They are not ends but means to end. He bases the formation of philosophies upon the mingling and borrowing of ideas, and concepts from each other. Importance of Teachers' Beliefs in Instructional Decision Making

**Teacher's Philosophical Beliefs:** A teacher's belief system consists of both knowledge and theories constructed and shaped through personal experiences. It provides a foundation while making decisions regarding instructional practice. Teachers use theories about learning as filters while making instructional decisions (Smith, 2004). The teachers' belief system about reading instruction greatly influences lesson planning and student learning. Belief in teaching is very important for research to understand a student's learning. Research must specify belief according to the study purpose because there is a wide range of definitions of beliefs. There are Nespar (1987) further explained four characteristics of beliefs. a) Everyone has a presumption about personal truth. b) It may

be opposite to reality and ideal. c) It has a powerful evaluative component about the time and energy input of teaching material. d) It arises from the interaction of previous and present experiences.

**Classroom Practices** if informed then they base on philosophical beliefs, According to Heslop (1997) described a teacher who bridges the gap and most of the time is influenced by the philosophical base and blends working with practical wisdom. Philosophical thoughts are abstract wisdom that can only come into practice when teachers integrate them with practical reason. All the learning theories and educational philosophies are directly determined framed and persuaded by the educator's conviction about the objectives and purposes of education research shows that practices are going to change from traditional to modern over time. (Marsh 2000)

Philosophy served as a foundation in the development of different schools of educational thought. Although it is important, it is not developed as a task list. The philosophical theories with the conclusion of Joyce, Weil and Calhoun (2000) and Robley (2004) presented strategies of pedagogical practice consisting of behavioural modification, information processing, personal source and social interaction. Therefore, for their practical implementation, Conti (2007) categorized educational philosophies into five categories and identified their philosophical and practical orientations.

#### **Procedure of the Study**

This study was descriptive in nature and a survey method was used to conduct this study. This study intended to find out the Philosophical beliefs of the teachers about their teaching. Moreover, the reflection of their Philosophical beliefs on their teaching practices was also observed. Teachers' Philosophical Beliefs Inventory (TPBI) was used to explore the philosophical

beliefs of teachers and whether their beliefs were aligned with a certain philosophy. A dichotomous scale was used for this purpose. Moreover, teachers' classroom practices were observed three different times through the Teachers' Classroom

Practices Observation Checklist (TCPOCL). It was assumed that if the concerned teacher does not show any sign of practice after three observations then it was considered that the teacher does not have any certain practices.

The following table presents the sample from three different strata.

Designation	Female Teachers	8% of the Population	Male Teachers	8% of the Population
ESE/PST	1002	80	533	43
EST/SESE	84	8	110	9
SST/SSE	51	5	75	6
Total	1137	93	718	58

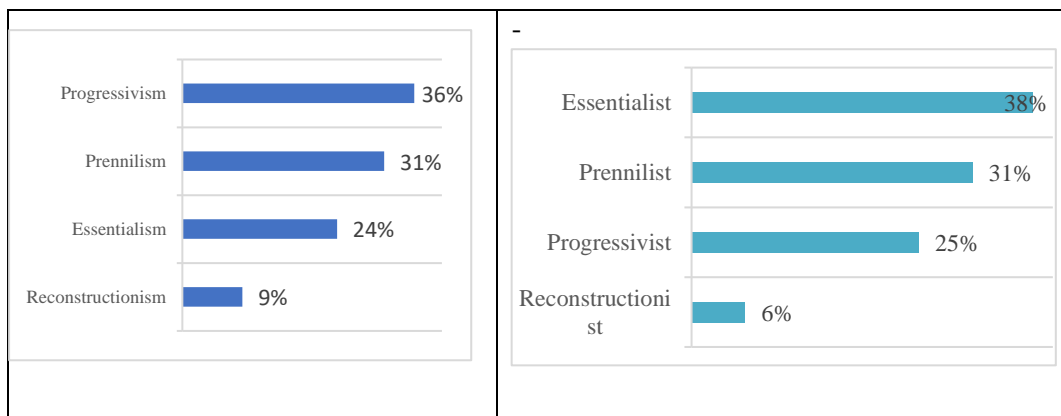
Two instruments were used, i.e., a) Teachers' Philosophical Beliefs Inventory (TPBI)

b) Teachers' Classroom Practices Observation Checklist (CPOC). The later consists of 20 statements on a dichotomous scale with options yes/no. TCP checklist was made in light of the four above-mentioned philosophical theories based on teachers' beliefs. Both the instruments were validated and made reliable through pilot testing and expert opinion. Then both instruments were used, keeping in view the required ethical considerations to collect quality data.

For data analysis, frequencies, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation were calculated as descriptive statistics to find out teachers' most dominant philosophical

beliefs and their practices as well. The nature of the data was categorical so a Chi-square correlation was applied to find out the association between the primary and elementary school teacher's philosophical beliefs about teaching and their classroom instructional practices.

The TPBI and TCPOCL both yielded quantitative data that was analyzed to answer four research question i.e. A to D through calculating percentage of frequencies. The graphical representation of all four data on the given questions are presented in the following graph which is also helpful to compare teachers having particular type of philosophical belief about Prevailing Teacher's Belief



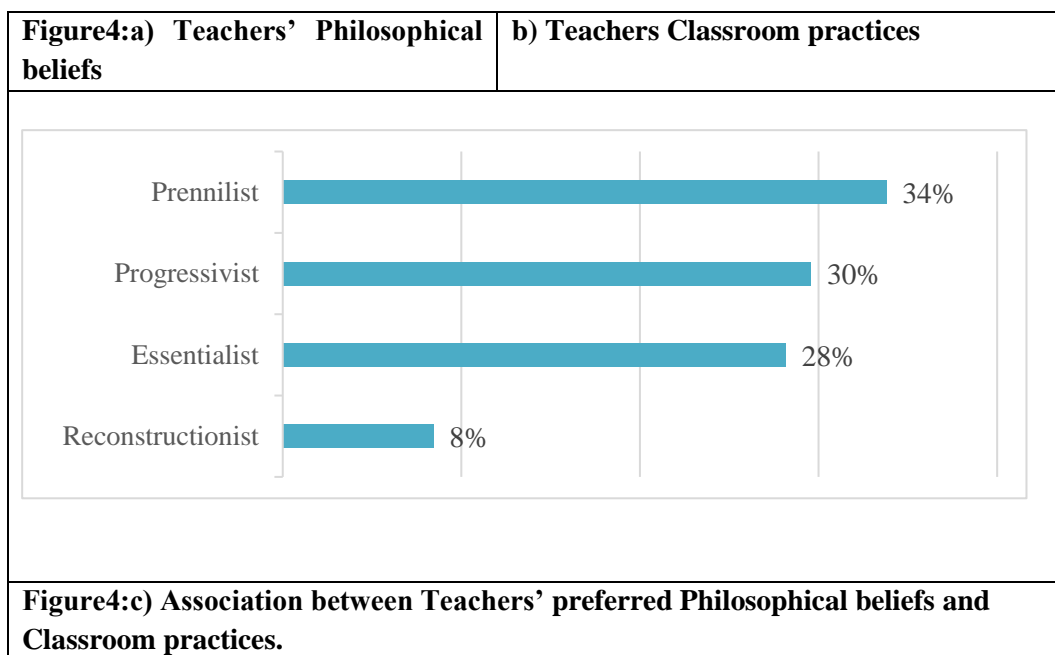


Figure-4 (a) contents make it evident that 36% of teachers have progressive beliefs 31% Perennials, and on the other hand essential and Reconstructive/critical beliefs are among y 24% and 9% of teachers respectively. For comparison in figure 4,(b) those participants having essentialists' classroom practices are 38% of teachers, perennialists 31%, poggessivists 25% of total teachers while 6% of teachers' practices are related to reconstructionist principles of education..

Figure-4 c) shows 34% of the teachers who were identified as perennialists, have alignment in their beliefs and practices. Similarly, 30% of the progressivist teachers practice in classroom what they report in their beliefs. There are 28 % essentialists

who have alignment while 8% are reconstructionist teachers have alignment in their philosophical beliefs and pedagogical practices.

**4.5: Association in Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and their classroom Practices**

The chi-square test of independence was applied to the data to examine the degree of association between teachers' classroom practices and their beliefs about teaching based on the Perennialist philosophy. The same test was also used to analyse the association between teachers' practices and beliefs according to the Essentialist, Progressivist, and Reconstructionist philosophies.

Philosophical Orientation	Variable	Aligned	Not-Aligned	Results of $\chi^2$ Test
Perennialists	Beliefs	412	343	$\chi^2 (1, N = 150) = 5.13, p > .05$
	Practices	368	387	
Essentialists	Beliefs	390	390	$\chi^2 (1, N = 150) = 7.74, p > .05$
	Practices	431	324	
Progressivists	Beliefs	446	308	$\chi^2 (1, N = 150) = 18.59, p < .05$
	Practices	363	392	



	Beliefs	373	378	
Reconstructionist /Critical Theorists	Practices	197	556	$\chi^2 (1, N = 150) = 102.15, p < .05$

Results in Table 2 show that the teachers identified as having perennialists' philosophical beliefs do not differ significantly ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 150) = 5.13, p > .05$ ) from their classroom practices, hence  $H_{01}$  is **accepted**.

The teachers who reported themselves to have philosophical beliefs were identified as essentialists do not differ significantly ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 150) = 7.74, p > .05$ ), in their related classroom practices, thus null hypothesis is **accepted**.

Results related to the third null hypothesis identified that the teachers having progressivist philosophical beliefs did not differ significantly in their classroom practices. Our null hypothesis is **rejected**. Teachers having progressivist philosophical beliefs differ significantly in their classroom practices,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 150) = 18.59, p < .05$

The results of the latest philosophical theory related to teachers' beliefs and their practices show that the teachers identified as reconstructionists differ significantly ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 150) = 102.15, p < .05$ .) in their identified philosophical beliefs and their actual classroom hence null hypothesis is **rejected**.

#### 4.19: Discussion and Conclusions

The above-given results of the analysis are further discussed in the following. The discussion would be focused on the implications and possible consequences of the reported results. Some of the results found in this chapter have interesting insights which are discussed in sequence as mentioned in previous sections of the report. Results of data analysis identified that there are 50% of the teachers in Pakistan follow perennialistic and essentialists' beliefs although Sarites,

(2016) shows that teachers adopt experimentalism, idealism, existentialism, realism, and Perennialism respectively. Ornstein (2003) linked the philosophical orientations of perennialists and Essentialists with idealism and realism and categorize it as a traditional philosophy of education. So, we can conclude that 50% of school teachers are still following outdated and traditional philosophical beliefs and classroom instructions. All teaching-learning processes, expectations from students, and instructional methods depend on teachers' educational philosophy (Kauchak & Eggen, 2011; Zinn, 2004).

The prevailing education system seems incapable to make progress in classroom practices where 1 out of 3 teachers follows similar classroom practices as it was in the era (teacher-centred) of Aristotle. Instruction lacks to give space for students to think independently, then how to expect progressive and rational, critical and creative thinking from them.

Progressivists and reconstructs with origin in pragmatism tagged as contemporary philosophies of education tend to keep pace with progressivist philosophical beliefs but the identified philosophical beliefs and practices are not much promising, which demand an expedited paradigm shift from teacher-centred and book-centered approach to student-centered instruction. Students particularly children have a lot of questions in their minds but one of the repeated phrases that the researcher listens to during classroom observation is "be quiet". Ignoring student's queries and asking them to be quiet escapes students' cognitive growth where the current social scenario is apparent having a lot of talking minds but not thinking.

Competition kills creativity, every child develops differently according to his learning speed and interest but almost all teachers think competition is important for success and conducting competition in the classroom is common practice. With this attitude, students try to compete with fellow students instead of sharpening their capacity. It's difficult for an individual to survive individually. Human beings are living in a society which is interlinked. Cooperation and collective well-being are key ingredients of a developed.

Last but not least the conclusive section is in the following.

A) Every third of teachers have perennialist philosophical beliefs which are almost similar to teaching practices and need to be sensitized and equipped with the latest theories of education having interactive, collaborative approaches for thinking, motivated, participative, interactive and creative classrooms. The similar results of inferential analysis stated that teachers having perennialist philosophical beliefs do not differ significantly regarding their classroom practices.

B) One-fourth of the primary and elementary school teachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have essentialist philosophical beliefs of primitive and medieval approaches to coaching and inculcating students in the globally developed world. Thus the results of the testing hypothesis stated that teachers having essentialist philosophical beliefs do not differ significantly from their classroom practices.

C) More than one-third of the primary and elementary school teachers reported themselves having their educational philosophy based on progressivism which focuses on children's development. But unfortunately, they differ significantly in their classroom practices although have

contemporary instructional beliefs the cultural and environmental factors seem to work alongside which causes incapacity among the progressivists.

D) An alarming result pushes towards hopelessness where only 9% of the primary and elementary school teachers were identified to have modern philosophical thoughts and beliefs and work in an incapacitating environment of classrooms, to practice what might be and what they believe to practice.

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