



*Research Paper*

## Exploring approaches to the philosophy of childhood to identify it in upstream educational documents in Iran

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### Abstract

**Aim:** To identify the philosophy of childhood in upstream educational documents in Iran, the predominant linear and non-linear discourses were examined. All the views from the past to the present were described within traditional and modernist paradigms. Descriptive statements were then compared. The simultaneous comparison of the approaches revealed the most important factor in the conceptualization of the philosophy of childhood to be the absence of a clear definition in upstream documents. This issue has led to contradictions about the compatibility of the monotheistic innatist approach in these documents to traditional and postmodernist approaches. This problem can be resolved by moving away from linear approaches and highlighting the differences between these and non-linear approaches.

**Keywords:** *Approaches; Philosophy of childhood; Upstream documents; Monotheistic innatism*

## **Introduction**

In 2018, the philosophy of childhood was officially recognized as a research area similar to other “philosophy of” disciplines (Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). Gareth Matthews first promoted the recognition of children as human peers (Matthews, 2016). Tesar (2016) regards the philosophy of childhood as a form of knowledge philosophically examining subjects pertaining to children and childhood (Tesar, 2016: 19). According to Hunter (2020), we have taken the wrong step towards explaining childhood agency, and this is why we do not have an accurate understanding of childhood. The absence of a precise conceptualization of the philosophy of childhood may have muddled its understanding. By examining the approach in upstream documents, the views towards the philosophy of childhood in the Iranian education system can be identified. In the current evolving world, many theoretical concepts, approaches, and methods in education have been transformed, and rules and regulations must be updated, as well (Adham, 2017; Collection of Approvals of the Supreme Council of Education, 2016:10). The present study aimed to explore the view towards the philosophy of childhood in upstream educational documents in Iran. The goal was to examine the current view towards the philosophy of childhood in Iran and see how it can be transformed based on ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

## **Methodology**

To identify the approaches towards the philosophy of childhood, we first reviewed all the theoretical studies in traditional and modernist paradigms. Then, to identify the approach in the Iranian education system, we examined the upstream documents and compared them with the data of the previous step. As we dealt with the data of different approaches to childhood and the approach in upstream documents, the concepts and statements were examined via comparative analysis, and the inferred concepts were compared based on Bereday’s model. The problem was described in relation to the philosophy of childhood; in the simultaneous comparison, the factor with the greatest effect on this problem was identified (Madandar Arani, 2019: 101-102).

## **Results**

The ontology, epistemology, and axiology of childhood were examined to identify the dominant view in upstream documents. The general approach in all the examined upstream documents was monotheistic innatism, based on which children are entrusted by God and have inherent dignity (National

curriculum, 2012: 12). In the Fundamental Evolution in Education document, the process of education is innate, excellence-seeking, gradual, integrated, and compatible with the standard Islamic system (Fundamental Evolution in Education document: 2011: 32). In this sense, a child is a potential adult, but the nature of this movement is not linear and uniform. The optimal monotheistic innatist approach in the upstream documents is, therefore, not a linear one. But can this interpretation be equated with non-linear approaches of modernist and postmodernist paradigms? Modernist and postmodernist views officially recognize children's absolute ipseity and resistance to the demands of the adult society, but in the religious interpretation, the basic idea of childhood is a transition towards agency and an asymmetric interaction (Bagheri, 2015: 100).

**Table1.** Explaining the philosophy of childhood in the discussed paradigms

<b>Paradigms and philosophical foundations</b>	<b>Traditional (Middle Ages and High Middle Ages)</b>	<b>Modernist</b>	<b>Postmodernist</b>	<b>Upstream documents</b>	<b>Islamic education</b>
<b>Ontology</b>	In Middle Ages (children as young adults) In High Middle Ages (children as incomplete adults)	Sequential approaches (Piaget) and Non-sequential approaches (Matthews)	Absolute existence of childhood	Incoherent existence (lack of agreement between theory and practice)	Existence of childhood human identity
<b>Epistemology</b>	Children in an asymmetric and non-interactive position with adults	Children in a symmetric and interactive position with adults	Children in a symmetric and non-interactive position with adults	Children in an asymmetric and non-interactive position with adults	Children in an asymmetric and interactive position with adults
<b>Axiology</b>	Instrumental	Natural	Inherent	Preliminary	Existential

## Discussion and conclusion

The general difference between traditional approaches and the upstream documents lies in the sequential view of Mulla Sadra's

philosophy; by distancing itself from linear approaches, this view regards children as having an existential value. Due to the asymmetric relationship between teachers and children in the Islamic educational philosophy, this approach differs from non-linear approaches, too. The view governing this approach is a continuous non-linear one. To attain a relative conceptual model on the optimal philosophy of childhood for the Iranian education system, recent models that emphasize the promotion of the philosophizing ability and the power of the idea of childhood can be adopted for the objectives in the upstream documents.

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