

A Critical Analysis of Humanism Philosophy in Education Policy in the Vuca Era

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Abstract

The demand for humanistic policies in the VUCA era has exposed many stakeholders to serious threats, particularly within the education sector. Rapid changes, biased information, policy uncertainty, and complex problem-solving workflows pose distinct challenges for educational policymakers. This study aims to analyze existing educational policies through the lens of humanistic philosophy. By identifying the gap between policy and practice, this research offers recommendations for improvement. This is crucial to ensure that educational policies remain relevant to contemporary societal needs. This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a literature review. The collected data is analyzed to identify discrepancies between policy and practice. The analysis of educational policies through a humanistic lens highlights the importance of aligning policies with the needs of a more critical and adaptive society in the current era. By identifying the gap between policy and practice, this research provides recommendations to assist in creating a better and more responsive education system. This study recommends that educational policies become more inclusive and responsive to societal needs. This includes involving the community in decision-making processes and adapting the curriculum to reflect humanistic values.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) era, global education systems face significant challenges in adapting policies to rapidly changing social and economic dynamics. According to an OECD report (2020), many countries struggle to ensure that their education policies remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of society. In Indonesia, for example, education policies are often at odds with the need for 21st-century skills, which emphasize creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). The philosophy of humanism in education emphasizes the holistic development of individual potential, with a focus on the values of humanity, freedom, and responsibility (Rogers, 1969). This theory expects that education policies should facilitate students' personal and social growth and prepare them to contribute positively to society. Humanism emphasizes the importance of student-centered education that is relevant to real-life contexts (Maslow, 1970). Character education faces unprecedented challenges amidst the currents of global modernization.

This era is marked by two major disruptive forces: globalization and the acceleration of the Industrial Revolution 5.0. Globalization has created an instantly connected society, but paradoxically, it often encourages individualism and hedonism. Communal values and local wisdom are at risk of being eroded by global pop culture and consumerism. Meanwhile, the Industrial Revolution, marked by the dominance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation, has changed the definition of success. While education previously focused on routine cognitive skills, AI is now capable of performing these tasks. Consequently, the focus of education must shift to areas uniquely human: character, ethics, and creativity. Technological disruption, particularly social media and the abundance of digital information, has had a significant impact on the character formation of the younger generation. The phenomena of cyberbullying, the spread of hoaxes, and the emergence of filter bubbles demand the development of digital literacy and digital integrity as an integral part of character education. Individuals must have strong character to be able to filter information, interact ethically in virtual spaces, and not lose their moral foundations amidst the flood of data. In the midst of uncertainty and changing values (value relativism), Character Education becomes an urgency to form a moral compass in students. Character education is understood not as an additional subject, but as a systematic and holistic effort to instill core values that guide behavior and decision-making. The main objectives of Character Education in the modernization era are: Forming Responsible Individuals: Character must include the ability to take initiative and bear the consequences of choices, both in professional and social contexts; Building Resilience and Resilience: In a changing environment, individuals need to have resilience (resilience) to recover from failure and perseverance to achieve long-term goals; Developing Empathy and Social Awareness: The ability to understand and share the feelings of others (empathy) is crucial in a heterogeneous global society, countering the tendency towards individualism and intolerance; Bridging the Cognitive and Affective Gap: Character education seeks to address the gap that has occurred so far, where students are academically smart (cognitive) but morally and emotionally fragile (affective). Research by Noddings (2013) shows that a humanistic approach to education can increase student motivation and engagement. Meanwhile, a study by Biesta (2015) highlights that educational policies that ignore humanistic aspects tend to produce students who are less prepared to face global challenges. Another study by Dewey (1938) emphasized the importance of direct experience in the learning process, which is often overlooked in educational policies that focus too much on standards and testing. Although humanistic theory emphasizes the importance of student-centered education, many current educational policies still focus on academic outcomes and standardized testing, often neglecting aspects of character development and social skills (Robinson, 2011). This creates a gap between theory and practice, where existing policies do not fully support the holistic development of students in accordance with humanistic principles (Biesta, 2015). This research is important to ensure that educational policies focus not only on academic outcomes but also on character development and social skills, which are essential in the VUCA era. Thus, this research contributes to the development of more inclusive and adaptive educational theory, as well as providing practical guidance for policymakers in designing more relevant and responsive policies (Noddings, 2013; Robinson, 2011). This research aims to analyze educational policy through the lens of humanist philosophy, focusing on identifying gaps between policy and practice. This approach is expected to provide recommendations for policy improvements that are more student-centered and relevant to the needs of today's society. This approach is supported by progressive educational theory, which emphasizes the importance of policy adaptation to social and economic changes (Dewey, 1938). Humanistic philosophy emerged as a reaction to the deterministic views of behaviorism and psychoanalysis in the mid-20th

435 | A Critical Analysis of Humanism Philosophy in the Vuca Era (Putri Dena Laksmi)

century. The main figures in the development of this theory are Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Maslow is known for his hierarchy of needs, while Rogers developed the concept of client-centered therapy. Humanistic philosophy emphasizes the human potential for growth and self-actualization, as well as the importance of individual subjective experience (Maslow, 1943). Humanistic philosophical theory focuses on several core elements, including basic human needs, self-actualization, and subjective experience. Maslow (1943) proposed a hierarchy of needs consisting of physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. Rogers (1951) emphasized the importance of a supportive environment for personal growth, which includes unconditional acceptance, empathy, and authenticity. The relationship between variables in this theory centers on how the fulfillment of basic needs and a supportive environment can propel individuals towards self-actualization. The VUCA era (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) demands an education system that is adaptive and responsive to rapid change. The Independent Curriculum in Indonesia aims to provide freedom and flexibility in learning, allowing students to explore their interests and talents more deeply. In this context, Humanistic Philosophy is highly relevant because it emphasizes the importance of personalized learning experiences and supports individual growth. For example, the application of humanistic principles in the Independent Curriculum can be seen in the student-centered learning approach, where teachers act as facilitators who support students' needs and interests. This aligns with Rogers's view of the importance of a supportive and empathetic learning environment (Rogers, 1951). Furthermore, the focus on individual potential development and self-actualization within Humanistic Philosophy can help students face the challenges of the VUCA era with greater confidence and creativity. The implication of applying this theory to curriculum policy is the need for educators to be trained to create learning environments that support and facilitate individual growth. Furthermore, learning evaluation should focus more on the individual's process and development rather than simply the result, in line with humanistic principles (Maslow, 1943).

This research is supported by a previous literature review conducted by Dartini et al., which focused on the fundamental role of philosophy in developing holistic human resources. It states that human resource development should not only pursue intellectual intelligence, but must also encompass moral integrity and social awareness. The authors emphasize that philosophy serves as a strategic foundation for reflective thinking to shape individual character as a whole. This study found that although philosophy is crucial for developing holistic potential and critical thinking, its implementation is often hampered by limited understanding and gaps in educational quality. This research aligns with research conducted to criticize overly technical education by reminding the "spirit" of education through philosophy. This is highly relevant to preventing education from becoming merely a labor factory without morals.

This research aims to Digging into stakeholder strategy information and analyzing existing education policies through the lens of humanist philosophy to address challenges in the VUCA era. A more in-depth study can provide policy recommendations and strategies for addressing complex policy challenges.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature search by analyzing educational policy documents and other supporting data. This approach was chosen to collect and analyze reliable academic literature, including books, scientific journals, research reports, related articles, and other sources (Sugiyono, 2022). The main data sources for this study are scientific articles, books, and research reports that discuss various related topics. The research procedure consists of three stages: (1) preparing the discussion, (2) searching for

credible and relevant theories or literature sources, and (3) presenting the search results from various literature sources. Data analysis uses data reduction, data presentation, and verification. Literature analysis is carried out through thematic analysis. Related themes include the philosophy of education and the study of educational policy in elementary schools, the role and recommendations of humanist philosophy in the development of educational policy.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research result

Based on literature searches and analysis of the latest education policy documents (such as the vocational curriculum, Link and Match policies, and Freedom to Learn), three main findings were found that dominate the current education landscape;

3.1.1 Reducing the Meaning of "Learning" to "Acquisition Skill."

In response to the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) era, education has been interpreted as a technical adaptation mechanism. Field findings indicate that the term "competence" often replaces "wisdom." Evaluations (such as PISA or the National Assessment) focus more heavily on functional literacy and numeracy, meaning that numeracy skills are used only for reading and understanding work information and calculating for technical logic rather than for deeply reflective abilities about self-existence or social morality. This creates a gap between the concept of "Freedom to Learn" and its implementation on the ground. Although the government's concept of "Freedom to Learn" philosophically adopts the thoughts of Ki Hajar Dewantara (education that liberates), field results demonstrate a paradox. Field findings indicate that teachers are often trapped in bureaucratic performance-based administration. Student "freedom" is interpreted as the freedom to choose technical skills (e.g., internships, independent projects), but provides little space for philosophical dialogue that builds the character of a "whole person" outside the context of economic productivity.

3.1.2 Hegemony Human Capital Theory in Education

Current education policy seems to operate under the umbrella of human *capital theory*, which views humans as economic assets, focuses excessively on hard *skills* and *soft Market-oriented* education (such as collaboration, business communication, coding) risks reducing students to "cogs" in an industrial machine. This is a form of human instrumentalization. Education is no longer an end in itself to cultivate reason, but rather merely a tool for economic growth. This can have the effect of creating a generation that is "technically savvy but spiritually fragile" (dehumanization). They are ready to work, but may stutter when faced with existential questions, ethical crises, or the meaning of life beyond work. Reinterpreting "Humanity" in the VUCA Era Criticism that current education completely forgets the essence of humanity also needs to be examined. In the VUCA Era, the definition of "humanizing humans" has undergone a shift in meaning that requires a dialectical understanding. Therefore, this issue requires serious attention from policymakers. Educational policies must equip students with the skills to survive in a cruel market, which is truly a form of humanization. Without relevant skills, humans will be marginalized, impoverished, and lose their dignity. Therefore, critical thinking skills (*critical thinking*) and adaptability taught to students' learning needs, if directed correctly, are modalities for humans to be empowered (agency). The key to the root of the problem is not in the teaching of work skills, but in the loss of the value context. If *critical thinking is*

only taught to solve technical problems, that is pragmatism. However, if critical thinking is taught to solve the problem of social injustice, that is humanization.

3.1.3 The Middle Way: Pragmatic Humanism

Ideal education in the modern era cannot choose one meaning or perspective, ultimately making it irrelevant to students with unique identities, learning needs, and interests. This should be seen as a way to tap into the humanism and empathy of students, empowering them. Education policy has shifted significantly, fostering positive perspectives. *Pragmatic* means that today's education no longer focuses on categorizing students based on high and low abilities or developing skills relevant to the workplace. Teaching methods have shifted toward a humanistic approach through habituation and role models within educational institutions. For example, coding isn't just about creating sales apps, but also discussing AI ethics, the impact of technology on human privacy, and how code can help humanity.

3.2. Discussion

Two contradictory realities were found (*paradoxical*) related to the use of technology, democratization of access, and personalization, providing a positive policy view that technology has succeeded in breaking down the physical walls of schools. This was reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many online learning platforms offered unlimited access to materials, such as EdTech platforms (LMS, MOOCs, AI Tutors) that allow 24/7 access to materials. Students in remote areas can access the same quality of content as students in big cities. With this process, learning administration becomes very efficient. Adaptive algorithms are able to adjust materials to the student's learning pace, a feature that is difficult for teachers to do manually in large classes. But this can also make the degradation of the quality of social interactions have a negative impact on this education policy. Although the frequency of communication has increased (via chat or forums), the emotional depth of interactions has decreased drastically. In synchronous learning (Zoom/Meet), the majority of students turn off their cameras. This eliminates *non-verbal cues* (body language, micro-expressions, eye contact) are crucial for teachers to build empathy and read students' psychological states. Communication tends to be limited to assignment instructions and grade collection, with no reflective dialogue that invites "aha!" moments, which should often occur organically in school discussion spaces or between lessons. This can diminish the essence of education as a humanizing process.

3.2.1 Educational Reduction: From "Self-Transformation" to "Data Transfer."

Humanist education (such as the ideas of Paulo Freire or Ki Hajar Dewantara) emphasizes the spiritual encounter between people. Teachers are not merely transmitters of information, but rather mentors who transmit values through their presence. But what happened technology tends to reduce education to mere information transfer. When interaction is mediated by a screen, the transfer of knowledge (*explicit knowledge*) goes smoothly, but the transfer of values, feelings, and characters (*tacit knowledge*) If this is hampered, it will cause many problems in the direction of our education policy. Of course, this will impact students who will be affected, perhaps educated to be cognitively intelligent due to broad access to information, but experience "emotional hunger." They lose real role models whose energy they can touch and feel. These risks producing a generation that is asocial or has low digital empathy, such as being easily judgmental on social media and having difficulty engaging in conflict in the real world, which creates a new problem, namely cyberbullying.

3.2.2 Education creates the illusion of connectivity (*The Illusion of Connection*)

Sherry Turkle, in her book "Alone Together," states that technology makes us "connected but lonely." This is particularly true in the context of digital classrooms, where chat features and reaction emojis create the illusion of interactive learning. However, the "thumbs-up" or "heart" emoji is an extreme simplification of emotion. It cannot replace the emotional validation of a proud teacher's gaze or a pat on the shoulder from a classmate. Therefore, when the humanist perspective is connected to the core of humanism, which humanizes humans through genuine reciprocal relationships, it becomes a paradox. If technology makes students feel like mere "accounts" or "attendance numbers" assessed by algorithms, then technology has dehumanized the learning process. This shift in the role of high tech to the system-high *touch* requires an in-depth study. We certainly agree that technology should not be isolated. The results of this study emphasize the need for a redefinition of roles. So that the higher the use of technology (*High Tech*), the higher the need for human touch (*High Touch*). This presents a new role for teachers. In the VUCA era, a teacher's job is no longer to teach "what" (because Google knows better), but to teach "how" and "why." Technology takes over low-level cognitive tasks (memorization, calculation), so teachers should have more time for humanistic tasks: listening, motivating, and facilitating moral dialogue. Of course, this requires further analysis, especially regarding teacher workload regulations, and field studies show a sharp gap between "what is expected" and "what must be done." Here are three key findings:

1. Contradictory Dual Role Demands

Regulatory requirements, through the Independent Curriculum, require teachers to be humanistic agents. These include conducting non-cognitive diagnostic assessments (understanding student emotions), employing differentiated (personalized) learning, and acting as empathetic facilitators to engage students' feelings and learning interests. Findings from the field indicate that teachers are burdened by technocratic demands. Obligations to complete applications (such as the PMM/Merdeka Mengajar Platform, E-Kinerja), complete supporting evidence for accreditation administration, and submit BOS reports require teachers to spend their time in front of their laptops, rather than with their students. Ultimately, policies are designed to simplify these tasks, rather than increase the burden of high performance and morale.

2. The Phenomenon of "Administration as Evidence of Performance."

The current teacher performance evaluation system is more based on administrative compliance (*compliance*) rather than actual classroom impact. Field findings suggest that teacher quality is often measured by the completeness of documentation (perfect lesson plans/teaching modules, training certificates) rather than by the quality of classroom interactions. Teachers who are busy interacting with students but who are behind on their administration are often considered poor performers, while teachers who are well-organized in their administration but rarely mentally present in class actually receive good marks.

3. Digitalization that "Adds to the Burden", not reduces it

The initial idea behind digitizing administration was efficiency, but findings suggest otherwise. Field findings often involve simply transferring piles of paper into digital format without simplifying the process. Teachers

experience *technostress* because they have to learn various reporting applications whose features often change, which ironically takes up their teaching preparation time.

3.2.3 Trapped in a Culture of Performativity

Quoting Stephen Ball, current education policies create a culture of performativity. A critical analysis of our education policy forces teachers to "appear" in both data and documents to appear to be working. Teachers' energy is spent producing evidence of their work (photos of activities, reports, certificates), rather than doing the work itself (educating). This impacts humanism and psychological *well-being*. This is something that teachers desperately need when educating. Teachers can be given unstructured space and time to open discussions with students, listen to their concerns, observe behavior, and engage in critical dialogue, so that this humanism is not merely jargon and a mere necessity. Activities tend to be difficult to document in standard administrative formats because they require personal space and a conducive environment for mentoring and organically gathering the necessary information. If this is ignored, the humanistic aspect becomes merely a formality and is not counted toward the teacher's performance goals. Pseudo-Humanism in policy Demanding teachers to be humanists without providing space (time and autonomy) is a form of pseudo-humanism or pseudo-humanism. The paradox of government policy is that it requires teachers to "liberate students," yet teachers themselves are "colonized" by the administration. How can a teacher who is stressed, exhausted, and pressured by administrative deadlines be able to be a warm, patient, and empathetic figure for their students? Thus, low emotional connection can trigger administrative burnout, causing teachers to experience emotional exhaustion as a result, interactions with students become transactional ("the important thing is to convey the material") and lose their personal touch. The existence of *the* myth "Super-Teacher" constructs the figure of the teacher as a "superhuman" who is able to be a philosophical educator in the morning and a reliable bureaucratic administrator in the afternoon. The reality is that human cognitive and emotional capacities are limited. When cognitive workloads are exhausted by managing administrative complexity, the capacity for empathy (the essence of humanism) declines. This policy fails to acknowledge the human limitations of teachers themselves.

4. CONCLUSION

An analysis of education policy through the lens of humanist philosophy demonstrates the importance of policy relevance to societal needs by simplifying policy to reflect the reality of teacher workloads. By identifying gaps between policy and practice, this study provides recommendations that can help create a better and more responsive education system. The study's findings indicate that the current pendulum of education policy is indeed tilted too heavily toward market pragmatism (the needs of the workplace). Indicators of educational success are overly dominated by workforce absorption and graduate income, which indirectly undermines the role of education as a process of humanization (the formation of character, ethics, and wisdom). However, the solution is not to reject market needs. Education must restore its essence by integrating humanistic values into skills education. Work skills are humanistic values that can act as a protective shield against the world, but human values are the "soul" that drives it. Without the soul, the essence of education is merely an empty, meaningless glass; without humanistic values, the soul is unprotected in the VUCA era. Technology in the VUCA era is like a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, it is a liberator that democratizes access to knowledge for everyone. However, on the other hand, if not managed with appropriate pedagogy, it has the potential to become an insulator that erodes emotional interaction and reduces education to mere data transactions. The essence of humanism is not lost because of technology itself, but because we often replace the role of teachers with technology, when technology should only be a tool for teachers to expand their humanitarian impact. Future education must restore the "soul" to the digital space to be present as an ethic and protector of students' humanistic values. The study concluded that current education policy is experiencing a disorientation of priorities, requiring a further strategy from stakeholders to sit together on specific issues addressing teacher workload and teacher psychological well-being. The demands of humanism are merely jargon on the surface, while the underlying policy actually strengthens administrative shackles. This policy creates a crisis of authenticity where teachers are forced to choose between being "good administrators" (favored by the system) or "good educators" (favored by students). Ideally, administration should be a minimal support system, not an end in itself that consumes teachers' primary resources: time and attention for students. This research is also expected to inform considerations about education policies that fail to consider local contexts and student needs. This leads to dissatisfaction among educators and students. This research recommends that education policies be more inclusive and responsive to community needs. This includes involving communities in decision-making processes and adapting curricula to reflect humanistic values.

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