

Educational Philosophies: Behaviorism and Progressivism in the Context of Modern Christian Religious Education

Simson Mau Kawa¹, Solly R. Tanono², Senia E. Oematan³, Siska Polli⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Kupang

Article

Article history:

Accepted: 23 Januari 2026

Publish: 01 Februari 2026

Keywords:

Behaviorism;
Modern;
Education;
Progressivism;
Students;

Abstract

In the dynamic era of modern education, the educational philosophy of behaviorism and progressivism offers a different approach that remains relevant in the modern education system (Khosiah et al., 2024). Behaviorism, pioneered by John Watson and B.F. Skinner, considers learning as a change in behavior due to stimulus and response. In practice, students are trained through repeated practice, rewards for positive actions, and definite assessment of results. This research is used to learn more about standardized tests, digital learning platforms and competency-based curricula to develop students' basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic. On the other hand, progressivism pioneered by John Dewey emphasized learning through direct experience and children's interests. Children learn by doing projects, having group discussions, and solving everyday problems. The teacher's role is more as a guide, not just delivering material, so that students can grow creative, independent, and able to work together in a democratic environment. Thus, in the current Indonesian educational context, for example in the Independent Curriculum, it can be seen that these two streams complement each other (Parwati, 2023). Therefore, behaviorism can help education achieve learning outcomes through technology, while progressivism encourages learning based on local culture, group work and character development. This combination prepares students to face the digital world, work challenges, and a harmonious and inclusive society.

This is an open access article under the [Lisensi Creative Commons Atribusi-BerbagiSerupa 4.0 Internasional](#)



Corresponding Author:

Simson Mau Kawa

Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Kupang

Email Coresspondent: maukawasimson@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (PAK) in Indonesia currently stands at an interesting and challenging crossroads. On the one hand, PAK is called to remain faithful to its biblical mandate, namely to lead students to "grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18) and equip them with a solid Christian worldview in an increasingly secular and pluralistic world. On the other hand, PAK cannot ignore developments in modern science, psychology, and pedagogy, which have produced various schools of educational philosophy proven effective in improving the teaching and learning process. This tension has become increasingly pronounced since the late 20th century, when Christian schools and theological educational institutions in Indonesia began to be massively exposed to Western curricula, methods, and educational theories through international collaboration, translated books, teacher training, and the influence of educational globalization (Wahyuni, 2021).

The two schools of educational philosophy that have most influenced contemporary Christian Education practice are behaviorism and progressivism. Behaviorism, pioneered by figures such as John B. Watson, B.F. Skinner and Ivan Pavlov emphasize the formation of behavior through

stimulation, response, and reinforcement. In many Christian schools, this approach is seen in the use of point systems, rewards and punishments, Bible verse memorization drills, and the habituation of regular worship. Although proven effective in creating discipline and spiritual habits, this approach is often criticized for tending to ignore the inner dimension, the motives of the heart, and the personal relationship with God, resulting in spiritual formation being purely mechanical and extrinsic.

Meanwhile, progressivism, initiated by John Dewey and further developed by his followers, places the child at the center of education. Learning must stem from the students' interests, experiences, and real needs; the teacher acts as a facilitator, not the sole source of truth. In many modern Christian schools, especially those adopting a competency-based curriculum or an active-creative approach, this progressive nuance is very strong: project-based learning, group discussions, problem-based learning, and portfolio assessments. However, when progressivism is applied excessively, concerns arise that normative and authoritative biblical truth becomes relative, excessive tolerance replaces the call to repentance, and children's individualism displaces obedience to the absolute word of God.

By examining both schools of thought from a Christian theological perspective (particularly the doctrine of sinful humanity created in the image of God, the sovereignty of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit), the author hopes this paper can provide a balanced framework for Christian Religious Education teachers, Christian school principals, religious education lecturers, and parents, as well as servants of God involved in child and youth ministry. Ultimately, the implementation of educational philosophy schools in Christian Religious Education is not merely a matter of teaching techniques, but rather a matter of faithfulness to Christ's call to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19-20) in a way that is relevant to today's generation, while remaining steadfast in eternal truth.

2. METHODOLOGY

In writing this article, the method used is a simple literature review. The approach used a qualitative approach: Collecting data through books and scientific articles in the last five years that contain Skinner in behaviorism (learning through rewards, punishment, and repeated practice so that learning outcomes can be clearly measured) and Dewey in progressivism (learning from real experiences, fun projects, and children's interests to be creative).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Basic Concepts of the Behaviorism and Progressivism Philosophies

The Behaviorist school of philosophy emphasizes behavioral change as a result of the interaction between stimuli and responses that can be observed and measured objectively. In the Behaviorist view, learning is a process of behavioral change caused by experience and environmental influences, not by internal processes such as thoughts or feelings. Learners are viewed as reactive beings who require reinforcement from educators so that their behavior develops according to learning objectives. Behaviorist learning methods are highly structured, focusing on providing stimuli, repeated practice, and providing feedback to reinforce desired responses (Huda et al., 2023).

A. Basic Concepts of Behaviorism

Behaviorism views learning as occurring through a stimulus-response relationship, where the teacher acts as the stimulus provider and the learner responds accordingly. This theory emphasizes the importance of the environment in shaping behavior, as well as the role of reinforcement and punishment in strengthening or weakening certain behaviors. The three main laws of behaviorism are the law of readiness (learning is successful if the learner is ready to respond), the law of practice (the more practice, the stronger the behavior), and the law of effect (behavior will be strengthened if given a positive reward).

B. Basic Concepts of Progressivism

The Progressivism philosophy emphasizes the importance of direct experience, creativity, and individual freedom in the learning process. Progressivism believes that education should be relevant to real life and encourages students to actively seek knowledge through experimentation and discussion, rather than simply receiving information from teachers. In the Progressivism view, teachers are not the sole source of knowledge, but rather facilitators who help students develop their potential and think critically (Masdar & Ismail, 2025).

Differences between Behaviorism and Progressivism

- Behaviorism focuses on observable changes in behavior, while progressivism emphasizes experience and personal development.

In behaviorism, students are passive and wait for stimulus from the teacher, whereas in progressivism, students actively seek knowledge.

Behaviorism uses structured, practice-based methods, while progressivism encourages contextual and creative learning.

These two schools offer different approaches to education, with behaviorism emphasizing the control of behavior through the environment, while progressivism prioritizes experience and individual freedom in the learning process.

Key Figures and Important Ideas in the Behaviorism and Progressivism Philosophies

1. Main Figures and Ideas of Behaviorism

Behaviorism emphasizes that human behavior can be understood and changed through the interaction between stimulus and response, as well as external experiences.

- ❖ Ivan Pavlov: Known for his theory of Classical Conditioning, namely the formation of associations between stimulus and response.
- ❖ John B. Watson: Known as the “Father of Behaviorism”, introduced a scientific approach to human behavior through stimulus-response.
- ❖ Edward Thorndike: Developed the law of effect, the law of exercise, and the law of readiness in learning.
- ❖ B.F. Skinner: Developed the concept of Operant Conditioning, namely reinforcement and punishment to shape behavior.
- ❖ Albert Bandura: Introduced the concept of observational learning (learning through observation).

The main idea of Behaviorism is that behavior can be measured, observed, and influenced by the environment, and can be strengthened or weakened through reinforcement and punishment (Dewi & Prabadevi, 2025).

2. Main Figures and Ideas of Progressivism

Progressivism in education emphasizes the importance of students' interests, freedom, and direct experience in the learning process.

- ❖ John Dewey, A key figure in Progressivism, emphasized student-centered education, relevance to real life, and encouraged hands-on experience and critical thinking.
- ❖ William James, one of the founders of the pragmatist school, which became the basis of progressive thinking, emphasized the importance of psychology in education (Sari, 2023).

Implementation of Behaviorism in General Education

Behaviorism has been highly influential in modern educational practice because it provides concrete strategies for shaping desired behavior. Its implementation includes the following:

1. Class Management through Reinforcement

Teachers use reward systems to encourage positive student behavior. Reinforcement can take the form of verbal praise, points or stars, certificates, or opportunities to receive

certain benefits. Through reinforcement, students learn that good behavior results in positive consequences, encouraging them to repeat it.

2. Formation of Study Habits

Behaviorism is used to build learning routines such as:

orderly class preparation, a “come to class – ready to learn – do assignments” system, and a consistent learning schedule. Through habituation, students develop discipline and an awareness of academic responsibility.

3. Conditioning as a Learning Strategy

Teachers can create a classroom atmosphere that makes students comfortable and motivated. For example, light music at the start of a lesson can create positive associations, and greeting routines and initial interactions can stimulate mental readiness.

4. Programmed and Systematic Learning

By following Skinner's concept:

Learning materials are divided into small units, students receive rapid feedback, and errors are corrected promptly to prevent them from becoming bad habits. This approach helps improve the effectiveness of the learning process, especially in materials that require precision (Darmayanti et al., 2024).

Implementation of Progressivism in General Education

The implementation of progressivism in general education emphasizes a democratic, flexible, and student-centered approach. The primary goal of progressivism is to transform educational practices that tend toward authoritarianism into ones that value individual potential and abilities, and encourage active, real-life learning.

A. Basic Principles of Progressivism

Progressivism emphasizes the importance of direct experience as the primary learning resource. Students are given the freedom to develop their talents and interests naturally, making the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding, directing, and supporting students in constructing their own knowledge, rather than as the sole source of knowledge.

B. Implementation in Educational Practice

In the classroom, progressive education encourages the use of learning methods such as project-based learning, group discussions, and hands-on activities that actively engage students. The curriculum is more flexible and can be tailored to each student's interests, needs, and learning style. Schools also serve as educational laboratories, where students can experiment, collaborate, and develop social and emotional skills.

C. Skill and Character Development

Progressive education emphasizes not only mastery of academic knowledge but also the development of 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, and effective communication. Through collaborative learning and real-world problem-solving, students are trained to become resilient, independent individuals capable of facing life's challenges (Rahma et al., 2022).

Analysis of the Application of Behaviorism and Progressivism in PAK Philosophy

Behaviorism and progressivism are two schools of educational philosophy that play a significant role in the development of Christian Religious Education (PAK), with differing approaches and objectives. Behaviorism emphasizes environmental influences through stimuli and responses to shape student behavior in a measurable and objective manner. Meanwhile, progressivism focuses on learning experiences relevant to real life and the active development of critical thinking skills and creativity in students.

1. Analysis of the Application of Behaviorism in PAK Philosophy

Behaviorism is based on the principle that human behavior can be learned and changed through interaction with the environment through stimulus and response. In the context of Christian religious education (PAK) philosophy, behaviorism is applied by repeatedly instilling religious values using positive and negative reinforcement. For example, teachers provide stimuli in the form of religious teachings or commands, then consistently provide rewards in the form of praise or punishment as reinforcement, so that behavior in line with Christian values is firmly established in students.

This approach positions the teacher as the primary controller of the learning process, where students are viewed as objects responding to the teacher's stimuli. In Christian Religious Education (PAK) learning, the application of behaviorism focuses on cultivating good behaviors such as prayer, worship, and behaving according to Christian morals through consistent training and repetition. This process is carried out until these behaviors become habitual and automatic in the students. The use of a structured curriculum and programmed teaching are hallmarks of behaviorism in PAK, providing clear boundaries regarding learning objectives and desired outcomes.

2. Analysis of the Application of Progressivism in PAK Philosophy

Progressivism emphasizes student-centered learning with active and contextual learning experiences. In Christian religious education, progressivism encourages students to learn through direct experience and reflection on Christian values as they experience them in their daily lives. This can take the form of group discussions, biblical case studies, and the application of teachings in concrete actions, aimed at shaping character and holistic self-development. In Christian Religious Education philosophy, progressivism expresses the value that education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but rather the process of developing critical thinking skills, creativity, and moral decision-making in accordance with Christian teachings. Teachers act as facilitators who help students discover and internalize religious values through concrete experiences. This progressive learning adapts material to the needs, interests, and context of students so that learning becomes more meaningful and effective in shaping spiritually and socially responsible characters.

3. Relevance of Material in PAK Philosophy

In the application of Christian Religious Education in schools or church education, behaviorism is used to form the habit of prayer, discipline in Christian morals, or obedience to God's commands through repetition and positive reinforcement. Meanwhile, progressivism is relevant in forming a deep understanding of the Bible and Christian teachings that are applicable in life, as well as developing critical thinking skills in making ethical decisions in everyday life. With the synergy of these two philosophies, Christian Religious Education not only emphasizes the normative aspect and habituation of values, but also the aspect of active and responsible character development. So that Christian religious education becomes a holistic learning process, preparing students as people of faith and behavior according to the guidance of the Christian faith in a modern context.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Behaviorism in Christian Religious Education

1. The advantage of behaviorism in Christian education is its ability to shape and habituate positive behavior through reinforcement (e.g., praise and rewards) and repetition, which can help children develop spiritual habits such as prayer and Bible reading. This aligns with the principle of concrete, accessible learning for children within the context of the Christian faith (Munthe et al., 2024).

2. The downside is that behaviorism tends to only change outward behavior without addressing the inner motivation and spiritual aspects essential to Christian education. The use of punishment or negative reinforcement, if not accompanied by love and understanding, can contradict the principle of love in Christian teaching.
3. The implementation of behaviorism must be done wisely, not mechanistically, and integrated with an approach that touches on the growth of faith holistically, imitating Jesus' example in educating with love and patience.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Progressivism in Christian Religious Education

1. Progressivism emphasizes direct experience, the development of individual potential, and contextual learning that is responsive to children's development, which is highly relevant in forming authentic and critical Christian character.
2. The advantage of progressivism is that it helps students become active participants in learning about faith, developing creativity, and a reflective understanding of biblical values.
3. The downside is that, if not managed properly, progressivism can ignore the clear doctrinal aspects and authority of faith, so it needs to be balanced with teachings that explicitly emphasize biblical truth (Londo & Supit, 2024).

The Bible's View of Behaviorism and Progressivism

The Bible supports the formation of good behavior through teaching and habituation as in Proverbs 22:6, which emphasizes early education to form a good way of life. However, the Bible also emphasizes the importance of a change of heart and inner motivation, not just outward behavior (Isaiah 29:13, Jeremiah 17:9), so that internal and spiritual aspects must be the main focus in Christian education. Progressivism that encourages active and reflective learning is in accordance with Christian principles to cultivate wisdom and understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6), but education must remain adhering to the truth of God's Word so as not to deviate (Legi, 2022).

Thus, behaviorism and progressivism have advantages and disadvantages that need to be aligned with Christian values. Ideally, Christian education combines both with a strong spiritual touch to holistically shape students' character and a vibrant, wholesome faith.

4. CONCLUSION

Christian Religious Education (PAK) in Indonesia faces the challenge of integrating developments in modern educational philosophy with the theological call to build strong character and faith. Behaviorism and progressivism, two major schools of thought, make important contributions but also have limitations in the context of Christian Religious Education. Behaviorism is effective in forming concrete spiritual habits and behaviors through repetition and reinforcement, but it fails to address the inner and spiritual aspects essential for faith growth. Progressivism, on the other hand, encourages active participation, creativity, and critical reflection, thus helping students meaningfully internalize Christian values. However, if not balanced with an affirmation of biblical truth, progressivism can potentially obscure the authority of God's Word. The biblical perspective demands education that not only shapes outward behavior but also transforms hearts and inner motivations by placing God's Word as the absolute foundation. Therefore, combining the principles of behaviorism and progressivism with a spiritual and theological touch is crucial to producing learning that is holistic, relevant, and faithful to Christ's calling. Thus, this article can provide a deep understanding of Christian Religious Education, because the ideal PAK is one that is able to utilize

the strengths of both in a balanced and directed manner, thus forming students who not only behave correctly, but also have a living faith and responsible Christian character in everyday life.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ for His abundant grace, which made it possible for this research to be successfully completed. We express our deepest gratitude to the lecturers in the philosophy of education course who have provided guidance, valuable input, and full support throughout the writing process. We also thank our fellow students at the Kupang State Christian Institute for sharing ideas and references. We also thank the librarians and friends who helped collect the literature review data. We hope this work will be beneficial for the development of modern Christian Religious Education. God bless us all. Amen.

6. REFERENCES

Darmayanti, R., Sukriyah, Y., Sahara, N., Suprayitno, K., & Susetyarini, R. E. (2024). *Behaviorisme dalam pendidikan: Pembelajaran berbasis stimulus-respon*. Penerbit Adab.

Dewi, I. A. D. K., & Prabadevi, D. A. A. (2025). Aliran behaviorisme dalam psikologi. *PsyEcho Journal of Psychology*, 2(1), 31–39.

Huda, M., Fawaid, A., & Slamet, S. (2023). Implementasi teori belajar behavioristik dalam proses pembelajaran. *Pendekar: Jurnal Pendidikan Berkarakter*, 1(4), 64–72.

Khosiah, N., Salsabila, A., Widodo, J., & Malang, U. M. (2024). Pokok pemikiran filsafat pendidikan zaman modern. *IMTIYAZ: Jurnal Ilmu Keislaman*, 8, 458–478.

Legi, H. (2022). *Moral, Karakter Dan Disiplin Dalam Pendidikan Agama Kristen*. Edu Publisher.

Londo, E. E., & Supit, S. (2024). Pendidikan Agama Kristen di Era Digital: Perspektif Progresivisme. *AISTHETIKOS Jurnal Ilmu Teologi Dan Seni*, 1(2), 10–19.

Masdar, R., & Ismail, I. (2025). Landasan Filsafat Progresivisme dalam Pengembangan Kompetensi Peserta Didik Abad-21. *JIIP-Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 8(1), 350–356.

Munthe, H. P., Takasowa, A. G. T., Roleh, A. E. R., Thomas, Y. I., & Maameah, E. A. (2024). PENERAPAN TEORI BELAJAR BEHAVIORISTIK TERHADAP KEAKTIFAN PADA ANAK SEKOLAH MINGGU DI GMIM “DAMAI” BUKIT MORIA SINGKIL. *MATA GURU: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Tenaga Kependidikan*, 1(1), 26–37.

Parwati, N. P. Y. (2023). Sinergi dan Tantangan: Kajian Kritis Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Bingkai Aliran Filsafat Pendidikan dan Filosofi Ki Hajar Dewantara": Synergy and Challenges: Critical Study of the Independent Curriculum in the Frame of the Philosophy of Education and the Philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara. *Prodiksema*, 2(2), 192–210.

Rahma, A. N., Rohmah, H., & Bakar, M. Y. A. (2022). Implementasi aliran progresivisme dalam pembelajaran menurut filsafat pendidikan dan perkembangan kurikulum di Indonesia. *An-Nidzam: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam*, 9(2), 219–242.

Sari, H. P. (2023). Pengembangan kurikulum merdeka belajar di sekolah dasar menurut aliran filsafat progresivisme. *El-Ibtidaiy: Journal of Primary Education*, 6(2), 131–141.

Wahyuni, S. (2021). *Peran guru pendidikan agama Kristen dalam membentuk karakter peserta didik*. Penerbit NEM.

Darmayanti, R., Sukriyah, Y., Sahara, N., Suprayitno, K., & Susetyarini, R. E. (2024). *Behaviorisme dalam pendidikan: Pembelajaran berbasis stimulus-respon*. Penerbit Adab.

Dewi, I. A. D. K., & Prabadevi, D. A. A. (2025). Aliran behaviorisme dalam psikologi. *PsyEcho Journal of Psychology*, 2(1), 31–39.

Huda, M., Fawaid, A., & Slamet, S. (2023). Implementasi teori belajar behavioristik dalam proses pembelajaran. *Pendekar: Jurnal Pendidikan Berkarakter*, 1(4), 64–72.

Khosiah, N., Salsabila, A., Widodo, J., & Malang, U. M. (2024). Pokok pemikiran filsafat pendidikan zaman modern. *IMTIYAZ: Jurnal Ilmu Keislaman*, 8, 458–478.

Legi, H. (2022). *Moral, Karakter Dan Disiplin Dalam Pendidikan Agama Kristen*. Edu Publisher.

Londo, E. E., & Supit, S. (2024). Pendidikan Agama Kristen di Era Digital: Perspektif Progresivisme. *AISTHETIKOS Jurnal Ilmu Teologi Dan Seni*, 1(2), 10–19.

Masdar, R., & Ismail, I. (2025). Landasan Filsafat Progresivisme dalam Pengembangan Kompetensi Peserta Didik Abad-21. *JIIP-Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 8(1), 350–356.

Munthe, H. P., Takasowa, A. G. T., Roleh, A. E. R., Thomas, Y. I., & Maameah, E. A. (2024). PENERAPAN TEORI BELAJAR BEHAVIORISTIK TERHADAP KEAKTIFAN PADA ANAK SEKOLAH MINGGU DI GMIM “DAMAI” BUKIT MORIA SINGKIL. *MATA GURU: Jurnal Pendidik Dan Tenaga Kependidikan*, 1(1), 26–37.

Parwati, N. P. Y. (2023). Sinergi dan Tantangan: Kajian Kritis Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Bingkai Aliran Filsafat Pendidikan dan Filosofi Ki Hajar Dewantara": Synergy and Challenges: Critical Study of the Independent Curriculum in the Frame of the Philosophy of Education and the Philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara. *ProdiKsema*, 2(2), 192–210.

Rahma, A. N., Rohmah, H., & Bakar, M. Y. A. (2022). Implementasi aliran progresivisme dalam pembelajaran menurut filsafat pendidikan dan perkembangan kurikulum di Indonesia. *An-Nidzam: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam*, 9(2), 219–242.

Sari, H. P. (2023). Pengembangan kurikulum merdeka belajar di sekolah dasar menurut aliran filsafat progresivisme. *El-Ibtidaiy: Journal of Primary Education*, 6(2), 131–141.

Wahyuni, S. (2021). *Peran guru pendidikan agama Kristen dalam membentuk karakter peserta didik*. Penerbit NEM.