Revisiting Pragmatism in Governance and Administration in Education: A Systematic Review in the Modern Era

[1]Reyzamae D. Sagandilan, MS , [2]Jay-ar A. Tino, MS , [3]Gladys S. Escarlos, PhD

[1]Instructor II, Don Carlos Polytechnic College, Philippines

[2]Teacher I, Kitubo National High School, Department of Education, Philippines

[3]Professor VI, College of Education, Central Mindanao University, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Pragmatism, rooted in the works of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, is a philosophical tradition that emphasizes the practical consequences of ideas and the evolving nature of truth. This paper examines the background of Pragmatism and its applicability in governance and administration within education, emphasizing its value as a flexible and results-oriented framework for policy and decision-making. Pragmatism promotes adaptability, collaboration, and evidence-based practices that prioritize real-world outcomes over rigid ideological or theoretical positions. Examples from the Philippines, such as participatory budgeting and the K–12 education reform, illustrate how pragmatic governance supports inclusivity, continuous learning, and policy relevance. However, the study also acknowledges key criticisms of Pragmatism, including its tendency toward relativism, moral inconsistency, and overemphasis on efficiency at the expense of justice. In the Philippine context, frequent policy shifts tied to political transitions reveal the risks of excessive flexibility and short-term focus. The paper concludes that while Pragmatism offers a valuable guide for responsive and innovative governance, it must be anchored in enduring ethical principles such as accountability, equity, and transparency. Balancing practicality with moral responsibility ensures that pragmatic governance and education remain both effective and just in promoting long-term societal development.
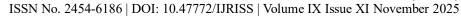
Keyword: Pragmatism, Governance, Administration, Education

Background Narrative of Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that emphasizes the practical application of ideas by assessing their truth through their practical consequences. Originating in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was primarily developed by thinkers such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. Pragmatism has significantly influenced various fields, including ethics, social science research, and governance, by promoting a flexible, problem-solving approach that values practical outcomes over abstract principles. This philosophy promotes a continuous process of inquiry and adaptation, making it applicable to contemporary issues in various domains.

However, modern Pragmatism as a formal philosophy originated with Charles Sanders Peirce (1839– 1914). For Peirce, Pragmatism was fundamentally a philosophy of meaning, asserting that the meaning of any concept applicable to reality is found in the relationship between its experiential conditions and observable outcomes. He believed that a proposition's meaning is determined by its practical, experiential consequences, assessed through observation. Focused on scientific inquiry and predictive accuracy, Peirce's Pragmatism stood in contrast to idealism, offering a pathway toward objective and impersonal standards of thought.

Although Charles Peirce laid the foundations of Pragmatism as a significant philosophical theory, it was William James (1842–1910) who popularized it through his highly influential 1907 book, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking. James redefined Pragmatism by introducing a more personal and subjective

interpretation of its principles. For him, pragmatic effectiveness was not confined to an abstract community of scientists but was grounded in the experiences of real, diverse individuals. According to James, truth is what reality compels people to believe, and it is determined by "what works" or "what pays" in the practical course of human life. Thus, truth is not discovered as a revelation but created through human experience and action.

John Dewey (1859–1952) further expanded Pragmatism, applying it to practical areas such as education and politics, thereby sustaining its influence in the United States until the Outbreak of World War II. Like Peirce, Dewey viewed inquiry as a continuous, self-correcting process that must adapt in response to new experiences. However, Dewey emphasized the social and communal nature of this process, grounded not solely in scientific reasoning but in the shared values and everyday dispositions of ordinary people. For Dewey, knowledge was not a static object of detached contemplation but a tool for purposeful action.

In essence, Peirce's Pragmatism was scientifically rigorous, James's was psychologically personal, and Dewey's was socially democratic. Today, the term pragmatism generally refers to a practical approach to thinking and problem-solving, one that prioritizes action and effectiveness. However, while Pragmatism has been influential, it has also faced criticism for its perceived lack of a solid theoretical core and methodological rigor. Critics argue that its flexible, non-systematic approach can lead to a dilution of philosophical rigor and coherence. Despite these critiques, Pragmatism's adaptability and focus on practical outcomes continue to make it a valuable perspective in addressing contemporary challenges across various disciplines. Hence, this paper gives a systematic review of Pragmatism and its application in modern governance and administration, particularly in the field of education. This study aims to revisit the applicability of the philosophy of Pragmatism to today's education in the modern world.

II. Pragmatism in Governance and Administration in Education

Pragmatism has evolved beyond its philosophical origins to become a guiding framework in education, governance, and administration, shaping how individuals and institutions address real-world challenges. Its emphasis on experience, reflection, and practical outcomes has transformed abstract ideas into actionable practices that promote progress and problem-solving. By highlighting the continuous interaction between thought and experience, Pragmatism enables education and leadership to respond dynamically to social, cultural, and institutional needs, addressing broader issues such as curriculum relevance, participatory governance, organizational efficiency, and community development.

In governance, this philosophy translates into adaptive leadership and policymaking that values outcomes, responsiveness, and inclusivity. It is a flexible, problem-solving approach that prioritizes practical outcomes over rigid adherence to formal rules or ideological purity (Yang et al., 2025). Administrators and leaders are challenged to base their decisions on evidence, stakeholder participation, and reflection, rather than rigid ideology or tradition. Pragmatism thus frames governance as an ongoing, evolving process rather than a static structure, a perspective that resonates strongly in a dynamic society like the Philippines.

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, where rigid governance structures often fail to address emerging challenges effectively, pragmatic governance allows for continuous learning and adjustment. This approach is characterized by adaptability, stakeholder collaboration, and a focus on real-world results. Supporting this view, Ansell (2022) highlights that Pragmatism values experimentation as a means to enhance governance outcomes, promoting policies that evolve through testing, reflection, and refinement rather than static, one-size-fits-all solutions. Thus, pragmatic governance fosters innovation, inclusivity, and evidence-based policymaking, ensuring that public institutions remain responsive to the needs of their constituents.

John Dewey emphasized that democracy should not be confined to elections but should be a "way of life" rooted in dialogue and shared problem-solving. In governance, this outlook encourages leaders to engage with citizens, adapt policies based on feedback, and adjust programs to emerging realities. The Philippines offers several examples of pragmatic governance. Participatory budgeting, institutionalized through the Bottom-Up Budgeting Program (BUB) of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), reflects pragmatist ideals by involving LGUs and civil society in identifying local projects that directly address community needs.

Similarly, in the context of education in the Philippines, the K–12 education reform embodies Pragmatism by aligning curricula with labor market requirements and global standards, showing how educational policies evolve to meet practical and real-world needs (Reyes, 2020). This reform represents a shift from purely theoretical instruction to competency-based learning, equipping students with practical skills that are relevant to the demands of the labor market and the global economy. By extending the basic education cycle and integrating contextualized curricula, the K–12 program, as an example, ensures that learning is not only meaningful but also applicable to everyday life and future employment.

Moreover, this reflects the pragmatic view of education and governance as dynamic, participatory, and outcome-oriented processes. Decision-making under this model involves continuous evaluation and adaptation, which is evident in the ongoing revisions of the K–12 curriculum and the broader efforts of the Philippine education system to implement timely and responsive changes. Thus, the K–12 reform embodies the essence of Pragmatism by promoting flexibility, collaboration, and the pursuit of practical results in shaping educational policy and practice. This pragmatic orientation acknowledges that education must continually adapt to social and economic changes, thereby fostering lifelong learning, creativity, and critical thinking among students. In essence, the K–12 reform demonstrates how educational policies grounded in Pragmatism can bridge the gap between schooling and societal needs, ensuring that education serves both individual development and national progress.

Furthermore, according to the Kenyan Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) study by Mugambi (2022), it emphasizes that Pragmatism in education governance and administration focuses on reforming the curriculum to meet real-world demands. It advocates for learner engagement and the utilization of prior experiences to create empowered citizens. It recommends that to fully actualize the new curriculum, increased funding should be initiated from the budget-making desk to support additional facilities, resources, and teacher development, ensuring that the principles of Pragmatism are effectively integrated into the CBC framework.

Another study by Diago & Bercedo Páramo (2023) highlighted the role of Pragmatism in governance and administration within education, emphasizing its potential to address contemporary societal challenges. It underscores the importance of cooperative and associative approaches, as advocated by Dewey, which facilitate equal participation and flexible institutional adjustments. Pragmatism encourages the resolution of common problems through collaborative efforts among individuals, communities, and institutions, thereby enhancing educational governance in democratic contexts. This perspective fosters a more responsive and effective educational system aligned with democratic ideals.

In another study by Maltsev (2023), although it focuses on Pragmatism in education rather than governance and administration, it discusses the philosophical foundations laid by C. Pierce, W. James, and J. Dewey, emphasizing principles such as critical thinking, dialogue, and experiential learning. The article concludes that Pragmatism, as a philosophy of education, offers valuable principles, including consensual practices, critical thinking, dialogue, and a focus on experiential learning, which can serve as a counterbalance to negative trends in education, such as commercialization and deprofessionalization.

III. Pragmatism in Educational Policy Implementation

Pragmatism provides a flexible and experience-centered framework for implementing educational policies, emphasizing adaptability, responsiveness, and real-world relevance over rigid adherence to fixed doctrine. It allows educational reforms to remain aligned with changing social, economic, and technological conditions. For instance, similar to the study of Mugambi (2022) on the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya which incorporates pragmatic principles to ensure education remains relevant and functional in the face of economic and social changes, the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia also emphasizes experience-based learning, aligning with Dewey's Pragmatism to develop students' competencies in a rapidly changing world (Ubaidillah et al., 2024). The curriculum encourages learners to engage in problem-solving tasks, collaborative projects, and reflection, allowing them to connect academic content with real-life situations. It focuses on competencies relevant to today's rapidly changing world, such as creativity, adaptability, and interpersonal skills.

Beyond adaptability, Pragmatism fosters collaboration among stakeholders, which is essential for effective policy implementation. In contexts such as Yemen, the resilience of local actors and communities demonstrates the

importance of community-driven mechanisms, especially in the absence of centralized governance (Hezam et al., 2025). Such an approach ensures that policies are grounded in the realities of the communities they aim to serve. Strategic recommendations from these contexts often include decentralized governance, international partnerships, and targeted investment in teacher development and school reconstruction to bridge the gap between policy design and practice.

Moreover, Pragmatism promotes iterative feedback and continuous improvement, enabling educators and policymakers to refine strategies based on evidence and contextual outcomes. Fullan (2019) emphasizes that successful educational reform relies on adaptive leadership, reflective practice, and evidence-based decisionmaking, principles that closely align with pragmatist thought. By integrating flexibility, collaboration, and reflective evaluation, Pragmatism ensures that educational policies remain practical, relevant, and effective in addressing the dynamic needs of learners.

IV. Critics Of Pragmatism

Despite its broad applicability, Pragmatism has drawn significant criticism from philosophers and scholars. One of the most common critiques is its tendency toward relativism. By defining truth as "what works" in practice, Pragmatism risks reducing truth to mere expediency, potentially undermining stable moral and epistemological foundations. Tracing back, Barrett (1958) warned that such an orientation could lead to "an era of expediency," in which truth becomes dependent upon convenience rather than enduring principles. Even Rorty (1999), a leading neo-pragmatist, acknowledged this internal tension, noting that Pragmatism often struggles to provide a consistent moral foundation beyond immediate utility. He argued that when truth is equated with what "works," philosophical commitment to long-term vision and moral depth may be sacrificed for short-term effectiveness. Dewey (1927) himself recognized this danger, emphasizing that practical inquiry must remain grounded in moral responsibility; otherwise, Pragmatism could devolve into opportunism rather than a philosophy of intelligent action.

This concern is evident in the Philippine socio-political landscape, where policies often shift according to changes in political leadership (Ball & Bowe, 1992; Tadem & Tadem, 2020). Government programs are sometimes discontinued or modified before their long-term benefits can be realized, reflecting a pragmatic but short-sighted approach. For instance, educational reforms and agricultural initiatives may be restructured with each new administration, revealing the tension between practical adaptation and the need for consistent, principle-based governance.

Furthermore, in the Philippine Education context, frequent adoption of new strategies, frameworks, or curricula sometimes lacks sustained ethical and empirical evaluation. Programs such as the K–12 curriculum or Outcome-Based Education (OBE) reforms, although grounded in pragmatic goals, have faced implementation inconsistencies due to shifting administrative priorities, highlighting how excessive flexibility can undermine long-term stability.

Studies show that the Philippine education system has moved relatively quickly from one reform wave to another, illustrating how the frequent adoption of new strategies or curricula, while well-intentioned and grounded in pragmatic aims, can undermine long-term stability and ethical consistency when sustained empirical evaluation and administrative continuity are lacking. For example, a systematic review by Cabaya et al. (2022) on the curriculum transition (from K–12 to the new "MATATAG" curriculum) identifies stakeholder perceptions, driving factors, and reform fatigue. Such rapid transitions create a landscape where educators and administrators may not fully adapt to one reform before the next arrives.

In terms of its implementation inconsistency, multiple reviews highlight gaps in the K–12 program's implementation, including insufficient teacher training, inadequate infrastructure, resource disparities (especially between rural and urban schools), and misalignment with labor-market demands (Reyes, 2024). For instance, despite the policy framework, the actual classroom experiences often deviate substantially from intended curricula due to contextual constraints (Estrera, 2020).

While reforms are ambitious, the literature highlights a deficit in longitudinal, evidence-based evaluation. For example, a recent PIDS discussion paper questions whether the standard-setting reforms post-K–12 have resulted in improved minimum standards in higher education (Largoza & Fernandez, 2025). Additionally, a news article citing an EDCOM II national assessment notes persistent lagging performance in international assessments, such as PISA, which suggests a lack of effective monitoring of outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In both scholarly perspectives and local practices, it is suggested that Pragmatism makes a significant contribution to governance and administration by promoting adaptability, democratic participation, and evidence-based decision-making. Its strength lies in its flexibility, where leaders are encouraged to respond to emerging challenges, revise policies, and test ideas through practice.

Nonetheless, critics highlight the dangers of relativism and inconsistency. In the Philippines, where policies are often vulnerable to shifts in political leadership, Pragmatism's rejection of fixed principles can sometimes lead to policy discontinuity. To maximize its value, Pragmatism must be balanced with enduring ethical commitments such as transparency, accountability, and social justice. Anchoring pragmatic governance in ethical values ensures that it remains not only effective but also equitable. While Pragmatism encourages responsiveness and adaptability, it requires balancing with enduring ethical values to ensure that governance does not devolve into expediency at the expense of equity and justice.

REFERENCES

1. Ansell, C. (2022). Pragmatism (pp. 419–428). Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800371972.00046
2. Aparna, R. P. (2022). Pragmatism. Cognitio, 23(1), e51310. https://doi.org/10.23925/23165278.2022v23i1:e51310
3. Ball, S. J., & Bowe, R. (1992). Subject departments and the "implementation" of National Curriculum policy: An overview of the issues. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 24(2), 97–115.
4. Barrett, W. (1958). Irrational man: A study in existential philosophy. Doubleday.
5. Cabaya, J.D., Gerios, C.Q., Lano, J.B., & Valenzuela, E.B. (2022). From K–12 to MATATAG: A Systematic Review of the Factors Driving Curriculum Transition. Indonesian Journal of Education Research (IJoER), 6(4).
6. Diago, J., & Bercedo Páramo, P. (2023). Perspectivas educativas e investigativas del pragmatismo en sociedades democráticas. https://doi.org/10.19053/22160159.v14.n36.2023.14769
7. Estrera, E. B. (2020). A Perception-Based Curricular Review on the K to 12 HUMSS Strand curriculum. IAFOR Journal of Education, 8(4), 25–44. https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.8.4.02
8. Fullan, M. (2019). Leading in a culture of change. Jossey-Bass.
9. Haddaway, N. R., Page, M. J., Pritchard, C. C., & McGuinness, L. A. (2022). PRISMA2020: An R package and Shiny app for producing PRISMA 2020-compliant flow diagrams, with interactivity for optimised digital transparency and Open Synthesis Campbell Systematic Reviews, 18, e1230. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1230
10. Hezam, M. N. D., Mardani, D., Jahari, J., & Supiana, S. (2025). Educational Policy in Post-Crisis Yemen: Between Regulatory Ideals and Implementation Constraints. International Journal of
11. Education and Literature, 4(2), 78–85. https://doi.org/10.55606/ijel.v4i2.232
12. Largoza, G., & Fernandez, C. G. (2025, June). Review of CHED Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs) Pre- and Post-K to 12 reforms. https://doi.org/10.62986/dp2025.13
13. Maltsev, Y. (2023). Pragmatism in Education: Philosophical Foundations and Pedagogical Practice. Filosofskaâ Myslʹ, 7, 38–50. https://doi.org/10.25136/2409-8728.2023.7.40380
14. Mugambi, M. M. (2022). Application of Pragmatism to Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya: An Analysis of Basic Education Curriculum Framework. International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 05(10). https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/v5-i10-22

15. Prestwood, M. A. (2024, March 27). 30 Philosophers companion material: The 80 Touchstones | TouchstoneTruth.com. Retrieved from https://www.touchstonetruth.com/30-philosopherscompanion-material- the- 80-touchstones/

16. Reyes, V. C. (2020). Understanding K–12 education reform in the Philippines: A policy

17. borrowing approach. Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 40(2), 209–222. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2020.1725432

18. Reyes, R. (2024, January 5). Why is the Philippines' K to 12 Implementation Failing? - The

19. Filipino Tech Explainer. Retrieved from https://www.bobreyes.com/why-is-the-philippines-k-to12-implementation-failing/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

20. Tadem, T. S. E., & Tadem, E. C. (2020). Political dynasties and the Philippine state: Crafting policies for the poor. Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 39(1), 70–92.

21. Ubaidillah, S. R., Laili, W. R., Wahono, S. S., & Machfudi, Moch. I. (2024). Transformasi Kurikulum Merdeka Dalam Perspektif John Dewey. Indonesian Journal of Islamic Teaching, 7(2), 338– 350. https://doi.org/10.35719/ijit.v7i2.2208

22. Yang, M., Zhu, J., & Song, C. (2025). Pragmatism Versus Formalism: Theoretical Analysis and Reform Reflections on the Dilemmas of Modern Governance. 1(1), 117–141. https://doi.org/10.63802/pemr.v1.i1.100