



The Role of Nasr's Philosophy of Education in Addressing the Moral Crisis

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Abstract : *The persistent moral decline in contemporary education underscores the inadequacy of existing pedagogical frameworks and the need for innovative alternatives. This study explores Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophy of education as a novel paradigm for moral renewal, focusing on integrating ethical and spiritual values as the foundation of character formation. Using a qualitative conceptual design through a systematic literature review of Nasr's seminal works and relevant educational theories, the study identifies his holistic framework which harmonizes intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions as a robust basis for moral education. The findings demonstrate that Nasr's philosophy advances both theoretical discourse and provides practical insights for curriculum development, teacher training, and policy formulation. By bridging classical Islamic intellectual traditions with contemporary challenges, this study offers a contextually relevant and theoretically grounded model addressing the ethical and spiritual deficits of modern education, promoting learners who are ethically responsible, spiritually aware, and intellectually prepared for today's complex society.*

Keywords: Philosophy of Education; Moral; Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

INTRODUCTION

The persistent moral and spiritual crisis in modern education has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges for educators and policymakers across the globe. Despite the unprecedented achievements in science, technology, and educational access, many contemporary educational systems continue to face severe criticism for neglecting the ethical and spiritual dimensions of human formation. The result is an observable decline in moral integrity, a weakening of character formation, and a growing sense of spiritual emptiness among students. This disjunction exposes a fundamental gap between the dominant objectives of modern education largely oriented toward technical skills and instrumental outcomes and the Islamic vision of *insan kamil*, the perfected human being who embodies a holistic balance of intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions

(Slamet Pamuji, 2024). Within this context, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophy of education offers an alternative paradigm that foregrounds the integration of spirituality and morality into the core of the educational process. His critique of secular and reductionist models of learning underscores the dangers of divorcing knowledge from its metaphysical and ethical foundations, which, he argues, inevitably leads to superficial intellectualism devoid of moral substance (Juwita et al., 2023).

Although the critique of modern education's ethical shortcomings has been widely discussed in both Western and Islamic scholarship, the responses have often remained fragmented, abstract, and limited in practical implications. A comprehensive body of literature has engaged with Nasr's perennial philosophy, highlighting his critique of scientism, materialism, and secularization as detrimental to the cultivation of holistic human beings. Yet, most of these works remain either descriptive or theoretical, primarily restating Nasr's criticisms or reiterating the importance of spirituality in education, without systematically analyzing how his philosophy can be operationalized in concrete educational settings. Specifically, very few studies have examined how Nasr's ideas could inform character formation and moral development within Islamic schooling environments today (Akhsanudin, 2024). The lack of empirical application and pedagogical frameworks rooted in Nasr's thought represents a significant research gap. While educational reforms in various Muslim societies continue to grapple with balancing tradition and modernity, the integration of Nasr's philosophy into curriculum development, teaching methods, and teacher formation remains an underexplored and underdeveloped field.

The present study emerges from the recognition of this gap. Its novelty lies not merely in revisiting Nasr's philosophical critiques but in critically evaluating and contextualizing his ideas within the framework of contemporary Islamic education. This research endeavors to systematically examine how Nasr's philosophy, with its emphasis on the unity of knowledge (*al-tawhid*) and the integration of *scientia sacra* (sacred knowledge), can provide practical guidance for addressing the ongoing moral crisis. By situating Nasr's perennial philosophy within the discourse of educational reform, this study aims to bridge the divide between theoretical reflection and educational praxis. Such an approach offers twofold contributions. First, it enriches the scholarly discourse on Islamic educational philosophy by positioning Nasr's thought as a viable alternative to dominant secular and instrumentalist models. In doing so, it reclaims the significance of spirituality and morality as integral to education, rather than treating them as supplementary or peripheral concerns.

Second, it provides strategic recommendations for policymakers, curriculum developers, and practitioners within Islamic educational institutions. These recommendations emphasize the role of educators not as mere transmitters of knowledge but as moral and spiritual mentors responsible for holistic

character formation. The importance of this study, therefore, extends beyond abstract philosophical debates. By operationalizing Nasr's educational philosophy in relation to moral education, it seeks to address urgent challenges posed by globalization, technological acceleration, and cultural homogenization. These forces often exacerbate ethical erosion, social fragmentation, and spiritual vacuity, particularly among younger generations. Nasr's emphasis on preserving the Islamic intellectual and spiritual heritage while engaging with contemporary realities provides a meaningful framework for navigating these challenges. His notion of education as *tarbiyah* a comprehensive process aimed at cultivating the soul offers a counter narrative to mechanistic, knowledge transfer models prevalent in current educational practices. Furthermore, by aligning his perennial insights with the objectives of modern Islamic educational reforms, this study aspires to contribute to the cultivation of *insan kamil*: morally grounded, spiritually aware, and intellectually capable individuals prepared to engage responsibly with the complexities of modern society (Subagiya, 2023).

In conclusion, the sustained moral and spiritual crisis in contemporary education calls for a transformative philosophical framework that integrates intellect, morality, and spirituality. Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perennial philosophy, rooted in traditional Islamic wisdom and informed by critiques of modern secular paradigms, offers a unique and compelling alternative. This study aims to explore Nasr's educational philosophy in depth, evaluate its relevance to modern Islamic education, and propose pathways for its practical application in curricula, pedagogy, and institutional reform. By addressing the gaps between theory and practice, this research intends to enrich academic discourse while also providing practical guidance for educators and policymakers. Ultimately, it seeks to advance an educational paradigm that not only develops intellectual competence but also nurtures moral integrity and spiritual awareness qualities indispensable for the flourishing of humanity in the 21st century.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review to analyze Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophy of education and its relevance in addressing the contemporary moral crisis. A literature based method is deemed appropriate, as the study focuses on a philosophical and conceptual problem that requires in depth engagement with primary texts and critical interpretations rather than empirical measurement. The research identifies three core conceptual variables: (1) spiritual values, (2) ethical dimensions, and (3) the intellectual-moral integration within education (Subagiya, 2023). The primary research instrument is a systematic literature review sheet designed to evaluate, categorize, and synthesize theoretical data from primary and secondary sources. Data were collected from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, using targeted keywords such as "Seyyed Hossein Nasr,"

“philosophy of education,” and “moral education.” The inclusion criteria consist of primary sources (Nasr’s original works) and secondary sources (peer reviewed journal articles, academic books, and dissertations) that directly address Nasr’s educational thought or the moral–spiritual dimension of education.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis involving three phases: text unitization, thematic coding, and categorization to construct conceptual patterns. Although statistical techniques are not applied, the design ensures analytical rigor and replicability through systematic coding, source triangulation, and peer review. The scope of this study is limited to examining Nasr’s philosophy in the context of Islamic educational discourse without engaging in comparative analysis with other philosophers. By structuring the method transparently and setting clear boundaries, this study provides a replicable framework for future philosophical and educational research on moral and spiritual integration (Abdurrahman, 2024).

RESEARCH RESULTS and DISCUSSION

1. Biography of Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (born 1933, Tehran) was raised in a family deeply rooted in intellectual and religious traditions, which profoundly shaped his later thought. His early education in the United States, including studies in science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and advanced training in geology and physics at Harvard University, exposed him to modern scientific paradigms while simultaneously deepening his engagement with philosophy and the history of science (Annur, 2014). This dual exposure to Western scientific traditions and the Islamic intellectual heritage laid the foundation of his educational philosophy, which emphasizes the integration of rational inquiry with spiritual and ethical dimensions.

As one of the leading contemporary Muslim philosophers, Nasr has consistently underlined the urgency of preserving traditional Islamic wisdom while engaging critically with modernity, particularly in the fields of metaphysics, the history of science, and spirituality (Juwita et al., 2023). His thought provides a conceptual framework highly relevant to contemporary education, particularly in addressing the moral and intellectual crisis by restoring the balance between scientific knowledge and sacred values as the foundation of human development. Thus, Nasr’s life experience and academic background not only shaped his philosophical identity but also provided a significant foundation for his contributions in articulating an educational paradigm that unites intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions under the guidance of divine knowledge.

2. The Concept of Philosophy of Education according to Sayyed Hossein Nasr

a. The Meaning of Philosophy according to Sayyed Hossein Nasr

Seyyed Hossein Nasr conceives philosophy as *philosophia perennis* a universal and timeless wisdom grounded in the Divine Reality. For him, authentic philosophy transcends abstract reasoning or speculative discourse; it constitutes an intellectual and spiritual journey that unites human reason with divine revelation. In this perspective, philosophy is not a merely rational exercise but a transformative discipline that integrates metaphysical, ethical, and spiritual dimensions into a holistic framework of sacred knowledge (Heer & Nasr, 1993).

According to Nasr, the crisis of modern civilization, particularly in the West, arises from its estrangement from the sacred through the separation of reason and revelation (Syahrin, 2019). This rupture fosters moral decay, spiritual alienation, and epistemological fragmentation that weaken humanity's ethical foundation. A philosophy detached from metaphysical principles degenerates into a purely rationalistic tool that legitimizes materialism and accelerates cultural disintegration. By contrast, perennial philosophy restores equilibrium by affirming that ultimate truth is singular and eternal, though expressed in diverse religious and cultural forms (Harahap, 2017). This vision underscores philosophy's role as a unifying force that bridges intellect and faith, reason and revelation.

Within the field of education, Nasr asserts that the ultimate aim of learning should extend beyond the mastery of technical competencies or rational skills. Education must cultivate the fullness of human potential, harmonizing intellectual development with moral refinement and spiritual awareness (Widayani, 2017). Rooted in perennial wisdom, such an approach transforms knowledge from a utilitarian instrument into a sacred path toward moral cultivation and spiritual realization (Nengsih, 2025). In this regard, Nasr's thought offers a viable educational paradigm for addressing the contemporary moral crisis, emphasizing the integration of scientific inquiry with transcendent values as the cornerstone of a meaningful and balanced civilization.

b. The Concept of Philosophy of Education according to Sayyed Hossein Nasr

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the philosophy of education is a framework based on eternal philosophy and classical Islamic tradition, which views education as a holistic process that integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual aspects. Nasr positions humans and the universe as creations of Allah SWT that are the main objects in Islamic education, so

that education is not limited to the transfer of knowledge, but also the cultivation of the soul and character based on eternal divine values.

In addition, Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes the philosophy of education as a search for divine truth and spirituality that integrates the intellectual aspects and inner transformation of students. In his view, education is not merely a transfer of knowledge, but a process of transmitting sacred traditions that connect humans with the spiritual and divine (God) dimensions. Education must be able to shape deep spiritual awareness as well as intellectual intelligence, thereby bringing humans to *ma'rifah* (true knowledge) and awareness of the eternal divine reality. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic educational philosophy departs from the view that humans and the universe are creations of Allah SWT, so that humans become the foundation in the educational process which includes the transformation of all aspects of life proportionally, covering intellectual and spiritual aspects. (Supriatna & Husain, 2020). Education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but also the process of passing on sacred traditions from one generation to the next with the aim of shaping individuals with noble character and spiritual awareness. Nasr emphasizes that education must train students holistically encompassing the mind, soul, and personality through an approach called *tarbiyah*, not merely teaching (*ta'lim*). (Anas, 2017)

c. The Views of Sayyed Hossein Nasr on Modern Education

Seyyed Hossein Nasr conceptualizes the philosophy of education as a holistic framework rooted in perennial philosophy and the classical Islamic intellectual tradition. Education, in his perspective, is not a neutral or technical process but a sacred endeavor that unites intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human development. Both humanity and the cosmos as creations of Allah SWT constitute the primary objects of knowledge, positioning education as a means of cultivating the soul and forming character upon eternal divine values (Juwita et al., 2023). This orientation situates education beyond mere information transfer, grounding it in the transformative process of linking learners to transcendent reality and nurturing their inner potential toward ultimate truth (*Al-Haqq*).

Central to Nasr's thought is the concept of *tarbiyah*, which signifies the integrated nurturing of the intellect, the soul, and the personality. Unlike *ta'lim*, which emphasizes teaching or instruction, *tarbiyah* encompasses moral formation and spiritual cultivation, aiming to produce individuals of noble character and sustained spiritual

awareness (Anas, 2017). Within the context of contemporary debates on character education, Nasr's framework provides an essential corrective. Whereas modern approaches often reduce moral education to behavioral discipline or civic ethics, Nasr insists that genuine moral formation must be anchored in a transcendent worldview that unites reason with revelation. Without such grounding, education risks reinforcing materialism and fragmentation, thereby neglecting the deeper ethical spiritual dimensions of human existence.

In practical terms, Nasr's philosophy of education highlights the necessity of embedding ethical and spiritual values across curricula, pedagogy, and educational policy rather than isolating them as supplementary subjects. This integration positions teachers not merely as transmitters of factual knowledge but as spiritual mentors and character builders who embody and exemplify sacred wisdom. Such a model directly addresses the moral and spiritual crisis in contemporary education by cultivating learners who embody intellectual depth, moral virtue, and awareness of their divine origin. By revitalizing the balance between rational inquiry and sacred knowledge, Nasr's educational vision contributes to re-establishing harmony between science, ethics, and spirituality offering a profound pathway for character education in a globalized and morally fragmented world.

3. The Role of Educational Philosophy from the Perspective of Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Addressing the Moral Crisis in the Modern Era.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr conceives educational philosophy as the fundamental conceptual and methodological basis for developing a holistic educational system oriented toward nurturing "*insan kamil*" the complete human being. He critiques modern education for its secular orientation and estrangement from spiritual traditions, reducing learning to the transfer of technical knowledge devoid of ontological depth and moral responsibility (Akhsanudin, 2024). For Nasr, education must be reconnected with *perennial philosophy*, which situates humanity and the cosmos as sacred creations of Allah SWT, thereby ensuring that knowledge is inseparable from divine truth and transcendent values.

Within this paradigm, education transcends cognitive training by integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual cultivation. As emphasized in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (1981) (Heer & Nasr, 1993) and *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (1976) (Iqbal, 2020), empirical knowledge is inseparable from metaphysical insight and sacred wisdom. Education thus becomes the transmission of perennial truths that preserve life's sanctity and ultimate meaning. In the face of technological acceleration and ethical disorientation

(Yusuf, 2016), Nasr underscores the necessity of an educational philosophy that safeguards intellectual competence while cultivating virtue and social responsibility (Nadhif Muhammad Mumtaz, 2014). Nasr identifies four interrelated roles of educational philosophy in addressing the moral crisis of modernity:

1. **Moral and Intellectual Integration** Education must embed ethical and spiritual values within the epistemological core of knowledge, ensuring that intellectual formation is inseparable from moral integrity (Heer & Nasr, 1993).
2. **Cultivation of Critical Awareness and Empathy** Education should nurture both rational inquiry and emotional intelligence, fostering compassion, accountability, and recognition of social interdependence.
3. **Educators as Spiritual Mentors** Teachers and parents function as moral exemplars and guides who transmit truth, beauty, and goodness, thereby facilitating inner transformation beyond information delivery (Nasr, 2002).
4. **Ethical Stewardship in the Technological Age** – Education must equip learners with the capacity to ethically manage scientific and technological progress, preventing ecological destruction and cultural alienation (Nasr, 2015).

This framework resonates with Islamic scholars such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who emphasizes the integration of knowledge and *adab*, though Nasr places greater weight on metaphysical grounding and perennial wisdom. Compared to Western educational thought exemplified by John Dewey's pragmatism, which highlights experiential learning and democratic participation Nasr's perspective is distinguished by its insistence on the inseparability of education from transcendence and divine reality. Nasr's philosophy offers not merely a critique of secular education but also a constructive paradigm for reorienting contemporary educational discourse. By integrating sacred values into curricula, pedagogy, and institutional culture, his approach provides a comprehensive response to the epistemological fragmentation and moral instability of modernity, positioning education as both intellectual formation and spiritual transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes that Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophy of education provides a comprehensive, integrative, and value based framework for addressing the moral crisis that pervades contemporary educational systems. Nasr's holistic vision emphasizes that education should not be reduced to the acquisition of cognitive and technical competencies, but rather function as a transformative process that integrates intellectual capacity with moral

responsibility and spiritual awareness. By grounding education in perennial wisdom and metaphysical principles, his philosophy restores the sacred dimension of knowledge, enabling the development of “*insan kamil*” individuals who embody integrity, ethical discernment, and spiritual consciousness. A key strength of Nasr’s framework lies in its ability to bridge classical Islamic intellectual traditions with modern pedagogical challenges, thereby offering sustainable pathways for character formation, ethical resilience, and cultural continuity.

This integrative approach situates education as both a means of personal transformation and a foundation for collective responsibility, ensuring that learners are prepared to navigate the ethical, social, and technological complexities of the modern world. Nevertheless, the study also identifies significant limitations. The abstract and normative nature of Nasr’s philosophical principles makes their direct application within diverse educational contexts particularly secular or pluralistic systems challenging. His writings provide limited operational guidelines for translating metaphysical insights into concrete pedagogical practices, curriculum models, or assessment strategies. This gap underscores the necessity for further research aimed at contextualizing Nasr’s framework in practical educational settings.

Future studies could explore the development of empirically grounded teaching methodologies inspired by his philosophy, as well as evaluate their effectiveness in cultivating moral and spiritual growth alongside intellectual achievement. Comparative inquiries, for instance with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas’s concept of *adab* or John Dewey’s pragmatism, would further enrich the discourse and test the adaptability of Nasr’s ideas across different cultural and philosophical traditions. Expanding this line of research could also provide valuable insights into how spiritual and ethical values may be systematically embedded into curricula without compromising academic rigor or inclusivity.

In conclusion, the findings affirm that embedding ethical and spiritual values at the heart of education is indispensable for overcoming the moral disintegration and epistemological fragmentation of modernity. By adopting Nasr’s vision, policymakers and educators can foster learners who are not only intellectually capable but also morally grounded and spiritually attuned, thereby advancing holistic human development and contributing to a more ethical and sustainable society.

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