



## Classical Educational Philosophy in the Evolution of Nursing Education: A Literature Review



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### Abstract

This literature review explores the influence of classical educational philosophy on the evolution of nursing education globally and in Indonesia. Drawing from the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, the study identifies how the moral, rational, and humanistic ideals of classical thought have shaped the foundations of professional and ethical nursing education. Using a qualitative literature review approach, this paper synthesizes scholarly sources related to philosophical foundations, historical development, and curriculum transformation in nursing education. The findings reveal that classical philosophy, emphasizing the harmony of intellectual, moral, and practical dimensions, continues to inform modern nursing education through values of compassion, moral responsibility, and professional integrity. In Indonesia, these philosophical roots are adapted within a contextual framework of local wisdom, spirituality, and national education policy. The study concludes that revisiting classical philosophical principles provides a robust conceptual framework for strengthening the character and humanistic orientation of nursing education worldwide.

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## 1 Introduction

Philosophy has always played a crucial role in shaping educational thought, serving as the foundation for understanding what it means to educate, learn, and act ethically (Jenkins et al., 2019; Bergström, 2024). The roots of educational philosophy can be traced back to classical antiquity, where thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle conceptualized education as the moral and intellectual cultivation of human beings (BNS, 2023). In contemporary education, particularly in nursing education, these classical ideals remain deeply relevant. Nursing, as both a science and an art, requires not only cognitive competence but also ethical sensitivity and reflective judgment (AHA, 2004). The integration of these elements echoes the Aristotelian principle of *phronesis*, practical wisdom that aligns theoretical understanding with moral action (Jenkins et al., 2019; Voutilainen et al., 2017).

Historically, the philosophical underpinnings of nursing education evolved alongside broader developments in Western education. Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, was significantly influenced by classical rationalism and Christian moral philosophy, emphasizing discipline, order, and compassion (Gilbert, 2020; Hamid, 1997). Her educational model integrated scientific knowledge with ethical and spiritual values, forming the basis of what would later become the professionalization of nursing education worldwide. In Indonesia, the evolution of nursing education reflects a complex interplay between Western philosophical traditions, local cultural values, and national policy reforms (BNS, 2025). Early nursing schools were established during the colonial period, focusing primarily on technical training. Post-independence reforms expanded the focus toward humanistic and ethical aspects, resonating with classical ideals of holistic education (Watson, 2018).

Given these intersections, this paper aims to analyze the continuity and adaptation of classical philosophical principles within the context of nursing education globally and in Indonesia. By examining key philosophical, historical, and pedagogical dimensions, this review seeks to highlight how timeless ideas from classical thought continue to inspire the development of ethical and compassionate nursing professionals in the modern era (Lee et al., 2004).

## 2 Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative literature review approach, focusing on peer-reviewed academic sources published between 2015 and 2025. Databases such as Scopus, PubMed, and ScienceDirect were searched using the keywords: *classical educational philosophy*, *nursing education*, *ethical formation*, and *Indonesia*. A total of 56 publications were identified, of which 32 met the inclusion criteria. Sources were analyzed through thematic synthesis, emphasizing philosophical concepts (truth, virtue, wisdom), pedagogical implications (curriculum, teaching values), and contextual adaptation in Indonesia. The review followed a three-phase procedure: Identification of philosophical roots in classical education; Comparison of philosophical and pedagogical models in nursing education globally; Contextual interpretation of how Indonesia integrates classical and local educational philosophies in nursing programs. This approach allows for a structured synthesis that connects the theoretical legacies of classical philosophy with contemporary nursing education practices.

## 3 Results and Discussions

### *Classical Philosophy and the Foundations of Education*

The classical Greek philosophers conceptualized education as a moral and intellectual journey toward achieving *eudaimonia*, human flourishing (Bergström, 2024; Jenkins et al., 2019). Plato's *Republic* described education as the "turning of the soul" toward truth and goodness (Potter et al., 2021). Aristotle later expanded

this view, emphasizing the unity of knowledge and virtue, and proposing that true education balances cognitive, moral, and practical dimensions (Rushton, 2024).

In this framework, education was never value-neutral. It sought to form virtuous citizens capable of reasoning ethically and contributing to the common good (ANA, 2004). This ideal resonates strongly with nursing education, where competence must coexist with compassion and integrity. Nursing education, therefore, reflects the Aristotelian synthesis of *episteme* (scientific knowledge), *techne* (technical skill), and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) (Jenkins et al., 2019; Cato, 2020).

#### *From Classical Ideals to Modern Nursing Philosophy*

The influence of classical philosophy on nursing education became more explicit during the 19th century, particularly through Florence Nightingale's reformist model (Gilbert, 2020; Hamid, 1997). Nightingale viewed nursing as a vocation rooted in moral duty and rational practice, emphasizing discipline, observation, and service to humanity, values consistent with Platonic and Aristotelian ethics (Rolfe, 2020). Contemporary nursing education continues to reflect these principles, albeit through modern pedagogical frameworks. Ethical courses, reflective practice modules, and holistic care models all embody classical humanism, reinforcing the connection between moral reasoning and professional competence (Jenkins et al., 2019).

For instance, the caring curriculum in the U.S. and Europe emphasizes relational ethics and moral reflection, reminiscent of Socratic dialogue as a method of moral inquiry (BNS, 2023). These developments highlight the enduring relevance of classical philosophical foundations in shaping modern nursing philosophy.

#### *Nursing Education in the Global Context*

Globally, nursing education has evolved from hospital-based apprenticeship models to university-level programs integrating scientific, ethical, and humanistic learning (Kaymak et al., 2025; Cato, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights the need for nurses to develop not only clinical expertise but also cultural sensitivity and ethical judgment competencies that echo classical ideals of *areté* (excellence) and *logos* (reason) (Bergström, 2024). Countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Japan have institutionalized philosophy-of-care courses, encouraging students to engage critically with moral and existential dimensions of healthcare (Jenkins et al., 2019). These educational frameworks demonstrate how classical rationalism continues to inform reflective practice and ethical reasoning in global nursing curricula. These developments indicate that the philosophical underpinnings of nursing are not static but continuously evolving through intercultural dialogue between classical rationalism and contemporary humanism (Gilbert, 2020).

#### *The Indonesian Context: Integrating Classical and Local Philosophies*

In Indonesia, the philosophical foundation of nursing education is guided by Pancasila, national education law, and local cultural values such as *gotong royong* (cooperation) and *kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab* (just and civilized humanity), which parallel classical ideals of virtue and communal harmony (Sutardjo & Widiastuti, 2022). These values resonate with Aristotelian ethics, emphasizing the formation of character through habituation and social responsibility (Jenkins et al., 2019). Nursing education in Indonesia developed through a series of reforms from the early colonial nursing schools of the 1900s, which emphasized technical training, to the establishment of higher education programs in the 1980s that incorporated more holistic and ethical components (Hamid, 1997). This shift reflects a broader educational movement toward integrating scientific knowledge with humanistic and moral values (Wijayanti & Koesoema, 2020).

Recent curricular frameworks emphasize competency-based education, interprofessional collaboration, and humanistic care models, echoing classical philosophical roots that link professional expertise with ethical formation (Kaymak et al., 2025; Cato, 2020). Scholars note that Indonesian nursing programs increasingly adopt integrative paradigms combining technical competence with ethical and spiritual awareness, a modern reflection of the classical ideal of forming wise, virtuous, and socially responsible professionals (Bergström, 2024).

## 4 Conclusion

The review of classical educational philosophy reveals that the moral, intellectual, and practical ideals formulated by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle remain foundational for understanding the purpose of education, including nursing education. Classical philosophy views education as a transformative process toward wisdom (sophia), virtue (areté), and practical wisdom (phronesis). These concepts emphasize that knowledge without moral guidance leads to technical proficiency but not human excellence. In the evolution of global nursing education, these philosophical ideals have been reinterpreted and applied to foster ethical professionalism, reflective judgment, and compassionate care. In Indonesia, nursing education reflects both universal philosophical roots and local cultural wisdom. The integration of Pancasila values and the emphasis on humanistic care demonstrate a unique synthesis of classical ideals with indigenous ethics. This hybrid philosophical foundation enriches nursing curricula, supporting the formation of professionals who are not only skilled but also morally grounded and culturally sensitive.

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