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The Psychological and Historical Foundations of Education

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Abstract

This article examines the psychological and historical foundations of education and their implications for contemporary educational management. The psychological foundation emphasizes students' cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development, including their motivation, interests, abilities, and individual differences. Meanwhile, the historical foundation explores the evolution of educational ideas, systems, policies, curricula, and practices within changing social, cultural, political, and technological contexts. This article aims to explain how integrating these two foundations can support effective, adaptive, and human-centered educational management. Using a qualitative literature review approach, the discussion synthesizes relevant concepts, educational theories, historical developments, and contemporary policy perspectives. The analysis highlights five major implications: educational planning, curriculum development, human resource management, educational decision-making, and responses to digital transformation. The findings indicate that understanding students' psychological characteristics enables educators to design inclusive and learner-centered learning experiences, while historical reflection provides valuable lessons for evaluating previous policies and guiding future reforms. Integrating both perspectives is particularly important amid digitalization and advances in artificial intelligence. The article concludes that educational management should combine evidence-based decision-making, historical awareness, and a commitment to holistic human development to achieve sustainable educational quality.

Keywords: ***Psychological Foundation, Historical Foundation, Educational Management, Learner-Centered Education, Educational Policy***

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental process of human development that extends beyond knowledge acquisition to the holistic development of intellectual, social, emotional, moral, creative, and adaptive capacities. Contemporary education increasingly recognizes learners as individuals with diverse potentials, needs, experiences, and developmental contexts. UNESCO emphasizes that learning is influenced by internal factors and broader social, cultural, institutional, environmental, and technological conditions. Therefore, educational success should not be measured solely by academic achievement but also by the extent to which education supports human development and student well-being (UNESCO MGIEP, 2026). Educational foundations provide conceptual and practical guidance for determining educational objectives, designing learning processes, and establishing principles for decision-making. Because education is influenced by social, economic, cultural, political, scientific, and technological developments, these foundations are essential for creating inclusive, relevant, adaptive, and sustainable educational systems (UNESCO, 2026a).

The psychological foundation of education provides a basis for understanding learners and the learning process through psychological principles. Since students differ in cognitive abilities, emotional conditions, motivation, interests, social needs, and developmental backgrounds, effective instruction must consider how they receive, process, understand, and apply information. UNESCO highlights the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy alongside social-emotional skills, executive functions, and self-regulation (UNESCO, 2025). Research by Ishida and Sekiyama (2024), based on a review of 84 empirical studies, demonstrates that learning motivation is influenced by various internal and external factors. Basileo et al. (2024) likewise emphasize the importance of self-efficacy, motivation, and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs in academic achievement. Furthermore, meta-analytic evidence indicates that autonomy support is positively associated with autonomous motivation, engagement, self-regulation, confidence, mastery goals, and academic performance. UNESCO's Global Report on Happiness in and for Learning (2024) also highlights the importance of student well-being through its Happy Schools framework, which encompasses people, processes, places, and principles. Integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into education can further support mental health, interpersonal relationships, and positive learning environments, extending educational goals beyond academic achievement toward holistic development (UNESCO, 2026b).

The historical foundation of education explains how educational systems, curricula, policies, and teaching practices evolve in response to changing social, cultural, political, and economic conditions. Historical analysis enables educators and policymakers to understand

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the continuity and transformation of educational institutions, theories, and practices over time. UNESCO identifies educational history as an examination of changes in educational systems, institutions, policies, and methods that reflect society's values and needs. In Indonesia, Malik et al. (2025) demonstrate the transformation of primary education from traditional approaches toward formal systems integrating science and technology. Similarly, Supriatna (2024) illustrates how educational thought has evolved from ancient civilizations to modern times, reflecting changing conceptions of humanity, learning, values, and educational purposes. Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy remains particularly significant in Indonesia because of its emphasis on human development and humanistic values. Indrayani, Purnomo, and Oktaniati (2023) identify historical continuity between Dewantara's ideas and the national education system, particularly regarding human dignity, educational equity, and the right to education. Historical perspectives therefore provide not merely a record of the past but also a basis for evaluating contemporary educational practices and shaping future directions.

The importance of historical understanding is evident in Indonesia's curriculum reforms. The issuance of Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 12 of 2024 established a national regulatory framework for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. By the 2023/2024 academic year, nearly 337,000 general education units, representing approximately 80% of eligible institutions, had begun implementing the curriculum (Kemendikdasmen, 2024). This extensive implementation demonstrates that curriculum reform represents a major national policy transformation rather than merely an administrative adjustment. Historically, the Merdeka Curriculum should be understood as part of Indonesia's continuing educational development, shaped by social and political changes, technological progress, and evolving national priorities (Kemendikbudristek RI, 2024). Asriyanti and Musgamy (2025) further emphasize that curriculum reforms must address implementation challenges, teacher preparedness, resource distribution, and learners' needs. Meanwhile, digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI) create additional demands concerning ethical technology use, information validity, privacy, and critical thinking. The OECD (2024) emphasizes the importance of AI literacy, enabling learners to understand AI systems, critically evaluate their outputs, and use technology ethically and creatively. UNESCO (2024a) similarly advocates educational technology that is equitable, context-sensitive, evidence-based, learner-centered, and sustainable. These developments demonstrate the need to combine historical awareness with responsiveness to contemporary educational challenges.

Integrating psychological and historical foundations is therefore essential for developing contemporary education. Psychological perspectives explain who learners are,

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how they develop and learn, and which factors influence their engagement, while historical perspectives clarify how educational systems and policies emerge, evolve, and generate lessons for future improvement. This integration helps prevent both the uncritical preservation of outdated practices and innovations that disregard historical experience and humanistic values. Aditya (2026), examining the relationship between John Dewey's progressivism and Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Among System within the Merdeka Curriculum, highlights the shared importance of experiential learning, learner autonomy, pedagogical guidance, and contextual learning. From an educational management perspective, psychological understanding supports appropriate program design, teacher development, supportive school environments, and humane assessment practices. Historical understanding helps leaders evaluate policy continuity, identify factors behind success or failure, and avoid repeating past mistakes. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5 emphasizes educational leadership that establishes direction, prioritizes learning, promotes collaboration, and develops human resources (UNESCO, 2024b). Ultimately, integrating psychological and historical foundations provides a basis for educational policies and practices that promote academic achievement alongside human potential, well-being, equity, relevance, and learners' capacity to respond to future societal changes.

METHOD

This article employs a qualitative approach using an integrative literature review method to examine the relationship between the psychological and historical foundations of education and their relevance to contemporary educational management. The study draws on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, educational policy documents, and relevant regulations published by credible institutions. Literature is identified through academic databases and scholarly search platforms, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and ERIC, using keywords such as psychological foundations of education, educational psychology, history of education, educational policy development, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, and contemporary educational management. Priority is given to relevant and credible publications from 2022–2026, alongside seminal works necessary to explain foundational theories and historical developments. The selection process considers relevance to the research objectives, scholarly credibility, and contribution to understanding psychological development, educational history, and management practices. This approach follows the principle that a rigorous literature review should use a clearly defined search strategy, transparent selection criteria, and a structured synthesis process (Snyder, 2019; Turnbull et al., 2023).

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The collected literature is analyzed through thematic content analysis and critical synthesis. The analysis is organized around four interconnected themes: (1) psychological development, learning processes, motivation, and individual differences; (2) the historical evolution of educational thought, institutions, curricula, and policies; (3) the integration of psychological and historical perspectives in understanding educational change; and (4) the implications of these foundations for educational planning, curriculum development, teacher and human resource management, decision-making, and responses to digital transformation. The findings are compared across theoretical perspectives and historical contexts to identify common patterns, significant differences, practical implications, and areas requiring further investigation. The synthesis is then used to develop a conceptual understanding of how educational managers can combine knowledge of learners' developmental needs with lessons from historical experience to formulate relevant, adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable educational policies and practices. The methodological emphasis on systematic identification, analysis, and synthesis is consistent with contemporary guidance on literature review design and reporting (Paul et al., 2022). As this study is based on published literature rather than primary field data, its conclusions are interpretive and conceptual rather than empirical findings from interviews, observations, or surveys.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Basic Concept of the Foundations of Education

Educational foundations comprise the ideas, principles, values, and knowledge that guide the understanding, design, implementation, and evaluation of education. They provide a framework for defining educational goals, understanding human development, and organizing effective educational processes. Education is therefore more than knowledge transfer; it is an integrated system involving values, learning processes, people, environments, and management. Its foundations serve philosophical, conceptual, normative, and operational functions, guiding curriculum development, teaching, assessment, teacher development, and educational policy. The main foundations include philosophical, psychological, historical, sociological, cultural, legal, economic, and pedagogical perspectives, which must be integrated to address the complexity of educational systems. OECD (2024a) emphasizes the need for education policies to adapt to social and technological changes, including artificial intelligence, while UNESCO (2024b) highlights that education should develop responsible thinking, social participation, and an understanding of societal values rather than focus exclusively on measurable academic outcomes.

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Among these foundations, the psychological and historical perspectives are particularly important for understanding education comprehensively. The psychological foundation focuses on students' cognitive, social, and emotional development, motivation, interests, abilities, and individual needs, while the historical foundation explains the evolution of educational ideas, institutions, policies, curricula, and practices. Integrating these perspectives helps ensure that educational reforms respond to learners' needs while considering lessons from previous reforms. For example, Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum received a formal regulatory basis through Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 12 of 2024 and had been implemented in more than 300,000 schools by the 2023/2024 academic year (Kemendikdasmen, 2024). These foundations also connect educational goals with practical management, including planning, curriculum development, human resource management, supervision, and evaluation. UNESCO (2024b) identifies four dimensions of effective educational leadership: setting direction and expectations, focusing on learning, building collaboration, and developing human capacity. Amid digital transformation, changing competency demands, teacher shortages, and advances in AI, psychological and historical foundations provide an essential conceptual basis for developing educational policies and practices that are adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to different institutional contexts (OECD, 2024a; UNESCO, 2024b).

The Psychological Foundations of Education

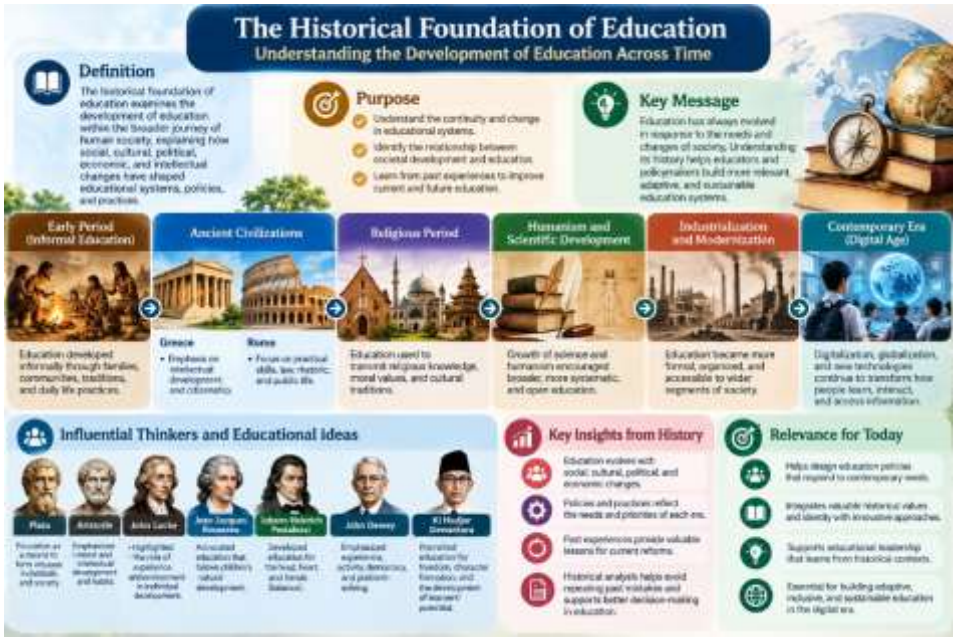
Educational psychology examines human behavior, mental processes, development, and learning within educational contexts. The psychological foundation of education applies these principles to understand learners' cognitive abilities, social-emotional development, motivation, interests, individual needs, and learning experiences. Basileo et al. (2024) highlight the importance of self-efficacy, motivation, and support for students' basic psychological needs in academic achievement. Learner development encompasses physical, cognitive, linguistic, affective, social, moral, and emotional dimensions, as explained by Piaget's stages of cognitive development, Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction and the zone of proximal development, Erikson's psychosocial theory, and Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Fatimah et al., 2026). These perspectives remain relevant to understanding learners holistically, while UNESCO (2024c) emphasizes social and emotional learning to support emotional regulation, positive relationships, responsible decision-making, and overall well-being. Motivation, interests, talents, and individual differences also influence learning outcomes; motivation is shaped by internal and external factors (Ishida & Sekiyama, 2024), while self-efficacy supports academic achievement (Basileo et al., 2024). Furthermore, learners' psychological development is influenced by

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family, school, peers, culture, and digital environments, making safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments essential. These principles have practical implications for instructional planning, curriculum development, classroom management, differentiated learning, assessment, inclusive education, and teacher professional development. Teachers must therefore possess strong psychopedagogical competencies to understand learners' characteristics, foster motivation, provide constructive feedback, and adapt teaching strategies to diverse needs. Overall, the psychological foundation provides a practical basis for developing learner-centered, adaptive, inclusive, and humanistic education that supports the holistic development of every student.

The Historical Foundations of Education



The historical foundation of education examines how educational systems, institutions, curricula, and teaching practices have evolved in response to social, cultural, political, and economic changes. Education initially developed informally through families, communities, traditions, and religious institutions before becoming more structured through ancient civilizations, humanism, industrialization, and modernization. Educational thought also evolved through the contributions of influential philosophers: Plato emphasized the formation of individuals and society, Aristotle highlighted moral and intellectual development, John Locke stressed the influence of experience and environment,

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Rousseau advocated education aligned with children's natural development, Pestalozzi promoted the balanced development of the head, heart, and hands, and John Dewey emphasized experience, activity, democracy, and problem-solving. In Indonesia, Ki Hadjar Dewantara advanced education based on freedom, character formation, and the development of learners' potential. These perspectives reflect a shift from knowledge transmission toward learner-centered education. Historical analysis therefore enables educators and policymakers to understand continuity and change, evaluate educational policies, and improve contemporary practices (Indrayani et al., 2023; Supriatna, 2024).

The development of education in Indonesia reflects the country's changing social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances. During the kingdom and traditional periods, education took place mainly through families, communities, religious institutions, and pesantren. Under colonial rule, formal schooling expanded but remained discriminatory and served colonial interests, encouraging the emergence of education as an instrument of national identity and independence. The establishment of Taman Siswa by Ki Hadjar Dewantara in 1922 marked an important milestone in promoting independent and character-based education. Following independence in 1945, education became central to national development and the intellectual advancement of the population. During the Old Order, education emphasized national identity, while the New Order promoted centralized management, educational access, human resource development, and standardized curricula. The Reformasi era subsequently strengthened decentralization, school autonomy, educational equity, and curriculum reform. In the digital era, online learning, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence have transformed teaching, learning, information management, and educational decision-making. Minister of Education Regulation No. 12 of 2024 provides a national framework for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexible learning tailored to students' needs. OECD (2024a) highlights the need to adapt teachers' competencies and educational approaches to technological developments, including AI, while UNESCO (2024c) emphasizes educational leadership in managing change and improving learning quality. These developments demonstrate that Indonesian education continues to evolve in response to historical experiences and contemporary challenges (Indrayani et al., 2023; Supriatna, 2024).

Ki Hadjar Dewantara viewed education as the process of guiding children's natural potential so they could achieve well-being and happiness as individuals and members of society. His Sistem Among positions educators as guides who provide examples, cultivate motivation, and support learners' development rather than impose their will. This philosophy is expressed through Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani, which emphasizes leading by example, inspiring others, and providing

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encouragement. His Tri Pusat Pendidikan further identifies the family, school, and community as interconnected environments responsible for children's development. This humanistic and contextual approach promotes holistic growth encompassing intellectual, moral, social, and cultural dimensions, and remains relevant to Indonesia's national education system (Indrayani, Purnomo, & Oktaniati, 2023). In contemporary education, these principles align with learner-centered instruction, differentiated learning, character development, and the Merdeka Curriculum's flexibility to accommodate students' individual needs and school contexts. However, educational freedom does not mean learning without direction; it involves guidance, responsibility, values, and respect for society. UNESCO (2024) emphasizes learning-oriented leadership, collaboration, and human capacity development, while OECD (2024) underscores the importance of preparing learners for social and technological change. Consequently, Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy remains both a historical foundation and a valuable guide for developing Indonesian education that is independent, inclusive, adaptive, character-oriented, and committed to the holistic development of every learner.

The Relationship of the Psychological and Historical Foundations of Education



Understanding students' psychological development has become a key driver of educational transformation. Research indicates that learning is influenced not only by cognitive abilities but also by social-emotional development, motivation, self-regulation, self-confidence, and environmental factors. Consequently, education has gradually shifted from standardized, content-oriented instruction toward learner-centered approaches that accommodate individual differences. Qualities such as perseverance, curiosity, creativity,

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empathy, responsibility, and collaboration contribute to academic achievement and broader life outcomes. These changes have transformed teaching strategies, classroom management, teacher roles, and educational assessment, encouraging active learning through exploration, collaboration, problem-solving, reflection, and self-regulation. Wang et al. (2024) found that interventions based on Self-Determination Theory can improve students' intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and competence, while research on academic and social-emotional flourishing highlights the relationship between motivation, social-emotional development, and learning outcomes. Similarly, OECD (2023) emphasizes that social-emotional skills can be developed through educational experiences and that teacher readiness and competence are essential for effective implementation.

Educational history provides a foundation for evaluating policies by examining their origins, implementation, achievements, limitations, and long-term impacts within specific social and political contexts. Idrus and Muhammad (2023) demonstrate that the development of Indonesian basic education policies, from the pre-independence period to the Reformasi era, reflects changing government priorities in expanding access and improving educational quality. Crouch and Spindelman (2024) highlight that successful educational policy adoption depends on adapting reforms to national contexts and historical experiences rather than simply imitating other countries, while Jian and Mustafa (2024) show that institutional factors, autonomy, and path dependence influence how reforms are translated into school practices. Integrating psychological and historical perspectives therefore enables educators and policymakers to understand learners' developmental needs while considering the historical, cultural, political, and institutional contexts shaping education. This integrated approach supports evidence-informed evaluation, learner-centered and inclusive instruction, and contextually relevant innovation. Ultimately, it helps develop educational policies and practices that respond to technological and societal changes while maintaining continuity with national educational values, cultural identity, and the goal of holistic human development.

The Relevance of Psychological and Historical Foundations in Contemporary Education Management

Educational planning should integrate psychological insights into students' abilities, interests, motivation, socio-emotional needs, and individual differences with historical lessons from previous educational policies and programs. Evidence-informed planning enables educational leaders to use relevant data, assess institutional needs, allocate resources effectively, and establish priorities based on actual learning conditions. Historical reflection helps identify successful practices, recognize previous limitations, and avoid

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repeating past mistakes, while considering current social and technological changes. Similarly, curriculum development should accommodate students' developmental stages and diverse potentials while fostering cognitive, social, emotional, moral, and twenty-first-century skills. Integrating historical and cultural values helps preserve identity and character without uncritically retaining outdated practices. In response to digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI), curricula must also develop digital and AI literacy, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and responsible technology use. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes evidence-based and human-centered approaches to educational technology, while OECD (2024) highlights the importance of curriculum transformation and relevant competencies for adapting to technological change.

Educational human resource management should strengthen teachers' professional, pedagogical, social, and psychological competencies so they can understand learners, motivate students, and create safe, inclusive learning environments. Effective educational leadership also requires a shared vision, professional development, collaboration, and a school culture that balances historical and cultural identity with innovation. OECD (2024) identifies working conditions, professional learning opportunities, leadership, and teacher collaboration as important factors in sustaining the teaching profession. Furthermore, educational decision-making should be based on evidence concerning learning outcomes, attendance, student engagement, socio-emotional needs, teacher capacity, and available resources, while using historical experiences to evaluate previous policies and improve future decisions. In the digital era, schools must address changing learning behaviors, online interactions, academic integrity, privacy, information reliability, technology dependence, and inequalities in digital access and competence. UNESCO (2023) stresses that educational technology should be evidence-based, equitable, and human-centered, while OECD (2024) emphasizes preparing teachers and students for AI-related developments and changing workforce demands. Therefore, integrating psychological and historical foundations enables educational institutions to plan responsively, develop relevant curricula, strengthen human resources, make reflective decisions, and adopt technology responsibly while maintaining a commitment to students' holistic development, ethical values, inclusion, and long-term educational quality.

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CONCLUSION

The psychological and historical foundations are two essential bases for understanding and organizing education comprehensively. The psychological foundation provides an understanding of learners as the central subjects of education, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development, motivation, interests, abilities, and individual differences that influence the learning process. Meanwhile, the historical foundation offers insights into the evolution of educational systems, ideas, policies, curricula, and practices over time. A historical perspective helps explain how social, cultural, and political conditions, as well as societal developments, have shaped contemporary educational systems. Thus, these two foundations complement each other: the psychological perspective explains how learners develop and learn, while the historical perspective explains how and why educational systems evolve. Integrating both perspectives enables education to focus not only on academic achievement but also on the holistic development of human potential and the continuity of educational values and experiences.

From an educational management perspective, integrating psychological and historical foundations has strategic implications for educational planning, curriculum development, human resource management, decision-making, and policy formulation. Educational planning should consider learners' needs and characteristics while using historical experiences as a basis for evaluation. Curriculum development should accommodate learners' developmental stages, cultural values, and evolving technological demands. Human resource management should strengthen teachers' psychopedagogical competencies and educational leadership, while decision-making should be grounded in data, contextual considerations, and lessons learned from previous policies. Amid digital

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transformation and advances in artificial intelligence, these foundations have become increasingly relevant to ensuring that educational innovation remains adaptive without losing its humanistic dimension. Therefore, effective education must understand human needs, learn from history, respond to change, and manage resources contextually and sustainably to achieve educational goals optimally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educators should enhance their understanding and competence in identifying students' psychological development, characteristics, needs, motivation, interests, and individual differences to ensure that learning processes are more adaptive and learner-centered. Teachers need not only to master subject matter but also to understand students' social-emotional development and the environmental factors influencing learning. Meanwhile, school administrators should consider psychological and historical perspectives when planning programs, developing curricula, managing human resources, and making decisions. Past educational experiences and practices can serve as a basis for reflection, helping schools maintain relevant practices while improving less effective policies. Thus, school management can evolve adaptively without losing the values, identity, and educational goals established throughout its historical development.

Educational policymakers are encouraged to develop policies that respond to social and technological changes and students' needs while considering historical experiences, cultural values, and the characteristics of the national education system. Educational innovations should be based on actual needs, empirical evidence, and evaluations of previous policies to ensure that changes are sustainable rather than temporary or merely driven by technological trends. Furthermore, researchers should expand empirical studies on the application of psychological and historical foundations in contemporary educational management through qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches. Future research could examine the relationships among students' psychological characteristics, the history of educational policies, school leadership, curriculum development, digital transformation, and the quality of educational decision-making. Strengthening such research would help ensure that psychological and historical foundations extend beyond theoretical concepts and make practical contributions to educational management that is humanistic, evidence-based, context-sensitive, adaptive, and sustainable.

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