



Difficulty In Acquiring Philosophical Concepts In Secondary Education

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Received:04/10/2024

Accepted :18/11/ 2024

Published: 16/12/2024

Abstract:

This study aimed to detect the difficulty in the achievement of the philosophical concept among secondary education students in the city of El Oued, in light of the variables (division, academic level). To achieve this goal, the descriptive method was used. The study was conducted on a sample of (293) male and female students who were randomly selected. After applying the two achievement tests (truth - freedom) and applying the difficulty diagnosis questionnaire, it was found that there is a difficulty in the achievement of the philosophical concept among students (69.90%). There were also statistically significant differences in the difficulty of the philosophical concept attributed to (division, academic level). Based on these findings, the study recommends a review of the philosophy curriculum, teacher training in philosophy pedagogy, and the development of new teaching methods and strategies to improve students' understanding of philosophical concepts.

Keywords: difficulty, acquisition, philosophical concept, secondary school students.

Introduction:

In light of scientific progress and the tremendous knowledge explosion across all fields, the sheer volume of information has increased, making it difficult to present learners with such an immense and ever-growing body of knowledge. Learners cannot absorb all the available information, necessitating the selection of essential and important knowledge in a structured, organized, and effective manner that is beneficial to the learner. Hence the idea of concepts appeared as a solution to these issues posed.

Concepts in this framework take multiple forms, both sensory, easy to acquire, and abstract, difficult to learn, as the subject of philosophy comes among the educational subjects at the secondary level that contain abstract concepts, and philosophical concepts through this perspective take on the character of abstraction, ambiguity and complexity, so it is expected that the learner in this subject will find it difficult to acquire these concepts.

1 -Problem of the Study:

Human societies, across different cultures, have long valued education with the aim of developing individuals' physical, mental, psychological, and social abilities. Education particularly focuses on teaching through the development and improvement of curricula that keep pace with social changes, scientific advances, and the rapid expansion of information in all

fields. It also strives to meet the technological demands of the era and the needs of learners and society.

The educational process places significant importance on knowledge, which represents the culmination of human experience and trials across centuries. Scholars and researchers have paid special attention to effective strategies that help learners acquire knowledge, particularly in light of the great scientific advancements and the overwhelming growth of information.

The acquisition of knowledge and concepts in this context takes various forms, from easily grasped sensory knowledge to more abstract and challenging knowledge. Philosophy, introduced in secondary education, explores abstract concepts. By studying philosophy, learners develop skills in critical thinking, argumentation, and analysis. This training also enhances their ability to read, understand, and critically evaluate philosophical texts. This ultimately enables them to master the tools necessary for writing essays and analyzing philosophical texts. Therefore, the study of philosophy is a critical stage in the intellectual development of the learner, as it helps them move beyond simply receiving information and encourages them to think logically, critically, and analytically.

From this perspective, philosophical knowledge and concepts are seen as abstract, complex, and ambiguous, which leads to the expectation that learners will face difficulties in acquiring this knowledge. This prompted the researcher to pose the following central question for the study:

- Is there difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts among second- and third-year secondary students, particularly regarding the concepts of "freedom" and "truth" as part of the philosophy curriculum?

This main question is further divided into sub-questions:

- Does the difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts vary according to the academic level (second year - third year) ?

- Does the difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts vary according to the division (scientific – literary) ?

2-Hypotheses of the Study:

- Most secondary school students (second and third years) experience difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts.

- The difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts varies according to the academic level (second year -third year).

- The difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts varies according to the division (scientific – literary).

3- Objectives of the Study:

- To determine the extent of difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts among the sample group.

- To examine differences in the difficulty of acquiring philosophical concepts based on academic level (second year -third year).
- To explore differences in the difficulty of acquiring philosophical concepts based on the division (scientific – literary).

4- Importance of the Study:

- The study draws attention to the difficulties that learners face in acquiring philosophical knowledge and concepts at the secondary education level, particularly as philosophy is a relatively new subject for them.
- It directs the attention of curriculum designers to the effectiveness of certain content in prescribed textbooks and proposes alternative approaches that could improve the learning process and enhance curriculum development.

5- Operational Definitions:

Philosophical Concept: a word or symbol representing an idea that forms part of the targeted knowledge within the philosophy curriculum for secondary education. Understanding its meaning requires a specific formulation.

Difficulty in Acquiring Philosophical Concepts: the obstacles that prevent learners from acquiring philosophical knowledge and concepts in secondary education. These difficulties can be psychological (affecting the emotional aspect), cognitive (related to understanding and grasping the subject matter), or educational (linked to the learning process, such as teaching strategies or pedagogical tools). Additionally, epistemological difficulties arise when a mental block hinders the learner's ability to acquire philosophical concepts and knowledge. These difficulties are measured through the achievement test for the units on "freedom" and "truth," and through the diagnostic questionnaire prepared for this purpose.

Secondary Education Stage: this educational stage follows middle school and culminates in the Baccalaureate examination at the end of the program.

Theoretical Framework of the Study:

1- Definition of the Concept:

The Dictionary of Educational Terms defines a concept as: "an abstraction expressed through a word or symbol, referring to a set of objects or types that share common characteristics and features, or a group of objects or types classified under specific categories" (Al-Luqani, Ali, & Al-Jamal, 2003, p. 282).

The Dictionary of Educational and Psychological Terms further elaborates that a concept is "a mental construct formed through the abstraction of one or more features from multiple particular instances (examples), where the feature is isolated from its surroundings, and any of these instances is given a name or term" (Shehata & Al-Najjar, 2003, p. 282).

2- Philosophical Concept:

- **Concept:** Something that can be conceived, and in logical terms, it refers to what is formed in the mind, whether potentially or actually. Concept and meaning are inherently unified, as both represent the mental image or idea held by the mind. However, they differ in terms of intention

and occurrence; when the image is intended through a word, it is called meaning, and when it is held in the mind, it is called a concept.

A concept also refers to the set of attributes contained within the mental representation of something (Saliba, 1999, pp. 403-404).

In the Philosophical Dictionary, a concept is defined logically as: "the set of characteristics and properties that clarify a general meaning, upon which definition and classification are based, in contrast to 'denotation.'" The term concept may refer to:

- A set of shared characteristics among members of a single category or type.
- The set of attributes it consists of.
- Philosophically: understanding something in its essence, including the problem of comprehension.
- In the context of Islamic jurisprudence: the opposite of what is explicitly stated (Saliba, 1999, p. 189).

3- Types of Philosophical Concepts:

According to Saliba (1999), philosophical concepts are classified into several types:

3-1- Primary concepts: fundamental and non-derivative concepts, such as the absolute or the good.

3-2- Derived concepts: concepts derived from others, which may originate from sensory perceptions or processes, such as liberation derived from freedom.

3-3- Abstract (theoretical) concepts: these are abstract concepts formed by specifying several characteristics and are named based on indirect observation, relying on imagination and cognitive abilities, such as the concept of truth.

3-4- Complex concepts: these involve multiple words and are categorized by learning difficulty, ranging from easy to difficult. They are based on hypotheses and cognitive constructs and rely on theories explaining scientific phenomena, such as introspection.

3-5- Metaphysical concepts: concepts referring to what lies beyond the physical, such as the absolute.

3-6- Value concepts: concepts incorporating ethical and moral aspects, such as justice and goodness.

4- Difficulty in Acquiring Philosophical Concepts: this refers to the challenges that impede students from acquiring philosophical concepts at the secondary school level.

5- Classification of Difficulties in Acquiring Philosophical Concepts:

Difficulties in acquiring philosophical concepts can be classified into the following types:

5-1-Psychological Difficulties:

Ben Messi and Khazar (2011) stated that there are several different factors that hinder learners in acquiring knowledge and concepts, and building their learning, including:

Emotional imbalance, resulting in frustration, anxiety, poor adjustment, withdrawal, or sometimes aggressive behavior, leading to aversion toward certain subjects or even the school and teacher, low self-confidence, anxiety, discomfort, shyness, or passivity, or negative attitudes toward school, the subject, or the teacher. Negative attitudes toward philosophy, based on preconceived notions about its lack of utility.

5-2-Educational Difficulties:

According to what Saleh Al-Kirsh (2011) cited from "Legendre," an obstacle is a difficulty encountered by the learner during learning that can hinder their education. Learning difficulties appear in several aspects, including:

- Ineffective teaching methods and strategies.
- Inadequate teaching skills among instructors.
- A lack of effective dialogue between teachers and students.
- Cognitive content that exceeds the learners' mental capacities and interests, particularly in abstract subjects like philosophy.
- A shortage of modern educational resources that foster a love of learning.

5-3- Epistemological Difficulties:

One of the most important aspects of the epistemological difficulties (obstacles) observed through the pedagogical practice of philosophy teachers, which constitute an obstacle to the acquisition of the philosophical concept:

- Adopting a theoretical background that is contrary to the philosophical concepts.
- Considering philosophy to be a useless subject, thus forming a negative idea or belief towards philosophy .
- The conceptual structure of the content of philosophy is shrouded in a lot of ambiguity and contradictions in the presentation, as all concepts contain contradictory visions, thus making it difficult for learners to acquire and accept the philosophical concepts presented (Aya, 2008, p.84-85).

5-4- Pedagogical Difficulties:

Pedagogical difficulties act as barriers preventing students from acquiring knowledge and concepts. According to the Dictionary of Educational Sciences, a pedagogical obstacle refers to: "any difficulty encountered by a student during their educational journey that can either hinder or facilitate learning. It refers to anything that contributes to a learning setback, impeding the achievement of objectives and the realization of success. Pedagogical obstacles are not simply

a lack of knowledge; rather, they consist of incorrect or incomplete knowledge, including subjects, relationships, methods, assumptions, and conclusions that have been forgotten or unexpectedly complicated (El Farabi et al., 1994, p. 244).

5-5-Cognitive difficulties:

Ben Messi and Khazar (2011) explained that Philosophy is a subject whose concepts are abstract, and the learner may find it difficult to achieve them, and through the researcher's extrapolation of the opinions of teachers in the representations of this difficulty, the results of their responses to the initial exploratory questionnaire showed the following:

- The difficulty of understanding metaphysical concepts such as truth - absolute...
- Difficulty in the nature of the philosophical language, which appears in many school texts and articles, as it appears ambiguous in language and complex in style.
- Difficulty concentrating and recognizing philosophical concepts such as the concept of truth - freedom, and deducing an opinion in which the student expresses his own position in argumentative essays.
- Lack of tribal knowledge of concepts such as the concept of freedom, justice, etc. etc.

6- Methods for Detecting Difficulties in Acquiring Philosophical Concepts:

Teachers use various methods to determine the existence of difficulties in students' acquisition of concepts, including Testing:

According to Al-Sakran (1989), testing is typically used to assess a student's ability to comprehend, analyze, synthesize, and apply the philosophical concepts presented in an essay or to analyze a text to clarify the concepts discussed. If a teacher identifies a deficiency or weakness in the student's conceptual understanding, they will attempt to address this gap by selecting the most appropriate methods and strategies to enhance the student's concept acquisition.

Study Methodology:

1- Method:

The nature of the research necessitated choosing the descriptive method to describe the phenomenon and analyze its dimensions.

2- Study Sample:

A random sample of 312 second- and third-year students studying Literature, Philosophy, and Experimental Sciences at several high schools in El Oued was selected. After excluding incomplete questionnaires, the final sample consisted of 293 students. The following table shows the sample's distribution:

Table

Distribution of the study sample by division and academic level

Division / Level	Second Year	Third Year	Total
Scientific	-	145	145
Literary	71	77	148

Total	71	222	293
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3- Study Tools:

The tools used in this study are:

- The achievement test for the units on freedom and truth.
- Diagnostic questionnaire for difficulties in acquiring philosophical concepts.

a. Achievement Test for Units on Freedom and Truth:

The units on truth and freedom were chosen as models for the achievement test based on objective justifications.

The researcher selected the units on truth and freedom as a model to explore difficulties in acquiring philosophical concepts based on the following reasons:

The concepts of truth and freedom are ones that every individual aspires to understand and explore, and to become familiar with their key aspects. Adolescents, who are in the process of forming their identities and experiencing what is termed an "identity crisis," show a keen interest in these concepts as they explore and test their beliefs, roles, and purposes in life (Asiri, 2003, p. 30).

Adolescents are motivated to explore the concepts of truth and freedom to understand the concept of truth, particularly ideological and social truths, and to form their self-identity through achieving ideological and social identity.

B-Diagnostic Questionnaire for Difficulties in Acquiring Philosophical Concepts:

The diagnostic questionnaire for difficulties in acquiring philosophical concepts contains 30 items, with dimensions (difficulties) and indicators as follows :psychological difficulties, educational difficulties, pedagogical difficulties, epistemological difficulties.

C-Psychometric Properties of Study Tools:

- **Psychometric Properties of the Achievement Tests:** a pilot study was conducted on a sample of 30 students to verify the psychometric properties of the achievement tests (truth and freedom), yielding the following results:

- **Validity:**

- **Discriminant Validity:**

The value of the t-test was 10.65 for significance of differences, which was significant at 0.01 level for the truth test.

The value of the t-test was 8.64 for significance of differences, which was significant at 0.01 level for the freedom test.

- **Reliability:**

-**Split-Half Method:**

The reliability coefficient after applying Spearman's length correction was 0.65, which is an acceptable value for the reliability coefficient of the truth test.

After applying Spearman's length correction, the value was 0.99, which is an acceptable reliability coefficient for the freedom test, indicating that the freedom and truth tests are suitable for application in the main study.

- Psychometric Properties of the Diagnostic Questionnaire for Difficulties:

A pilot study was conducted on a sample of 42 students experiencing difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts to verify the psychometric properties of the diagnostic questionnaire for difficulty, yielding the following results:

- Validity:

-Discriminant Validity:

The value of the t-test was 6.73 for significance of differences, which was significant at a 0.01 level, indicating that the diagnostic questionnaire for difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts has discriminative power between the upper and lower groups, meaning that the test demonstrates discriminant validity.

- Reliability:

- Cronbach's Alpha:

Reliability was calculated for the diagnostic questionnaire for difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient value of 0.76, which is an acceptable reliability value for the questionnaire.

4-Presentation and Analysis of Findings:

4-1- First Hypothesis:

The first hypothesis stated that most second- and third-year students studying Literature, Philosophy, and Experimental Sciences in El Oued have difficulty acquiring the philosophical concept, including the units of freedom and truth as a model from the curriculum.

To test this hypothesis, the achievement tests (truth - freedom) were administered to the research sample to identify the group of students who have difficulty acquiring the philosophical concept, whose scores in the achievement test are below (14) (i.e., less than the average total score of the test, estimated at (28)). The results of the hypothesis are shown in the following table:

Table 02

Overall Results for Students with Difficulty Acquiring the Philosophical Concept

Level	Number of Students	Students with Difficulty	Percentage of Students with Difficulty
Second Year (Literature)	71	51	71.83%
Third Year (Literature)	77	52	67.53%

Third Year (Science)	145	102	70.34%
Total	293	205	69.90%

From Table 02, it is evident that the percentage of students with difficulty acquiring the philosophical concept is estimated at (69.90%), which is approximately (70%) of the main study sample. On the other hand, the percentage of students without difficulty is (30.1%). Thus, the researcher's hypothesis that most second-year Literature and Philosophy and third-year secondary education students have difficulty acquiring the philosophical concept, concerning the units of freedom and truth, is confirmed.

Furthermore, researchers "Ben Messi and Khazar" concluded that there are psychological, pedagogical, and cognitive difficulties among learners in acquiring the contents of the philosophy subject, as many local and Arab studies have confirmed the difficulty of the content of the philosophy subject, as found by Kehilabouz (2009), Akli Koukam (2010), and Boudaoud Hussein (2007).

The difficulty in philosophy lies mainly in the nature of the subject itself. The philosophical concept in this context involves a level of abstraction and complexity, with ideas that have different connotations. It is not enough to merely review these ideas; rather, understanding and examining them in depth is necessary, which involves questions and the search for answers. Students unaccustomed to philosophy may find it difficult to obtain clear answers to these questions. Additionally, philosophy is distinguished from other subjects by its abstract nature in arguments, making it challenging for students to acquire the proposed knowledge and concepts.

4-2- Second Hypothesis:

The second hypothesis stated that the difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts varies according to the educational level (Second Year - Third Year).

To verify this hypothesis, responses to the diagnostic questionnaire on difficulty were analyzed for students with difficulty in acquiring the philosophical concept from both the second and third years of secondary education. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a t-test for differences between two independent groups was calculated. The results are shown in the following table:

Table 03
Results of the T-test on the Difficulty of Acquiring Philosophical Concepts by Educational Level (Second Year - Third Year)

Data	Number of Students	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	T-Value	Significance Level
Second Year	51	73.82	11.37	203	6.89	0.01
Third Year	154	61.32	11.16			

From Table 03 above, it appears that the mean score of the diagnostic questionnaire on difficulty for students with difficulty in acquiring the philosophical concept in the second year

is (73.82), while the mean for the third year is (61.32). The standard deviation is (11.37) for the second year and (11.16) for the third year. The t-value is (6.89), which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level with degrees of freedom (df= 203), indicating a significant difference in the difficulty of acquiring philosophical concepts between the mean scores of second- and third-year students on the difficulty diagnostic questionnaire.

The result can be interpreted as follows: Third-year students are preparing for a crucial exam (baccalaureate exam) and, therefore, may be more focused on acquiring and mastering the content compared to second-year students who are studying philosophy for the first time and do not have a prior knowledge background of the philosophical concept. Third-year students have previously studied philosophy, which gives them familiarity with the nature of the subject and the necessary background knowledge, making it easier for them to understand the concepts compared to second-year students.

4-3- Third Hypothesis:

The third hypothesis stated that the difficulty in acquiring the philosophical concept varies according to the division (Scientific - Literature).

To verify this hypothesis, the responses to the diagnostic questionnaire on difficulty were analyzed for students with difficulty in acquiring the philosophical concept from both scientific and literary divisions using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and calculating a t-test for differences between two independent groups. The results are shown in the following table:

Table 05
Results of the T-test on the Difficulty of Acquiring Philosophical Concepts between Students from the Two divisions (Scientific - Literature)

Data	Number of Students	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	T-Value	Significance Level
Scientific	102	64.21	12.32	154	3.64	0.01
Literature	103	59.16	6.36			

From Table 05, it is evident that the mean score of the diagnostic questionnaire on difficulty for students with difficulty in acquiring the philosophical concept from the scientific division is (64.21), while for the literature division is (59.16). The standard deviation is (12.32) for the scientific division and (6.36) for the literature division. The t-value is (3.64), which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level with degrees of freedom (df= 154), indicating a significant difference in the difficulty of acquiring philosophical concepts between the mean scores of students from the two division.

This result indicates that the difficulty varies depending on the division (Scientific - Literature). It can be attributed to the fact that philosophy is not a core subject for scientific stream students, unlike their peers in the literary stream. Additionally, the number of hours allocated for philosophy in the literature stream is greater than in the scientific stream, providing more opportunities for learning and acquiring philosophical concepts for literature students compared to scientific students.

5- Conclusion:

This study aimed to explore a learning-teaching problem represented in the difficulty of acquiring the philosophical concept. The study results showed a significant difficulty in acquiring the philosophical concept, with a high percentage among students in both the second and third years of secondary education, as well as a significant difference in difficulty in light of the variables (division - educational level).

In an effort to find effective solutions to the difficulty of acquiring the philosophical concept, the following suggestions are proposed:

- Curriculum designers should review the philosophy curriculum by reconsidering the usefulness of some study units, adopting more effective approaches, using a textual approach, and selecting simpler texts to facilitate student learning and acquisition of philosophical concepts.
- Improve the quality of the subject textbook, diversify modern pedagogical tools, and use modern technologies in teaching to improve the teacher's pedagogical performance and reduce student difficulty in acquiring philosophical concepts.
- Provide philosophy teachers with guidance on subject teaching and adopt effective teaching strategies, such as concept maps and metacognition strategies, to facilitate students' acquisition of philosophical concepts.
- Reduce the density of the curriculum and increase the allocated hours for the subject.
- Introduce philosophy as a subject at the beginning of secondary education to develop students' abilities and accustom their perceptions to the content of the subject.

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