

UDC 37.01

DOI <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/86-4-24>**Victor CHERNYSHOV,***orcid.org/0000-0002-0960-8464**PhD in Philosophy, Associate Professor**Associate Professor at the General Linguistics and Foreign Languages Department**National University "Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic"**(Poltava, Ukraine) chernyshov.v@nupp.edu.ua***Olena BALATSKA,***orcid.org/0000-0001-8909-2324**PhD, Associate Professor,**Associate Professor at the Department of General Linguistics and Foreign Languages**National University «Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic»**(Poltava, Ukraine) balatska2014@gmail.com*

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES IN EDUCATION: THEORIES OF MEANING

This article investigates the philosophical nature of the concept of "meaning" as a fundamental notion that shapes methodological approaches in contemporary educational research. The authors examine the philosophical assumptions underlying research design, methodological selection, and the interpretation of findings. The study analyses three principal paradigms of theories of meaning: the objectivist paradigm, which treats meaning as objectively existing independently of human perception; the subjectivist paradigm, emphasizing the role of individual or collective experience in constructing meaning; and the syncretic (in some cases even synthetic) paradigm, which combines these approaches by highlighting the interaction between objective reality and subjective understanding. The article discusses major philosophical "turns" that have significantly influenced conceptions of knowledge and meaning: the Anthropological, Copernican, and Linguistic turns. The Anthropological Turn, commencing with Socrates, shifted the focus from cosmology to human experience and cognition, thereby contributing to the establishment of education as a philosophical discipline. The Copernican Turn, led by Kant, relocated the epistemological centre of gravity onto the active role of the subject in knowledge formation, establishing an interaction between perception and a priori categories of the mind. The Linguistic Turn of the twentieth century, represented by thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Husserl, and Gadamer, emphasized language as the primary medium for the creation of meaning. The authors argue that methodological choices in educational research are always linked to specific philosophical commitments about the nature of language, reality, and knowledge making these choices inherently non-neutral and subjective. Recognising and critically engaging with these philosophical foundations is essential for conducting scientifically rigorous, ethically responsible, and methodologically coherent research in the field of education.

Key words: *educational research, philosophical foundations of research, philosophy of education, philosophy of science, research methodology, theory of meaning, theory of education.*

Віктор ЧЕРНИШОВ,*orcid.org/0000-0002-0960-8464**кандидат філософських наук, доцент,**доцент кафедри загального мовознавства та іноземних мов**Національного університету «Полтавська політехніка імені Юрія Кондратюка»**(Полтава, Україна) chernyshov.v@nupp.edu.ua***Олена БАЛАЦЬКА,***orcid.org/0000-0001-8909-2324**кандидат філологічних наук, доцент,**доцент кафедри загального мовознавства та іноземних мов**Національного університету «Полтавська політехніка імені Юрія Кондратюка»**(Полтава, Україна) balatska2014@gmail.com*

ФІЛОСОФСЬКІ ЗАСНОВКИ ДОСЛІДНИЦЬКИХ МЕТОДОЛОГІЙ В ОСВІТІ: ТЕОРІЇ ЗНАЧЕНЬ

У статті досліджується філософська природа поняття «значення» як базового концепту, що визначає методологічні підходи у сучасних освітніх дослідженнях. Автори розглядають філософські припущення, що лежать в основі організації досліджень, вибору методології та інтерпретації отриманих результатів. Аналі-

зують три ключові парадигми теорії значення: об'єктивістську, яка трактує значення як об'єктивно існуюче незалежно від сприйняття людини; суб'єктивістську, що підкреслює роль індивідуального або колективного досвіду у конструюванні значення; та синкретичну, яка об'єднує ці два підходи, наголошуючи на взаємодії між об'єктивною реальністю та суб'єктивним розумінням. У статті висвітлюються основні філософські «повороти», що визначили розвиток уявлень про знання та значення: антропологічний, коперніканський і лінгвістичний. Антропологічний поворот, починаючи з епохи Сократа, переніс акцент з космосу на людський досвід і пізнання, сприяючи формуванню освіти як філософської дисципліни. Коперніканський поворот Канта змістив центр ваги на активну роль суб'єкта у формуванні знання, встановивши взаємодію між сприйняттям і апіорними категоріями розуму. Лінгвістичний поворот ХХ століття, представлений такими мислителями, як Л. Вітгенштайн, Е. Гуссерль і Г.-Г. Гадамер, характеризувався наголосом на мові як основному інструменті творення значення. Автори аргументують, що вибір методології в освітніх дослідженнях завжди пов'язаний із певними філософськими переконаннями про природу мови, реальності і пізнання, що робить ці вибори ненейтральними. Усвідомлення цих філософських основ є критично важливим для проведення науково обґрунтованих, етично відповідальних та методологічно послідовних досліджень в освітній сфері.

Ключові слова: дослідження в галузі освіти, дослідницька методологія, філософія науки, філософія освіти, філософські засновки, теорія значення, теорія освіти.

Problem statement. A successful academic study presupposes a transition from the realm of the unknown to the domain of knowledge: a transformation that turns the object of research into the object of understanding. This transition requires a methodology that inevitably rests on a particular philosophical foundation. Contemporary research in education, however, demonstrates a range of methodological approaches, each based on distinct philosophical premises. Without a clear understanding of these premises, and their differences, it becomes difficult to articulate a coherent research programme.

From the standpoint of philosophy, one of the defining features of any research methodology is the theory of meaning it employs. The understanding of meaning – its origin, and its interpretation – affects every aspect of a research programme, forming the cornerstone of its entire methodology. It is also evident that the theory of meaning adopted by a researcher influences all subsequent research procedures, and ultimately shapes the research conclusions, providing the framework for the entire study.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Several recent publications address this topic in varying ways. In the most recent book *Perspectives in Contemporary STEM Education Research. Research Methodology and Design* Thomas Delahunty and Máire Ní Ríordáin state at least three classical approaches (or paradigms, as they call it) to meaning – positivist, interpretivist, and pragmatic, opposing these is the new “quantum-theoretical paradigm”, characterised by a syncretistic approach that might provide the philosophical foundation for the contemporary STEM education research, relating it to the quantum physics (Delahunty, 2023). Omar A. Ponce, José Gómez Galán, Nellie Pagán-Maldonado, Angel L. Canales Encarnación in their book *Introduction to the Philosophy of Educational Research* offering insights into contemporary issues within the framework of the philosophy of

educational research, focusing on the dichotomy of qualitative and quantitative methods in educational research (Ponce et al., 2021). Olaf Zawacki-Richter, Michael Kerres, Svenja Bedenlier, Melissa Bond, Katja Buntins, and others, in the collective monograph *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research Methodology, Perspectives and Application*, focus on the systematicity of educational research, reflecting on the meaning of the data, the collective meaning of the research, and the understanding of the overall meaning (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). There are several other studies that treat and reflect the topic in the likewise manner (Heyting, 2001; and some others). However, no one of these publications address it directly, which undoubtedly highlights the relevance of this investigation.

Purpose statement. This study aims to explore how theories of meaning underpin methodological approaches in educational research. Specifically, it seeks to clarify the philosophical assumptions that shape research design, methodology, and interpretation of results.

General study. The philosophical understanding of *meaning* is central to the development of research methodologies, which inevitably exist as an “irreducible plurality” (Heyting, 2001: 2). Theories of meaning not only shape how knowledge is conceptualised, but also determine the underlying assumptions about language, reality, and understanding within any research framework.

Several conceptual “turns” in the history of thought have profoundly shaped human understanding, including our contemporary perspectives. The first of these was the *Anthropological Turn*, which occurred around the fourth century BCE and is typically associated with Socrates (c. 470–399 BCE). This *Socratic turn* shifted philosophical attention from cosmological questions to anthropological, or more broadly, humanistic concerns. Notably, it marked the first time in European culture that education was

considered a worthy subject of philosophical inquiry, particularly due to the famous debates between the sophists and Socrates.

The major questions addressed during this period revolved around the relationship between the natural and the social dimensions of human life – and, by extension, of education. A central issue was the nature of truth: Is truth absolute and divine, or relative and human? Must it be discovered, or is it constructed by the human mind and used for human purposes?

In the classical tradition, Plato (c. 428–347 BCE) conceived of meaning in terms of participation in eternal Forms. Words, in his view, derived their significance by referring to immutable, ideal entities beyond the world of appearances (see Plato, 1992). In *Cratylus*, however, Plato explores the origin of word meanings, debating the merits of *conventionalism* versus *naturalism* (see Plato, 1926). Aristotle, while sharing Plato's concern with the relationship between language and reality, offered a more empirical and logical account. In the *Organon*, he argued that terms acquire meaning through their connection to categories of being, structured by syllogistic reasoning and predication (see Aristotle, 2002). This framework oscillated between *idealism* and *realism*, providing a relatively stable basis for subsequent philosophical inquiry.

Another major shift was the so-called *Copernican Turn* in philosophy, initiated by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). With this turn, modern philosophy embraced a *transcendental* approach. For Kant, knowledge does not conform to objects; rather, objects conform to the structures of human cognition. Meaning thus arises from the interplay between the *a priori* categories of understanding and the sensory manifold (Kant, 1998). This reorientation situated the conditions of meaning within the subject rather than in the external world, seeking a balance between objectivity and subjectivity, *empiricism* and *rationalism*, the universal and the individual.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries introduced what is often termed the *Linguistic Turn*, which repositioned language as the central medium through which philosophical problems are approached. It was the third major “turn”. The *Linguistic Turn* was initiated by a range of thinkers from both sides of the English Channel – and even the Atlantic. On one hand, there were the founders of *Analytical Philosophy*, such as Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. On the other, there were the central figures of Continental European philosophy, including the founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl, as well as Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and others.

Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) distinguished between *Sinn* (sense) and *Bedeutung* (reference), arguing that the meaning of a term involves both its referent and the way it is presented (Frege, 1952). Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) extended this line of inquiry through his theory of descriptions, aiming to resolve ambiguities in language by analysing logical form (Russell, 1905).

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) made two distinct contributions to the theory of meaning. In his early work – *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he proposed that the structure of language mirrors the structure of reality (Wittgenstein, 1922). Later, in *Philosophical Investigations*, he argued that meaning arises from use – language is embedded in forms of life, and understanding is a matter of shared practices (Wittgenstein, 1953).

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the founder of phenomenology, sought to return to the “things themselves” by examining the intentional structures of consciousness. For Husserl, meaning is constituted through acts of consciousness directed toward objects (Husserl, 1983). Martin Heidegger, expanding phenomenology into ontology, interpreted meaning as emerging from *Dasein*'s engagement with the world – an understanding grounded in temporality and *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 1962). Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) further developed this tradition through philosophical hermeneutics, asserting that meaning is not fixed but unfolds through dialogue and historical interpretation (Gadamer, 1975).

In parallel, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) introduced a semiotic theory in which meaning is a product of sign processes (semiosis), involving the interaction of sign, object, and interpretant (Peirce, 1974: 5.473). Herbert Paul Grice, within analytic philosophy, proposed that meaning in communication is fundamentally tied to speaker intentions and the recognition of those intentions by the listener (Grice, 1957).

These varied theories of meaning – from idealism and empiricism to pragmatism and phenomenology – have profound implications for educational research. Each framework carries methodological consequences, shaping how research problems are posed, how data are interpreted, and how conclusions are drawn. A critical awareness of these foundations is therefore essential for any research programme (Lakatos, 1989).

These theories of meaning may be broadly systematised according to their respective centres of gravity: *objectivist* (or physical) theories, *subjectivist* (or interpretivist) theories, and syncretic (in some cases even synthetic) theories of meaning.

Objectivist theories are arguably the oldest philosophical approaches to meaning. Contemporary

positivist theory and the so-called “quantum-theoretical paradigm” both fall within this category. The defining features of these theories lie in their emphasis on what meaning is understood to be – objectively and naturally (i.e., physically) – as well as on the cognitive act conceived as either naturalistic (naïve) or scientific (employing methods liable to verification or falsification). In any case, meaning is regarded as something discovered by a “detached observer.” According to such theories, meaning precedes cognition, and the acquisition of knowledge about meaning is the result of human discovery of *objective facts* pertaining to the nature and structure of a mind-independent world. Cognition, so understood, may employ either *qualitative* or *quantitative* methods and may yield *relative* or *absolute* results.

By contrast, contemporary interpretivist theories of meaning fall under the subjectivist paradigm. These theories are largely the product of modern philosophy, beginning with the sceptical dictum *Dubito* and the Cartesian principle *Cogito*. Centring the subject – and its processes of thought – at the core of cognition, subjectivist theories may be subdivided into two broad types: individualistic and social. Theories of the individualistic type are rooted in subjective idealism and hold that social reality, being subjectively construed and variable from person to person, is mediated through human perception. They place particular emphasis on the role of language in mediating and constructing social reality. In this view, meaning is considered strictly individual, and knowledge is inherently subjective and relative, as it emerges from the constructive activity of the individual mind. The “educational research conducted under the interpretivism paradigm tries to understand educational phenomena from the research participants perspectives” (Delahunty, 2023: 16).

Theories of the social type are grounded in the notion of *common sense*; however, they maintain that social reality is relative and varies across communities situated in different historical and spatial contexts. In such frameworks, the subject is no longer the individual human being, but rather the social collective or organism as a whole.

For subjectivist or interpretivist theories, the principal methodologies are those of *phenomenology* and *hermeneutics*. Meaning is understood as an individual or social construct, generalising the *subjective facts*, which must be uncovered through interpretivist approaches. These may include semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, unstructured observations, and focus groups. In the majority of cases, the data sought are *qualitative* in nature and are analysed by the researcher using

thematic analysis, with the aim of identifying general patterns – such as common themes, underlying principles, or shared behaviours among research participants.

The pragmatic theory of meaning is the theory of syncretic type. Despite it rejects the traditional assumptions on the nature of reality, knowledge, and modes of reality, at the same time, it accepts the existence of single or multiple realities that can be investigated empirically. Syncretic (or in some cases even synthetic) theories of meaning attempt to reconcile or integrate elements from both objectivist and subjectivist approaches. These theories acknowledge the existence of an external world that constrains meaning, while simultaneously recognising the formative role of the subject in the construction and interpretation of meaning. In this respect, syncretic theories are often situated within pragmatic, phenomenological, hermeneutic, or critical traditions, all of which resist the reduction of meaning to purely objective facts or wholly subjective constructions.

A central feature of syncretic (or synthetic, in some cases) theories is the emphasis on intersubjectivity – the idea that meaning arises through communicative acts embedded within shared linguistic, cultural, or historical frameworks. Rather than privileging either the external world or the individual subject, these theories foreground the dynamic interplay between them. Meaning is neither entirely discovered nor entirely invented; rather, it emerges through the mediation of language, practice, and context.

Moreover, syncretic accounts typically stress the provisional, contingent, and historically situated nature of meaning. They reject the notion of absolute certainty, favouring instead a model of knowledge that is fallible yet potentially progressive. In this view, understanding is an ongoing interpretative process, subject to revision and negotiation within the horizon of human experience.

Taken together, these three broad paradigms – objectivist, subjectivist, and syncretic – constitute a spectrum of philosophical approaches to meaning. Each offers distinct assumptions about the nature of reality, the role of the subject, and the epistemological status of meaning. A critical engagement with these frameworks allows for a more nuanced understanding of how meaning is constituted, apprehended, and communicated.

Conclusion. This study underscores that educational research is invariably situated within philosophical assumptions about meaning. Whether drawing on objectivist, subjectivist, or syncretic (in some cases even synthetic) paradigms, researchers are guided – implicitly

or explicitly – by commitments regarding the nature of knowledge, reality, and language. These theoretical commitments shape not only the questions researchers pose, but also how they gather and interpret data, and ultimately how they generate meaning from their findings.

By tracing the major philosophical “turns” and mapping the spectrum of theories of meaning, this study clarifies the deep connections between epistemology and methodology. It argues that methodological choices in educational research are never neutral but are embedded in broader ontological and semantic frameworks. Recognising and critically engaging with these underlying theories is essential for conducting philosophically grounded, methodologically sound, and ethically responsible research in education.

Throughout the history of philosophy – and, by extension, of science – several core distinctions have shaped conceptions of meaning: the theoretical distinction between *objectivism* and *subjectivism*, that is, between the objective and the subjective, and even between the common and the individual. The contemporary division between *positivism*, *interpretivism*, *pragmatism*, and *the quantum-theoretical paradigm* can, in general, be reduced to this broader distinction, taking into account their respective variations. These variations often rest, for instance, on the distinction between *naturalism* and *conventionalism*, or between the natural and the social.

Another dimension of this issue is practical, relating to the application of research methods, which depends on the theoretical premises. At the applied level, the principal division lies between *quantitative* and *qualitative* methodologies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Aristotle. *Categories and De Interpretatione* / Transl. by J.L. Ackrill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 167 p.
2. Babione C.A. *Practitioner Teacher Inquiry and Research*. San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass – Wiley, 2015. 314 p.
3. Delahunty Th., Ríordáin M.N. *Perspectives in Contemporary STEM Education Research*. Research Methodology and Design. London, New York: Routledge, 2023. 201 p.
4. Frege G. *On Sense and Reference* / Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege / ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (this piece translated by Max Black). Oxford: Blackwell, 1952. P. 56–78.
5. Gadamer H.-G. *Truth and Method* / 2nd rev. ed. Revised tr. by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. London, New York: Continuum, 1975. 599 p.
6. Grice H.P. *Meaning*. *The Philosophical Review*. 1957. Vol. 66, no. 3. P. 377–388.
7. Heidegger M. *Being and Time* / Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962. 589 p.
8. Heyting F., Lenzen D., White J. (eds.). *Methods in philosophy of education*. London: Routledge, 2001. 185 p.
9. Husserl E. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* / Transl. by F. Kersten. The Hague / Boston / Lancaster: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983. 401 p.
10. Kant I. *Critique of Pure Reason* / Transl. by P. Guyer and A. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 785 p.
11. Lakatos I. *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*. Philosophical Papers. Volume I / J. Worrall, G. Currie (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. 250 p. (1st ed. 1978).
12. Martinich A.P. (ed.). *The Philosophy of language* / 3rd ed. New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. 577 p.
13. Peirce C.S. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. 5–6 / ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974. 950 p.
14. Plato. *Cratylus. Parmenides. Greater Hippias. Lesser Hippias* / With an English transl. by H.N. Fowler. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1926. 496 p.
15. Plato. *Republic* / Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis Cambridge: Hackett, 1992. 300 p.
16. Ponce O.A., Galán J.G., Pagán-Maldonado N., Encarnación A.L.C. *Introduction to the Philosophy of Educational Research*. Gistrup, Denmark: River Publishers; London, New York: Routledge, 2021. 190 p.
17. Russell B. *On Denoting*. *Mind*. 1905. Vol. 14, no. 56. P. 479–493.
18. Wittgenstein L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge, 1922. 207 p.
19. Wittgenstein L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. 250 p.
20. Zawacki-Richter O., Kerres M., Bedenlier S., Bond M., Buntins K. (eds.). *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research. Methodology, Perspectives and Application*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020. 161 p.

REFERENCES

1. Aristotle. (2002). *Categories and De Interpretatione*. Transl. by J.L. Ackrill. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 167 p.
2. Babione C.A. (2015). *Practitioner Teacher Inquiry and Research*. San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass – Wiley. 314 p.
3. Delahunty Th., Ríordáin M.N. (2023) *Perspectives in Contemporary STEM Education Research*. Research Methodology and Design. London, New York: Routledge. 201 p.
4. Frege G. (1952). *On Sense and Reference*. *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*. ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (this piece translated by Max Black). Oxford: Blackwell, 1952, 56–78.
5. Gadamer, H.-G. (1975). *Truth and Method*. 2nd rev. ed. Revised tr. by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. London, New York: Continuum. 599 p.
6. Grice H.P. (1957). *Meaning*. *The Philosophical Review*, 66(3), 377–388.

7. Heidegger M. (1962). *Being and Time*. Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell. 589 p.
8. Heyting F., Lenzen D., White J. (eds.). (2001). *Methods in philosophy of education*. London: Routledge. 185 p.
9. Husserl E. (1983). *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Transl. by F. Kersten. The Hague / Boston / Lancaster: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 401 p.
10. Kant I. (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Transl. by P. Guyer and A. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 785 p.
11. Lakatos I. (1989). *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*. Philosophical Papers. Volume I / J. Worrall, G. Currie (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge UP. [1st ed. 1978]. 250 p.
12. Martinich A.P. (ed.). (1996) *The Philosophy of language* (3rd ed.). New York, Oxford: Oxford UP. 577 p.
13. Peirce C.S. (1974). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. 5–6, ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 950 p.
14. Plato. (1926). *Cratylus. Parmenides. Greater Hippias. Lesser Hippias*. With an English transl. by H.N. Fowler. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. 496 p. [In Ancient Greek with English translation].
15. Plato. (1992). *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis / Cambridge: Hackett. 300 p.
16. Ponce O.A., Galán J.G., Pagán-Maldonado N., Encarnación A.L.C. (2021). *Introduction to the Philosophy of Educational Research*. Gistrup, Denmark: River Publishers; London, New York: Routledge. 190 p.
17. Russell B. (1905). On Denoting. *Mind*, 14(56), 479–493.
18. Wittgenstein L. (1922). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge. 207 p.
19. Wittgenstein L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell. 250 p.
20. Zawacki-Richter O., Kerres M., Bedenlier S., Bond M., Buntins K. (eds.). (2020) *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research. Methodology, Perspectives and Application*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. 161 p.