



## BRINGING DEPTH TO EDUCATION: APPLYING EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN DEVELOPING ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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### **Abstract:**

*Existentialism emphasizes the uniqueness of individuals and the importance of personal choice and responsibility. It encourages individuals to seek meaning and purpose in their lives, and to grapple with the difficult questions of existence. By applying existentialist philosophy to Islamic education, students can be empowered to take responsibility for their own learning and to engage with the deeper questions of life and spirituality. This paper examines the implications of applying existentialist philosophy to Islamic education, including the role of the teacher as a facilitator and guide rather than a strict authority figure, the importance of experiential learning and self-discovery, and the need to provide opportunities for students to explore and question their beliefs and values. The research method used in this study is literature review. This research will conduct a search and analysis of literature sources related to the application of existentialist philosophy in the development of Islamic education. The literature sources that will be used include books, scientific journals, articles, and official documents related to Islamic education and existentialist philosophy. The process of searching literature sources will be carried out using several online databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, and EBSCO. After the literature sources are found, the selection process will be carried out by identifying the relevance, credibility, and quality of the literature sources that will be used in this research. Research result, bringing depth to Islamic education through the application of existentialist philosophy can help students develop a stronger sense of identity, purpose, and meaning in their lives. It can also help students to better understand and appreciate the complexities and diversity of the Islamic tradition, and to engage with the world around them in a more meaningful and productive way.*

**Keyword:** *Islamic education, existentialist philosophy, personal responsibility, teacher's role, self-discovery, experiential learning.*

**Abstrak:**

Eksistensialisme menekankan keunikan individu dan pentingnya pilihan dan tanggung jawab pribadi. Hal ini mendorong individu untuk mencari makna dan tujuan dalam hidup mereka, serta berjuang dengan pertanyaan-pertanyaan sulit tentang eksistensi. Dengan menerapkan filsafat eksistensialis dalam pendidikan Islam, siswa dapat diberdayakan untuk bertanggung jawab atas pembelajaran mereka sendiri dan terlibat dengan pertanyaan-pertanyaan yang lebih dalam tentang kehidupan dan spiritualitas. Paper ini mengkaji implikasi dari penerapan filsafat eksistensialis dalam pendidikan Islam, termasuk peran guru sebagai fasilitator dan panduan bukan sebagai tokoh otoritas yang ketat, pentingnya pembelajaran pengalaman dan penemuan diri, serta perlunya memberikan kesempatan bagi siswa untuk mengeksplorasi dan mempertanyakan keyakinan dan nilai-nilai mereka. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah tinjauan literatur. Penelitian ini akan melakukan pencarian dan analisis sumber literatur yang terkait dengan penerapan filsafat eksistensialis dalam pengembangan pendidikan Islam. Sumber literatur yang akan digunakan termasuk buku, jurnal ilmiah, artikel, dan dokumen resmi yang terkait dengan pendidikan Islam dan filsafat eksistensialis. Proses pencarian sumber literatur akan dilakukan menggunakan beberapa database online seperti Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, dan EBSCO. Setelah sumber literatur ditemukan, proses pemilihan akan dilakukan dengan mengidentifikasi relevansi, kredibilitas, dan kualitas sumber literatur yang akan digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa membawa kedalaman pada pendidikan Islam melalui penerapan filsafat eksistensialis dapat membantu siswa mengembangkan rasa identitas, tujuan, dan makna yang lebih kuat dalam hidup mereka. Ini juga dapat membantu siswa memahami dan menghargai kompleksitas dan keragaman tradisi Islam, serta terlibat dengan dunia sekitar mereka secara lebih bermakna dan produktif.

**Kata kunci:** Pendidikan Islam, filsafat eksistensialis, tanggung jawab pribadi, peran guru, penemuan diri, pengalaman belajar.

## A. Introduction

The philosophical stream is the utilization of the philosophical method and will utilize the results of philosophy, namely the results of human thinking about reality, knowledge, and values. As a method, philosophy is a process of deep thinking that goes to the roots. As a result of thought, philosophy is a product of thinking that gives rise to philosophical streams.

Existentialism is one of the significant characteristics of twentieth-century philosophical thought that places great emphasis on the autonomy and immense freedom of human beings to actualize themselves. The existentialist philosophy is an attempt to liberate humans from the shackles that imprison them, thus realizing human existence towards a more humane and civilized direction. From the perspective of existentialism, education should focus on the true liberation of humans, and some existentialist ideas can serve as a basis or a sort of contemplative material for educators to direct the education process towards this end.<sup>1</sup>

Existentialism opposes the materialistic doctrine that regards humans merely as objects. It is a philosophy that considers all phenomena based on existence, or the way humans exist in the world. The way humans exist in the world is different from the way objects exist. The philosophy of existentialism prioritizes the individual as a factor in determining what is good and right. Life norms differ individually and are determined freely by each individual.<sup>2</sup>

Existentialism emerged as a response to the social conditions of developing societies. As a philosophical movement, existentialism is a subject of study that is always interesting to explore. Many writings have examined this philosophical movement. In this article, the author will also examine the essence of existentialism and its implications for education. Existentialism, as a philosophical movement, places great emphasis on individual freedom, choice, and responsibility. It acknowledges the existence of fundamental questions about the nature of human existence and encourages individuals to confront these questions head-on. In the context of education, existentialism emphasizes the importance of personal growth and development, as well as critical self-reflection.<sup>3</sup>

In Islamic education, the implementation of existentialist philosophy can serve as a bridge between traditional Islamic teachings and modern pedagogical methods. It can help to develop students' sense of self-awareness, personal responsibility, and critical thinking skills, while also instilling in them a strong sense of faith and devotion to Allah. By combining Islamic teachings with existentialist philosophy, we can create a more meaningful and impactful learning

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<sup>1</sup> R. Nasrullah, Existentialism in the Philosophy of Education. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 8(4), 2019, 37-46.

<sup>2</sup> J. P. Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. (Yale University Press, 1946)

<sup>3</sup> G. L. Gutek. *Historical and philosophical foundations of education: A biographical introduction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2011), 185.

experience for students, one that enables them to grow both intellectually and spiritually.<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, incorporating existentialist philosophy into Islamic education can offer a powerful tool for transformation and growth. It can inspire students to reflect on their purpose in life, take responsibility for their choices, and develop a strong sense of self. By embracing the tenets of this philosophy, we can empower future leaders to create positive change and make a lasting impact on the world.

## **B. Method**

The research method used in this study is literature review. This research will conduct a search and analysis of literature sources related to the application of existentialist philosophy in the development of Islamic education. The literature sources that will be used include books, scientific journals, articles, and official documents related to Islamic education and existentialist philosophy. The process of searching literature sources will be carried out using several online databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, and EBSCO. After the literature sources are found, the selection process will be carried out by identifying the relevance, credibility, and quality of the literature sources that will be used in this research.

After the selected literature sources, the analysis of the content will be carried out by reading them carefully and thoroughly, then extracting and organizing relevant data. Data analysis will be carried out by comparing and summarizing the collected data, and then interpreting and discussing the analyzed data. The results of this research will be used to develop Islamic education with an existentialist approach, as well as to provide a deeper understanding of the philosophy of existentialism and its implications in the development of Islamic education.

## **C. Result and Discussion**

### **1. Understanding Existentialism and Its History**

Existentialism is a philosophy that views all phenomena rooted in existence. The word "existence" comes from the Latin word "ex" meaning "out" and "sistere" meaning "to stand." Existence is defined as humans standing as themselves by coming out of themselves. Humans are aware of their own existence. They can doubt everything, but one thing is certain: they exist. This is what is called the "SELF."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Harun Hadiwijono argues that existentialism is a philosophy that sees all phenomena as rooted in existence. Existence has a special meaning, which is the way human beings exist in the world. The way

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<sup>4</sup> Muhammad, N. A., & Rahman, N. A. (2015). Existentialism in Islamic Education: A Critical Appraisal. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(1 S1), 98-103.

<sup>5</sup> Harun Hadiwijono, *Sari Sejarah Filsafat Barat II*, (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2011), 148

human beings exist in the world is different from the way objects exist. Objects are not conscious of their existence, but humans exist with these objects. These objects become meaningful because of humans..<sup>6</sup> Everything around him is connected to human existence. In the world, humans determine their condition through their actions. Humans are preoccupied with themselves to find their true selves. That's how they exist.

According to Gutek, Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes the uniqueness and freedom of individuals in facing the various tumults of mass media. Everyone is responsible for the full responsibility of the meaning of their existence and the manifestation of their essence.<sup>7</sup> Kierkegaard defined existentialism as an absolute freedom of humans and all aspects of humanity must be accounted for.<sup>8</sup>

The term existentialism was introduced by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Existentialism is a philosophy and its methodological roots come from the phenomenological method developed by Husserl (1859-1938). The emergence of existentialism began with philosophers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Kierkegaard was a German philosopher (1813-1855) who sought to answer the question "How do I become an individual?" This happened because at that time there was an existential crisis where humans were forgetting their individuality.

Kiergaard found the answer to the question that humans (I) can become authentic individuals if they have passion, engagement, and personal commitment in life. Nietzsche (1844-1900), a German philosopher, believed that the goal of philosophy is to answer the question "how to become a superior human being." The answer is that humans can become superior if they have the courage to honestly and bravely realize themselves.

Existentialism is a philosophy that specifically emphasizes human existence and experience using the methodology of phenomenology, or the way humans exist. Existentialism is a reaction to materialism and idealism. Materialism posits that humans are objects in the world, that humans are material, and that humans are something that exists without being a subject. The idealist view of humans is that humans are only subjects or only consciousness. Existentialism holds that human exposition must be grounded in existence, and as such, the existentialist movement is filled with concrete depictions.

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<sup>6</sup>Harun Hadiwijono, *Sari Sejarah*, 148

<sup>7</sup> “ Existensialism can be difined as a kind of philosophizing that emphasizes the uniqueness and freedom of individual person against the herd, the crowd, or the mass society.....that all people are fully responsible for the meaning of their existence and the creating of the the own essence or self-defenition. Gerald. L Gutek, *Philosopical and Ideological Perspectives on Education*, 114

<sup>8</sup> Gerald. L Gutek, *Philosopical and Ideological Perspectives on Education*, 114

## 1. The essence of the philosophy of existentialism

The existentialist movement in philosophy and education is an intriguing and fascinating topic. It challenges traditional views of human nature and emphasizes the importance of personal freedom and individuality. Existentialism posits that humans are not merely objects or subjects but unique individuals who must take responsibility for their own lives and create their own meaning in a world that is often absurd and meaningless.

One of the key principles of existentialism is that existence precedes essence. This means that humans are not born with predetermined purposes or natures but must create their own identity through their actions and choices. This belief in personal freedom and self-determination is both liberating and daunting, as it requires individuals to take responsibility for their own lives and accept the consequences of their actions. Existentialism also emphasizes the importance of subjective experience and the role of emotions and feelings in human life. It rejects the idea that humans can be understood solely through objective observation and analysis, and instead asserts that subjective experiences such as anxiety, despair, and joy are central to understanding human existence.

Moreover, existentialism in education is particularly interesting as it focuses on the development of the whole person, rather than just intellectual development. This approach emphasizes the importance of personal growth, emotional maturity, and self-awareness, which are essential for students to lead fulfilling lives and make positive contributions to society..

Abd. Rachman Assegaf wrote that existentialism is a relatively modern philosophy. According to him, there are many variations of existentialism, from atheistic to theistic and phenomenological forms. Abd. Rachman Assegaf cited Peter A. Angeles who classified the main characteristics of existentialism into several parts, including:

- a. Existence precedes essence.
- b. Truth is subjective.
- c. Nature does not provide moral rules. Moral principles are constructed by human beings in the context of being responsible for their own actions and the actions of others.
- d. Individual actions cannot be predicted.
- e. Individuals have complete freedom of will.
- f. Individuals can only make choices, not help but make them.
- g. Individuals can become something other than their existence perfectly..<sup>9</sup>

According to Harun Hadiwijono, there are four characteristics of existentialism that can be identified through its thoughts, namely:

- a. The main motif of existentialism is what is known as "existence," which refers to the way humans exist. Only humans have existence, which is a

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<sup>9</sup> Abd. Rahman Assegaf, *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam, Paradigma Baru Pendidikan Hadhari Berbasis Integratif dan Interkonektif*, 216.

- unique way of being. The focus is on humans, which is why humans are considered to be humanistic.
- b. Existence must be understood dynamically. To exist means to actively create oneself, to act, to become, and to plan. At any moment, humans can become more or less than they are.
  - c. In existential philosophy, humans are seen as open. Humans are an unfinished reality that still needs to be shaped. In essence, humans are bound to the world around them, especially to other humans.
  - d. Existentialist philosophy emphasizes concrete, existential experiences.<sup>10</sup>

The implication of existentialism in human life essentially lies in the attitude of subjectivity and individuality of humans. This subjectivity is dynamically manifested in life through actions and the search for identity. Thus, people tend to be free to act according to their own identity with the slogan "be yourself". The four views on humans above emphasize certain dimensions and aspects within humans.

Humans are free individuals. They are free to act and define themselves individually. Humans become themselves and realize the existence of others, thus, they can create their own world that is meaningful to themselves and to the lives of others or their environment.

The main principle of this philosophical school of thought is respect for the unique individuality of each person. Existence must be understood as something that exists within humans before reaching essence. Humans are born and exist, and then freely determine their own essence. Each individual determines for themselves what is right, wrong, beautiful, and ugly. Everyone has a desire for freedom (free will) and to develop without any limitations.

a) Reality

According to this existentialist philosophy, reality is the actuality of life itself. To describe reality, humans must describe what exists within themselves, rather than external conditions of humans.

b) Knowledge

The theory of existentialist knowledge is heavily influenced by the philosophy of phenomenology, which is a perspective that describes the appearance of objects and events as they appear to human consciousness. Human knowledge depends on their understanding of reality, depending on human interpretation of reality. Education provided in schools is not just a tool to obtain jobs or careers for children, but also a tool for personal development and self-fulfillment. Lessons in school should be used as a means to realize oneself, not a rigid discipline where children must obey and submit to the content of the lessons. Let the child's personality develop to find truths within the truth.c) Nilai

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<sup>10</sup> Harun Hadiwijono, *Sari Sejarah Filsafat Barat II*, 149

According to the existentialist understanding of values, it emphasizes freedom in action. Freedom is not a goal or an end in itself, but rather a potential for action. Humans have the freedom to choose, but determining the best choices among the options is the most difficult. Actions will produce consequences, and individuals must accept these consequences as their choices. Freedom is never finished, as every consequence will generate the need for the next choice. Moral actions can be done for their own sake or for a purpose. An individual must be able to create their own purpose. If one chooses the goals of a group or society, they must make those goals their own, as personal goals that they must achieve in every situation. Therefore, goals are obtained in situations.

## 2. Existentialism Philosophy and Its Implications in Education

Existentialism is very closely related to education, because both of them intersect with one another on the same issues, namely humans, life, relationships between humans, the nature of personality, and freedom. The center of existentialism's discussion is the "existence" of humans, while education is only carried out by humans.

Muhaimin positioned the school of philosophy and educational thought on 4 things, namely educational goals, curriculum and methods, the role of the teacher and the role of the school. Related to this, it is explained that the philosophy of existentialism influences educational goals, namely that students develop their individual potential to find their identity. Regarding the curriculum, it is explained that this philosophy is influential in terms of ;

- a. In general, there is no set curriculum because each individual has certain needs and interests to fulfill
- b. Emphasizes reflective thought processes
- c. Literature and arts as important subjects for introspection and reflection.<sup>11</sup>

The method developed is to encourage students to participate in projects that help them develop the necessary skills and knowledge. Regarding the role of teachers, they act as mentors and stimulate reflective thinking through inquiry-based questioning, with scientific honesty, integrity, and a figure that does not interfere with the development of students' interests and talents. As for the role of schools, according to this philosophy, schools should be a forum for dialogue among students.<sup>12</sup>

### a. Educational Goals

The purpose of education is to encourage each individual to be able to develop all of his potential for self-fulfillment and to provide broad and comprehensive experience in all forms of life. Each individual has specific needs and concerns related to self-fulfillment, so that in determining the

<sup>11</sup> Muhaimin, *Wacana Pengembangan*, 44

<sup>12</sup> Muhamin, *Wacana Pengembangan*, 44



curriculum there is no definite and determined curriculum that applies in general.

Related to this educational goal, Howard Ozmon and Samuel Craver write as follows;

Because the individual human is so important as the creator of ideas, existentialist maintain that education should focus upon individual human reality. It should deal with the individual as a unique being in the world-not only as a creator of idea, but as a living, feeling being.<sup>13</sup>

The point is that educational goals focus on achieving the human reality of each individual. That goal must be in direct contact with the unique process of becoming. Each individual is related to life and feels the process of "becoming".

d. Teacher's role

Man is the creator of his own essence. In the classroom the teacher acts as a facilitator to let students develop into themselves by allowing various forms to go through. Because feelings cannot be separated from reason, existentialists advocate education as a way of forming a whole human being, not just as a development of reason. In line with that goal, the curriculum is flexible by presenting a number of options for students to choose from. Classes must be rich with teaching materials that allow students to express themselves, including in the form of literary works, film and drama.

Teachers must give students the freedom to choose and give them experiences that will help them find meaning in their lives. This approach, contrary to popular belief, does not mean that students can do whatever they like. Logic shows that freedom has rules, and respect for other people's freedom is important.

Teachers should encourage students to think about themselves in a dialogue. The teacher asks about the ideas students have, and submits other ideas, then the teacher guides students to direct students carefully so that students are able to think relatively through questions.

e. Learners

Existentialism views students as rational beings with free choice and responsibility for their choices and students are seen as complete beings whose mind, spirit, and body are all round and all of which need to be developed through education. By exercising personal freedom, students will learn the basics of personal and social responsibility.

f. Curriculum

The ideal curriculum is one that gives students broad individual freedom and requires them to ask questions, carry out their own searches, and draw their own conclusions.

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<sup>13</sup> Howard A. Ozmon dan Samuel M. Craver, *Philosophical Foundations of Education*, (New Jersey:Merill Publishing Company,1995), 259.

According to the view of existentialism, no one particular subject is more important than another. Subjects are the material by which the individual will be able to find himself and his awareness of his world.

The existentialism curriculum pays great attention to the humanities and arts. Because both materials are needed so that individuals can introspect and introduce their self-image. Lessons should be encouraged to undertake activities that can develop the required skills, as well as acquire the expected knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

g. Method

Discussion is the main method in the view of existentialism. Students have the right to refuse the teacher's interpretation of the subject. School is a forum where students are able to dialogue with their peers, and teachers help explain students' progress in self-fulfillment.

In the view of exhibitionism, the learning method is taken by the way the teacher conducts a stimulus to intensify student awareness by encouraging through questions that are in concert with the meaning of life. These questions are in order to create an atmosphere in which students can express their subjectivity.<sup>15</sup>

h. Evaluation

Existentialism holds that existence on the world is always related to individual decisions, that is, if individuals do not make a decision then nothing must happen. Individuals are very decisive about something good, especially for their own interests. So according to this school, man himself can determine whether something is good or bad. The expression of this school is "Truth is subjectivity" or the truth lies in the person then it is called good, and vice versa if the decision is not good for the person then it is bad.

The evaluation carried out is based on human subjectivity (teacher). Something becomes good if it is decided that the child's performance is good. Something related to students can be bad if it is decided that something is bad. So the evaluation depends largely on the subject.

## D. Conclusion

Existentialism is rooted in the ideas of subjectivity and individuality of human beings. This subjectivity is dynamically manifested in life through actions and the search for self-identity. Individuals are naturally inclined to act according to their true selves with the motto "be yourself".

Humans are free individuals, able to define and express themselves in a unique way. By being true to themselves, they become aware of the presence of others and can create a world that is meaningful not only to themselves but also to others around them.

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<sup>14</sup> Muhaimin, *Wacana Pengembangan Pendidikan Islam*, 44

<sup>15</sup> Gerald. L. Gutek, *Philosophical and Ideological Perspectives on Education*, 129

This freedom of the individual has profound implications for education. Existentialism is closely related to education because both deal with similar issues, such as human life, relationships, personality, and freedom. The core of existentialist philosophy is human "existence," and education is only carried out by humans.

In short, existentialism calls for a focus on the individual and their unique experiences and perspectives. Education, therefore, should encourage self-expression and personal growth, helping individuals to become who they truly are and to create a meaningful life for themselves and those around them.

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