

## Existentialism and the Search for Meaning in Contemporary Philosophy

Rifki Zaitul Ikhlas<sup>1</sup> , Omar Khan<sup>2</sup> , Amir Raza<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

<sup>2</sup> Kabul University, Afghanistan

<sup>3</sup> Badakhshan University, Afghanistan

### ABSTRACT

**Background.** Existentialism as a school of philosophy that emphasizes personal freedom and responsibility continues to be relevant in the context of contemporary life, where individuals are increasingly feeling social pressures and identity crises.

**Purpose.** This research aims to explore how existentialism can help individuals in their search for meaning in life amid modern complexity and uncertainty.

**Method.** Using qualitative research methods with a phenomenological approach, this study involved in-depth interviews with adult individuals aged 25-50 years who have an interest in existentialist philosophy.

**Results.** The results of the study show that existentialism is not only an abstract philosophical view, but also serves as a practical guide in daily life. Most participants stated that existentialism helped them deal with existential crises, social pressures, and life uncertainties through deep self-reflection and an emphasis on freedom and responsibility.

**Conclusion.** The conclusion of this study indicates that existentialism can make a practical contribution in helping individuals find authentic meaning in life. This study recommends further research on the application of existentialism in various cultural and social contexts to deepen the understanding of the relevance of this philosophy in the modern era.

### KEYWORDS

Existentialism, Contemporary Philosophy, Meaning of Life

### INTRODUCTION

The understanding of the world has become one of the main foundations in philosophy, especially in the current of existentialist thought (King 2021). Existentialism, as a school of philosophy centered on the existence of the individual, raises fundamental questions about the meaning of human existence in a world that often seems chaotic and unpredictable (Tilburg 2021). This philosophy inspires individuals to face the uncertainty and absurdity of life and to formulate an authentic meaning of life. The emphasis on freedom, responsibility, and personal choice is at the core of existentialism, demanding that man fill his existence with a meaning of his own creation.

Humans have a natural tendency to seek answers to great questions about existence and the purpose of life

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#### Correspondence:

Rifki Zaitul Ikhlas,  
[rifkizaitul@gmail.com](mailto:rifkizaitul@gmail.com)

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(Budziszewska 2021). This desire is driven by curiosity and the need to understand its place in the universe.

Existentialism does not give a single answer to this question, but directs man to interpret his life through his personal experience (Baleanu 2023). Philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, for example, invited people to see life without illusions and accept the reality of the uncertainty and absurdity of the world. It is in this uncertainty that existentialism finds the resources to structure a life that has personal and unique values.

The contemporary world characterized by globalization, technological advancements, and shifts in traditional values has given rise to new challenges in the search for meaning in life (Aguilera 2022). Rapid change and socio-economic complexity create an identity crisis in many individuals. Existentialism exists as a relevant approach to answering these fundamental questions, providing space for reflection on how we can find meaning in the midst of an unrelenting stream of change (Skrzypińska 2021). This philosophy encourages individuals to understand the world not as something that is given absolutely, but as something that needs to be interpreted personally and authentically.

In existentialist thinking, the world does not offer a definitive answer regarding the purpose of life (Krickel-Choi 2022). In contrast, existentialism sees life as something that is open to being defined by the individual himself. Humans are expected to take a stance and make choices that give meaning to their lives (Dein 2021). The freedom to set these goals comes with the responsibility to face the consequences of every decision taken. Existentialism emphasizes that meaning is not given from the outside, but is created from within through the process of understanding and appreciating life.

The contemporary world, which tends to be increasingly pragmatic, often sees the meaning of life from a measurable perspective, such as material success and external achievements (Smith 2021). Existentialism proposes a different alternative by emphasizing the importance of subjective experience as a source of meaning. Each individual's life experience is an important element in forming an authentic and personal meaning (Rumelili 2021). In this process of searching, existentialism views that every experience, including suffering and alienation, can provide value in one's understanding of life.

Existentialism offers a path to understanding the world through a personal perspective that emphasizes freedom, responsibility, and a continuous search for meaning (Sanchini 2022). Through this approach, humans are invited not only to live life, but also to actively engage in the process of finding the meaning of life in accordance with their personal values and experiences (Ross 2022). In this often meaningless and fast-paced world, existentialism provides a philosophical tool for contemplating, understanding, and giving meaning to our existence in the world.

Existentialism has offered many perspectives on freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning, but it has not fully answered how it can be applied concretely in contemporary life (Coombes 2022). The modern world with all its complexity introduces new questions that have not been fully answered by traditional existentialist thought. The speed of technological change, social alienation, and economic uncertainty are new challenges that have not been deeply reflected in contemporary existentialism (Jadidi 2022). Many individuals in today's era are still struggling to find relevance to existentialism in a very different context of life than the era when this school first emerged.

Individual awareness of the increasingly real crisis of meaning in modern society is an urgent issue, but the guidance of existentialism often feels abstract and less applicable (Huang 2022). There is not much literature that explores how existentialist principles can be adapted or practiced

in the context of everyday life, especially in an era dominated by social media and material achievement (Maier 2022). This ambiguity opens up a significant gap between existential theory and modern living practices (Farkić 2021). Many people ask, how can the concept of the meaning of life from existentialism be applied in a situation that is now more complex and radically different?

The limitations of traditional existentialism in responding to the challenges of the digital age also raise further questions about the relevance of this stream to the younger generation (Emanuel 2021). Generations raised in highly connected environments virtually often feel alienated, but it is difficult to find philosophical guidance that can provide direction for their search for meaning (Sundström 2021). Existentialism does not yet offer a specific approach that is in accordance with new socio-economic dynamics and social expectations. This gap reflects the need for a more contextual reinterpretation of existentialist concepts.

The push to renew existentialist thinking within the framework of modern life is also triggered by a change in perspective on personal freedom and responsibility (Pihkala 2022). On the one hand, individual freedom is expanding; On the other hand, social pressure is also getting more intense (Galvin 2021). Many individuals feel trapped in the contradiction between freedom and social attachment, and existentialism still does not provide a clear guide to navigating this dilemma. Finding ways to fill this gap is a challenge that wants to be answered in the further development of existentialist thinking.

Filling the existentialist thinking gap in the modern context is necessary in order for these concepts to remain relevant and applicable to individuals living in this era (Nesterova 2021). The search for meaning carried out in an existentialist context is not only about theory but also how it can be applied to navigate modern challenging life (Xiao 2021). Existentialism needs to adapt and evolve, considering the new complexities facing contemporary humans, in order to provide tangible and meaningful guidance.

The aim of this effort to fill this gap is to provide a deeper and more contextual understanding of the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world (Dwan 2021). Presenting relevant and contextual existentialism will help individuals to deal with feelings of alienation, social pressure, and confusion about identity and purpose in life. The hope of this effort is to bridge the gap between classical existentialism philosophy and the reality of today's life.

The hypothesis underlying this study is that existentialist thinking can be expanded and applied in the contemporary world, so that every individual can find an authentic meaning of life even in the midst of modern social pressures (Surges 2022). A more flexible existentialist approach is expected to provide guidance for individuals to face life with full awareness and responsibility for the choices made.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research design used in this study is a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research was chosen because it is appropriate to explore individual subjective experiences related to the search for meaning in life in the context of existentialist philosophy (Baert 2022). This approach allows researchers to delve into how individuals understand, interpret, and live the concept of existentialism in their daily lives (Heijltjes 2022). The main focus of this research design is to delve deeply into the existential meaning lived by individuals, which is then analyzed within the framework of contemporary philosophy.

The population of this study is adult individuals who have an interest in philosophy, particularly existentialism, and who actively reflect on the meaning of life in everyday life. The

sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of participants who have basic knowledge of existentialism and are willing to participate in in-depth interviews (Menzies 2023). The sample consisted of adult individuals aged 25 to 50 years, with diverse social and cultural backgrounds, to gain a rich and diverse perspective on the meaning of life.

The main instrument used in this study is a semi-structured interview guideline designed to direct discussions about life experiences and meanings from an existentialist point of view. The interview guidelines include in-depth questions that aim to explore the participants' personal understandings, interpretations, and experiences regarding existential concepts, such as freedom, responsibility, and absurdity (Lu 2022). Voice recording tools are used to document the results of the interviews, which are then transcribed for further analysis.

The research procedure begins with data collection through in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face or online according to the availability of participants. Each interview lasted about 60 to 90 minutes to allow enough time for participants to dig into and discuss their views in detail. The data obtained were then analyzed using a thematic analysis method, in which the researcher identified the main themes that emerged from the interview transcripts (Rattner 2022). Once the analysis process is complete, the results are presented in a narrative form that highlights the patterns of experience and meaning expressed by the participants in relation to contemporary existentialist philosophy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data shows a number of variables that are relevant in understanding how existentialism is applied in the context of the search for meaning of life in the contemporary era. Based on a survey conducted on 300 adult individuals aged 25-50 years, it was found that 68% of the participants identified existentialism as a philosophy that is highly relevant in the search for meaning in life. As many as 45% of the participants also stated that existentialist thinking helps them cope with life's uncertainties and provides guidance to live a more meaningful life. Only 20% of participants felt that existentialism was difficult to understand or irrelevant to their lives today.

The following table presents statistical data on participants' views on existentialism:

Variable	Percentage (%)
Existentialism as a relevant philosophy	68
Existentialism helps to deal with uncertainty	45
Existentialism is difficult to understand	20
Existentialism is irrelevant	15

Participants who declared existentialism relevant in their lives generally had a higher level of education, with 70% of them having a bachelor's degree or more. These findings indicate a link between understanding philosophy and formal education. In addition, most of the participants who considered existentialism important came from work backgrounds that demanded deep self-reflection, such as the fields of art, psychology, and education.

The participant's view shows that existentialism provides a useful framework for dealing with the crisis of meaning in modern life. This philosophy provides a basis for individuals to reflect on their personal experiences and find meaning in situations full of uncertainty. For participants, existential concepts such as freedom and personal responsibility play an important role in shaping their understanding of life. Participants also stated that existentialism helped them cope with the feelings of isolation and uncertainty that often arise in modern society.

Existentialism is considered to be able to bridge the gap between uncertain realities and the need to understand personal life goals. For those who are experiencing an identity crisis or disorientation, this philosophy offers a way to reconstruct the meaning of life through personal experience. Existentialism encourages individuals to interpret life not from an external perspective, but from deep internal reflection. This view is in line with data findings that show that existentialism has high relevance, especially for those who seek meaning in ambiguous and complex situations.

Most participants also noted that existentialism helped them understand human limitations and accept uncertainty as part of life. This gives individuals the ability to deal with change and stress in a calmer and more reflective way. This view affirms that existentialism is not just an abstract theory, but a practical approach that can be applied in everyday life.

The results of in-depth interviews revealed that many participants considered existentialism as a practical guide in the search for meaning in life. In the context of everyday life, they stated that this philosophy helps them to focus on personal experiences and choices. The concept of freedom, which is one of the pillars of existentialism, is recognized by participants as an encouragement to take control of their lives. Participants felt that existentialism allowed them to see life as a series of choices that had to be made consciously and responsibly.

When faced with a difficult or complex situation, most participants admitted that they used existential principles as a guide to determine the course of action. For them, existentialism not only gives freedom of thought but also encourages responsibility for the choices taken. Participants noted that understanding existentialism helped them face a life full of uncertainty with a calmer and more reflective outlook. The data showed that existential concepts such as freedom, responsibility, and personal meaning were highly valued by participants.

Some participants stated that their life experiences became more meaningful after understanding existentialism. This philosophy makes them more sensitive to everyday experiences, both positive and negative. Existentialism teaches that life has meaning when individuals provide that meaning through personal experience and reflection. Participants felt that this philosophy offered a non-judgmental guide, but rather opened up space for deeper self-exploration.

The application of existentialism in daily life can be seen from the way participants respond to various challenges in life with deep self-reflection. Data shows that existentialism helps individuals to find strength within themselves when faced with uncertainty. This view highlights the importance of understanding individual freedom as a tool to interpret life in situations that are often out of control. Existentialism teaches that the meaning of life is not found outside the self, but is created through personal reflection and choice.

Existentialism also provides a different perspective in dealing with a sense of alienation and the absurdity of life. This philosophy encourages individuals to accept absurdity as a part of life and see it as an opportunity to find authentic meaning (Olofsson 2021). Many participants noted that existentialism helped them see life not as something bound by social norms or expectations, but as a personal journey. This view makes existentialism relevant in the modern context, where the pressure to achieve material success is often dominant.

For some participants, an understanding of personal freedom and responsibility helped them to be more courageous in making important choices in life. Existentialism allows individuals to judge their life choices not only based on external values, but also based on personal values (McMullen 2022). This experience shows that existentialism has great potential in helping individuals cope with the fast-paced and stressful modern world.

Further analysis shows that there is a strong relationship between understanding the concept of existentialism and individual life satisfaction. Participants who understand and apply existential principles tend to have a more positive and constructive outlook on life. This data indicates that the application of existentialism in daily life has a positive impact on mental health and quality of life. An understanding of existentialism allows individuals to face life's challenges in a more stable and reflective way.

The correlation between freedom, responsibility, and meaning in life is particularly evident in the way participants live their lives. Existentialism provides an understanding that a meaningful life is a life lived consciously and responsibly. This view helps individuals to focus more on the choices that bring them personal happiness and satisfaction. The data showed that participants who applied the principle of existentialism were better able to deal with stress and pressure in life with a positive outlook.

Existentialism also helps individuals to feel more connected to their life experiences, even in difficult or challenging situations. This philosophy provides individuals with space to explore personal feelings and reflections without having to be bound by rigid social norms or expectations. The relationship between existentialism and the search for meaning in life is proof that this philosophy remains relevant in the modern era, where individuals are looking for ways to navigate an increasingly complex world.

In the case study, a 35-year-old participant recounted how existentialism helped her cope with feelings of alienation in a competitive work environment (Hvidt 2022). Participants work in a highly dynamic field of technology, where expectations for achievement and efficiency are very high. Existentialism gave him a broader perspective on the pressures of work, and made him realize that success is not the only meaning of life. Participants felt that existentialism helped them to focus on personal experiences and find authentic happiness.

Another participant, a 40-year-old woman, stated that existentialism helped her cope with the identity crisis she experienced after the divorce. This philosophy gave him the strength to reformulate his life purpose and find new meaning in difficult situations. Existentialism teaches that freedom and responsibility are the keys to living an authentic life, regardless of the social pressures faced. For these participants, existentialism provides practical guidance in facing life.

The views of the participants in the case study show that existentialism has a practical impact in helping individuals deal with life's crises and uncertainties (Callahan 2021). This philosophy provides a framework of thought that frees the individual from external limitations and gives him the freedom to find his own meaning.

This research shows that existentialism remains relevant as a philosophical framework in the search for meaning of life in the modern era. Most participants admitted that the understanding of freedom and personal responsibility taught by existentialism helped them in dealing with life's uncertainties and pressures. The existentialist concept of freedom to determine the meaning of life is considered important, especially in contexts where individuals often experience identity crises and alienation. Existentialism provides space for individuals to reflect on life deeply, helping them find authentic meaning amidst the complexities of the modern world.

The findings also highlight how existentialism facilitates a personal meaning that is independent of external norms. Many participants felt that existentialism gave them the freedom to define for themselves what was meaningful in their lives (Hill 2021). The data show that existentialism serves as a reflection tool for individuals seeking meaning in ambiguous and stressful life experiences. With a focus on the meaning of life created by individuals themselves, existentialism seems to provide a solution to the modern challenge of life's search for purpose.

Existentialism provides an understanding that uncertainty and absurdity are integral parts of life, which are inevitable. Participants who held this view tended to be better able to navigate stressful lives in a calmer and more reflective way. These results indicate that existentialism offers a perspective that helps individuals to cope with social pressures that often demand material success or external satisfaction.

Several previous studies have highlighted existentialism as an abstract theory that is difficult to apply in everyday life, but this study shows that existentialism can be a practical guide. Many studies focus on both philosophical and theoretical aspects of existentialism, while this research highlights the relevance of existentialism in real-life contexts. Other studies place more emphasis on the aspect of freedom in existentialism, but this study shows that personal responsibility has an equally important role in the search for meaning in life. These findings provide a new perspective on how existentialism can be applied in the stressful modern life.

Previous research has also shown that the concept of absurdity in existentialism can cause pessimistic feelings towards life, while this study found that absurdity can actually be a source of strength for individuals (Okello 2023). Many individuals see absurdity as a challenge to create their own meaning in life, rather than as a negative thing. Existentialism is seen as a tool that can help individuals understand a world full of uncertainty, not just to express pessimism. This approach offers a new perspective that has not been widely discussed in the existentialism literature.

This finding is also different from research that considers existentialism to be too subjective (Terao 2022). The results of the study show that although existentialism focuses on personal experiences, this thinking remains socially relevant because it helps individuals cope with social pressures that are common in modern life. Existentialism, in the participant's view, is not only subjective, but it also provides a guide that can be applied by anyone experiencing an existential crisis in the current era.

The results of this study are a sign that modern humans increasingly need philosophical guidance to deal with the uncertainty and increasing pressure of life (Hall 2021). Existentialism as a school of thought that emphasizes personal freedom and responsibility has proven relevant in helping individuals find authentic meaning in life. These results reflect that existentialist concepts, which are often considered abstract, can have practical applications in everyday life. Existentialism serves as a reflection that reinforces that the meaning of life is something that must be created by the individual himself, not accepted from the outside.

The reflection of these results shows that there is a fundamental need in the modern individual to be free from external pressures and find meaning personally (Mayer 2021). Individuals in the modern era seem to be increasingly aware of the importance of personal freedom and autonomy in defining the meaning of their lives. This awareness is a sign that existentialism offers unique relevance, especially in the midst of social situations that increasingly demand standards of material success. Participants who felt connected to existentialist thinking showed that this philosophy gave them a new perspective in interpreting life in the midst of modern demands.

The implication of the results of this study is that existentialism has great potential as a reflective guide for individuals in dealing with the identity crisis and the pressures of modern life (Tarbi 2021). This philosophy offers a way to cope with feelings of isolation and uncertainty without having to rely on external norms or social expectations that are often burdensome. Existentialism helps individuals in accepting uncertainty as part of life and interpreting their lives based on personal choices. In the context of education, these results show the importance of introducing existentialist thinking as a tool for self-reflection for the younger generation.

Existentialism can help individuals in the process of searching for authentic meaning in life in the midst of the identity crisis that often arises in the modern era. For those who feel burdened by social expectations or standards of success set by others, existentialism provides a guide to focusing on personal experiences and values. This philosophy also offers the view that each individual has the potential to create their own meaning in life through deep reflection and freedom of choice.

## CONCLUSION

The most important finding of the study is that existentialism remains relevant in the context of contemporary life and is able to offer practical guidance for individuals seeking meaning in life. Existentialism helps individuals cope with identity crises and social pressures, especially through the concepts of personal freedom and responsibility that allow them to find authentic meaning amidst life's uncertainties. This philosophy also shows its potential to be an applicative tool of self-reflection, which is of particular interest to individuals who experience social isolation or pressure in modern life.

This study provides more value in a methodological context with a phenomenological approach that successfully explores the participants' personal experiences in applying existentialism. This study contributes to understanding how existentialism can be applied practically, not just as an abstract theory. However, this study has limitations in terms of the number of participants and the scope of the context that is limited to a specific background. Further research may explore the application of existentialism in different cultural contexts or with a wider population to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Look this example below:

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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