



Existentialism in Indonesian EFL Education: A Theoretical Analysis of Humanism and Learner Freedom

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Abstrak

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Indonesian schools has traditionally emphasized cognitive mastery and linguistic structure, often overlooking learners' human dimensions such as freedom of expression, identity formation, and the search for meaning in learning. Drawing on existentialist philosophy, this article presents an expanded theoretical analysis of how existentialist principles can inform humanistic, student-centered EFL pedagogy aligned with Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar policy. Using a qualitative literature-based method, the study synthesizes national and international scholarship on existentialism, humanistic education, EFL pedagogy, communicative language teaching, project-based learning, assessment, and classroom management. The findings indicate that existentialist principles freedom, responsibility, authenticity, reflective experience, and becoming operationalized through reflective dialogue, authentic communication, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and humanistic classroom management. The article argues that existentialism provides a robust philosophical foundation for rehumanizing EFL education in Indonesia, enhancing motivation, learner agency, linguistic competence, and character formation while remaining responsive to curricular and assessment constraints.

Kata Kunci: existentialism, EFL, humanistic learning, Merdeka Belajar, Indonesian education

Abstract

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Indonesian schools has traditionally emphasized cognitive mastery and linguistic structure, often overlooking learners' human dimensions such as freedom of expression, identity formation, and the search for meaning in learning. Drawing on existentialist philosophy, this article presents an expanded theoretical analysis of how existentialist principles can inform humanistic, student-centered EFL pedagogy aligned with Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar policy. Using a qualitative literature-based method, the study synthesizes national and international scholarship on existentialism, humanistic education, EFL pedagogy, communicative language teaching, project-based learning, assessment, and classroom management. The findings indicate that existentialist principles freedom, responsibility, authenticity, reflective experience, and becoming operationalized through reflective dialogue, authentic communication, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and humanistic classroom management. The article argues that existentialism provides a robust philosophical foundation for rehumanizing EFL education in Indonesia, enhancing motivation, learner agency, linguistic competence, and character formation while remaining responsive to curricular and assessment constraints.

Keywords: existentialism, EFL, humanistic learning, Merdeka Belajar, Indonesian education

1. Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Indonesian schools plays a strategic role in preparing learners for global communication, intercultural engagement, and participation in knowledge-based economies. Scholars have consistently emphasized that English proficiency increasingly mediates learners' access to transnational knowledge, academic mobility, and professional opportunities in a globalized world (Lamb, 2017; Richards, 2015). In the context of rapid digital transformation, English is no longer perceived merely as a foreign language subject but as a key resource that enables participation in global discourses and intercultural interaction (Kramsch, 2014). Consequently, EFL education in Indonesia is expected not only to develop linguistic competence but also to cultivate communicative confidence, intercultural awareness, and adaptive

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skills relevant to global citizenship. English learning thus becomes an essential component of national human capital development, and inadequate pedagogical responses may widen gaps between Indonesian learners and their international peers.

Despite this strategic importance, classroom practices in many Indonesian EFL contexts remain dominated by structural and form-focused approaches. Instruction frequently prioritizes grammatical accuracy, vocabulary memorization, and performance on standardized assessments, reflecting long-standing examination-oriented traditions within the school system (Lie, 2017; Sulistiyo, 2016). In such pedagogical environments, students are often positioned as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active language users who negotiate meaning and express ideas. Teachers tend to control classroom discourse tightly, leaving limited space for dialogic interaction or spontaneous language use. As a result, communicative competence is frequently treated as secondary to formal correctness, reinforcing a narrow conception of language learning.

This instructional orientation tends to marginalize affective, reflective, and existential dimensions of language learning. Empirical studies on Indonesian EFL classrooms indicate that many students experience low intrinsic motivation and heightened anxiety, particularly in oral communication, due to fear of making mistakes and excessive emphasis on linguistic accuracy (Marwan, 2018; Wahyudi, 2020). Such anxiety often inhibits classroom participation and reduces learners' willingness to communicate. When students are rarely encouraged to reflect on their experiences or connect language learning with personal meaning, English becomes detached from their lived realities. Over time, this detachment may weaken sustained engagement and diminish learners' sense of ownership over their learning process.

Language, however, is fundamentally a human and social practice rather than a purely technical skill. It enables individuals to articulate thoughts, express emotions, negotiate values, and construct identities through interaction with others. Contemporary scholarship in applied linguistics and language education underscores that meaningful learning emerges when learners use language as a medium for self-expression and social participation, not merely as an object of formal analysis (Kramsch, 2014; Richards, 2015). When EFL instruction is reduced to mechanical mastery of linguistic forms, students may struggle to perceive its relevance beyond the classroom context. This reduction risks undermining the transformative potential of language education as a means of empowerment, identity formation, and social engagement.

This challenge is particularly salient in the Indonesian educational context, where students come from highly diverse sociocultural, linguistic, and regional backgrounds. Such diversity necessitates pedagogical approaches that acknowledge learners as individuals with distinct voices, experiences, and aspirations. Research on language education in Indonesia suggests that learner-centered and context-sensitive pedagogies are more effective in fostering engagement, confidence, and meaningful participation, especially in EFL settings (Lamb, 2017; Musthafa, 2014). Ignoring learners' individuality may reinforce conformity and silence rather than encouraging expression, agency, and critical engagement. Therefore, EFL pedagogy in Indonesia must be responsive to local realities while remaining open to global perspectives.

Existentialist philosophy offers an alternative educational lens that foregrounds freedom, responsibility, authenticity, and meaning-making in learning. Within educational discourse, existentialism conceptualizes learners as conscious agents who actively shape their identities through choices and lived experiences, rather than as objects shaped solely by external instruction. Learning is understood as a process of becoming, involving reflection, commitment, and personal engagement with knowledge (Biesta, 2015; Tan, 2018). This perspective challenges purely instrumental views of education that prioritize outcomes over human development. It invites educators to reconsider the ethical, emotional, and existential dimensions of teaching and learning.

This existentialist orientation resonates strongly with the principles underpinning Indonesia's current education reform agenda, particularly its emphasis on learner autonomy, flexibility, and contextual relevance. Recent scholarly discussions highlight the importance of empowering students and valuing their experiences as legitimate sources of learning within contemporary classrooms (Suyanto & Jihad, 2021; Lamb, 2017). Both existentialism and learner-centered reform stress responsibility alongside freedom, positioning learners as active participants in their own development rather than passive subjects of instruction. In this context, the present article asks: How can existentialist principles be translated into concrete EFL pedagogies in Indonesian schools, and what implications do they hold for teaching practices, assessment strategies, and classroom culture? Addressing these questions is essential for rehumanizing EFL education and aligning it with broader goals of holistic, student-centered learning in Indonesia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Existentialism in Education

Existentialism views human beings as free, responsible, and continuously in the process of becoming, emphasizing the central role of individual choice and lived experience in human development. In educational contexts, this philosophy explicitly rejects the treatment of learners as passive objects to be shaped by fixed standards, rigid curricula, or uniform assessment criteria. As articulated by Biesta (2015), existentialist-oriented education prioritizes subjectivity and ethical responsibility, positioning learners as active agents who must respond to the world through conscious choice. This view is reinforced by Tan (2018), who argues that education should cultivate learners' capacity to make meaningful decisions rather than merely comply with external expectations. From this perspective, learning is understood as an existential act that involves commitment, responsibility, and personal meaning-making (Hodgson et al., 2018).

Within existentialist educational philosophy, students are regarded as unique individuals whose learning gains significance through personal experience, reflection, and self-awareness. Knowledge is not valued solely for its instrumental or economic utility, but for its contribution to learners' understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Scholars emphasize that existentialist education invites learners to confront uncertainty, ambiguity, and moral choice as integral aspects of learning (Tan, 2018; Biesta, 2015). According to Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019), such encounters enable students to develop authenticity by engaging critically with ideas rather than reproducing predetermined answers. In this sense, education becomes a deeply personal and ethical process rather than a purely technical or procedural one.

Educational existentialism places strong emphasis on freedom of choice, dialogic relationships, and ethical responsibility within classroom interactions. Learners are encouraged to participate actively in shaping their learning trajectories, while teachers are expected to acknowledge and respect students' voices and experiences. Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski (2018) highlight dialogue as a core pedagogical principle, arguing that learning emerges through relational encounters in which meanings are negotiated rather than transmitted. This dialogic orientation is further supported by Biesta (2015), who contends that genuine education requires openness to unpredictability and difference. By fostering dialogic spaces, existentialist pedagogy reduces fear of error and promotes intellectual risk-taking, reflection, and engagement (Tan, 2018).

Humanistic education shares close affinities with existentialism by prioritizing the development of the whole person cognitive, affective, social, and moral. From a humanistic perspective, learning is not merely about achieving measurable outcomes but about growth, self-understanding, and the cultivation of agency. Research in learner-centered and humanistic education demonstrates that emotionally supportive and respectful learning environments enhance motivation, autonomy, and reflective engagement (Noddings, 2013; Richards, 2015). Lamb (2017) further argues that recognizing learners' identities and aspirations is particularly important in language education contexts. Within this framework, teachers function as facilitators and dialogic partners rather than authoritative transmitters of knowledge, creating spaces where learners can explore ideas, express uncertainty, and construct meaning without fear of judgment (Biesta, 2015)..

2.2 Existentialism and EFL Pedagogy

EFL learning is particularly compatible with existentialist principles because language use inherently involves self-expression, interpretation, and meaning-making. Language is not merely a system of grammatical rules but a medium through which individuals articulate experiences, emotions, and perspectives. Scholars in applied linguistics emphasize that language learning becomes meaningful when learners are positioned as subjects who use language to express themselves rather than as objects who reproduce predefined forms (Kramsch, 2014; Richards, 2015). From an existentialist standpoint, this emphasis aligns with the view that learning should engage learners' lived experiences and personal choices, allowing them to construct meaning through authentic language use (Biesta, 2015).

Existentialist-oriented EFL pedagogy encourages students to use English to articulate personal experiences, viewpoints, and concerns instead of merely reproducing textbook patterns or scripted dialogues. According to Lamb (2017), learners' investment in language learning increases when English is connected to their identities and future aspirations. This pedagogical orientation values authenticity over perfection, encouraging learners to take risks and communicate meaning even when linguistic accuracy is still developing. Studies on communicative language teaching suggest that such authenticity supports learner agency and

confidence, particularly in contexts where students traditionally experience anxiety in using English (Marwan, 2018; Richards, 2015).

Authentic communication, reflective tasks, and dialogic interaction play a central role in operationalizing existentialist principles in EFL classrooms. Through reflective journals, personal narratives, discussions of real-life issues, and collaborative projects, learners are invited to connect language learning with their own experiences and social realities. Scholars argue that dialogic interaction allows learners to negotiate meaning, question assumptions, and construct understanding collaboratively, thereby reinforcing both linguistic and personal development (Hodgson et al., 2018; Kramsch, 2014). Such practices position language as a tool for participation and self-understanding rather than mere academic performance.

Research on humanistic and communicative approaches consistently shows that when learners perceive relevance and personal meaning in language learning, motivation and engagement increase significantly. Learner-centered EFL environments that value autonomy, reflection, and emotional safety are associated with higher willingness to communicate and sustained learning engagement (Richards, 2015; Lamb, 2017). From an existentialist perspective, EFL is thus reframed from a technical subject into a space for personal growth, identity formation, and social interaction. This reframing supports the development of learners who are not only linguistically competent but also reflective, confident, and socially responsive participants in communication (Biesta, 2015; Tan, 2018).

2.3 Merdeka Belajar and Humanistic Reform

Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar policy emphasizes flexibility, contextual learning, and student agency as core principles of contemporary education reform. These principles reflect a shift away from rigid curricular control toward learning environments that value autonomy, relevance, and learner participation. Scholars argue that such reform agendas respond to long standing critiques of teacher centered instruction and examination driven schooling in Indonesia (Lamb, 2017; Musthafa, 2014). By foregrounding agency, Merdeka Belajar seeks to reposition students as active participants in learning rather than passive recipients of instruction. This orientation aligns with global movements toward learner centered education while remaining sensitive to local educational challenges.

The goals of Merdeka Belajar resonate strongly with existentialist commitments to freedom, responsibility, and meaning making in education. Existentialist philosophy conceptualizes freedom not as the absence of structure but as the capacity to make meaningful choices and assume responsibility for those choices (Biesta, 2015; Tan, 2018). From this perspective, student agency involves ethical engagement and reflective decision making rather than unrestricted autonomy. Scholars emphasize that educational freedom must be accompanied by responsibility if it is to contribute to genuine learning and personal development (Hodgson et al., 2018). This framing provides a philosophical rationale for understanding agency as both a pedagogical and ethical construct.

However, translating policy ideals such as flexibility and autonomy into everyday classroom practice remains a significant challenge. Research on curriculum reform consistently highlights a gap between policy discourse and pedagogical enactment, particularly in contexts characterized by standardized assessment practices and strong traditions of teacher authority (Lie, 2017; Sulistiyo, 2016). Without a coherent philosophical grounding, flexibility risks being interpreted merely as administrative discretion rather than as a transformative pedagogical principle. Teachers may implement surface level changes without fundamentally altering classroom relationships or learning purposes. This condition underscores the importance of a guiding philosophy that informs both instructional design and classroom interaction.

Existentialism can serve as such a philosophical foundation by offering conceptual clarity regarding the aims and limits of learner autonomy. Rather than treating flexibility as an end in itself, existentialist pedagogy frames it as a means to support learners' engagement with meaningful questions, lived experiences, and ethical responsibility (Biesta, 2015; Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019). Within this perspective, classroom practices such as choice of topics, reflective writing, and dialogic discussion are understood as essential conditions for authentic learning. Existentialist grounding ensures that pedagogical flexibility remains oriented toward personal growth, self understanding, and responsible participation rather than procedural variation alone.

When interpreted through an existentialist lens, Merdeka Belajar can be enacted in ways that are pedagogically meaningful and contextually responsive. Studies on learner centered education in Indonesia indicate that when students are encouraged to connect learning with their experiences and aspirations, levels of engagement and motivation increase significantly (Lamb, 2017; Marwan, 2018). Existentialism reinforces this approach by emphasizing authenticity, dialogue, and reflection as central dimensions of learning. By integrating existentialist principles into classroom practice, Merdeka Belajar can move beyond policy rhetoric and function as a coherent educational philosophy that balances freedom with responsibility, flexibility with purpose, and autonomy with ethical awareness.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach employing a comprehensive literature review as its primary method of inquiry. A qualitative design is considered appropriate because the focus of the study is philosophical, theoretical, and contextual, requiring interpretive understanding rather than empirical measurement or statistical generalization. Qualitative research emphasizes meaning, interpretation, and depth of analysis, particularly when examining educational philosophies and pedagogical frameworks (Creswell, 2014). In line with this orientation, the present study seeks to explore how existentialist principles can inform and shape English as a Foreign Language pedagogy within the Indonesian educational context.

A literature review approach is selected to synthesize existing knowledge, identify conceptual patterns, and construct a coherent theoretical framework. According to Sugiyono (2017), literature based research enables scholars to examine ideas, concepts, and theoretical perspectives systematically by drawing on authoritative written sources. Similarly, Creswell (2014) notes that qualitative literature reviews are especially valuable for studies that aim to build or refine conceptual understandings rather than test hypotheses. Through this approach, the study integrates philosophical discussions of existentialism with contemporary scholarship on EFL pedagogy and educational reform in Indonesia.

3.1 Data Resources

The data sources for this study consist of secondary data derived from a wide range of academic and scholarly publications. These include books and edited volumes on existentialist philosophy and education, peer reviewed national and international journal articles on EFL pedagogy, humanistic education, communicative language teaching, and project-based learning. In addition, relevant studies discussing educational reform and learner centered approaches in Indonesia were included to ensure contextual relevance. Literature selection was guided by relevance to the research focus, academic credibility, and publication date, with priority given to sources published after 2010 to reflect contemporary educational discourse.

The use of diverse data sources allows for triangulation of perspectives and strengthens the conceptual robustness of the analysis. As emphasized by Sugiyono (2017), employing multiple sources in qualitative research enhances the richness and trustworthiness of findings. Likewise, Creswell (2014) highlights that well selected documentary sources are essential for developing a nuanced understanding of complex educational phenomena, particularly when empirical observation is not the primary objective.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study follows a thematic synthesis approach to identify, interpret, and integrate key concepts across the reviewed literature. Thematic synthesis involves systematic reading, coding, and categorization of texts to uncover recurring ideas and theoretical patterns. Initially, the selected literature was read closely to identify central themes related to existentialist principles such as freedom, responsibility, authenticity, and meaning making in education. These themes were then compared and grouped to establish conceptual connections with EFL pedagogical strategies.

This analytic process enables conceptual integration by mapping existentialist principles onto practical dimensions of EFL teaching, including classroom interaction, task design, assessment, and teacher roles. According to Creswell (2014), thematic analysis allows researchers to move beyond description toward interpretation and theory building. Similarly, Sugiyono (2017) argues that thematic synthesis is effective for developing applied frameworks grounded in theoretical insights. Through this method, the study produces an

interpretive framework that is both philosophically grounded and pedagogically applicable to Indonesian school contexts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Core Existentialist Principles for EFL

The literature review identifies freedom of choice as a foundational principle of existentialist EFL pedagogy. Freedom in this context does not imply the absence of structure, but the provision of meaningful options that allow learners to make decisions regarding learning topics, tasks, and modes of expression. Scholars argue that when students are given opportunities to choose, they experience learning as personally relevant rather than externally imposed (Biesta, 2015; Tan, 2018). In EFL contexts, freedom of choice may involve selecting discussion themes, project topics, or forms of language output, enabling learners to connect English use with their interests and experiences. Such pedagogical freedom supports learner agency and aligns language learning with existentialist views of education as an act of self formation (Lamb, 2017).

Closely related to freedom is the principle of responsibility, which emphasizes learners' ownership of their learning processes and outcomes. Existentialist philosophy stresses that freedom is inseparable from responsibility, as individuals must be accountable for the choices they make (Biesta, 2015). In educational practice, this principle translates into encouraging learners to take responsibility for task completion, participation, and reflection on learning progress. Studies on learner centered pedagogy suggest that when students perceive themselves as responsible agents, motivation and engagement increase, particularly in language learning contexts (Richards, 2015; Marwan, 2018). Responsibility thus functions as a moral and pedagogical anchor that prevents autonomy from becoming superficial or disengaged.

The principle of authenticity further distinguishes existentialist EFL pedagogy from traditional form focused instruction. Authenticity prioritizes genuine self expression and meaningful communication over rote performance or mechanical repetition. From an existentialist perspective, learning becomes authentic when learners are able to express their own voices and perspectives rather than reproducing predetermined answers (Tan, 2018; Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019). In EFL classrooms, authentic tasks such as personal narratives, opinion based discussions, and real world projects allow learners to use English as a medium of expression rather than mere linguistic exercise. Literature on communicative language teaching supports this view, emphasizing that authenticity enhances confidence and communicative willingness (Kramsch, 2014; Richards, 2015).

Another central principle identified in the literature is reflective experience, which positions learning as an interpretive process grounded in lived experience. Existentialist education emphasizes reflection as a means through which learners make sense of their actions, choices, and interactions with the world (Biesta, 2015). Reflective activities such as journals, self assessment, and guided discussion enable learners to connect language learning with personal meaning and self awareness. Research in humanistic education indicates that reflective practices deepen learning by encouraging students to examine not only what they learn but also how and why they learn (Noddings, 2013; Lamb, 2017). In EFL contexts, reflection supports both linguistic development and personal growth.

Finally, the principle of becoming highlights learning as an ongoing process of growth rather than the attainment of fixed or standardized achievement. Existentialist philosophy views human development as dynamic and unfinished, emphasizing continuous becoming rather than static outcomes (Biesta, 2015; Tan, 2018). Applied to EFL pedagogy, this principle encourages educators to focus on learners' progress, confidence, and evolving identities as language users, rather than solely on test scores or proficiency levels. Studies on learner identity in language education suggest that recognizing learning as a process of becoming supports resilience and long term engagement (Kramsch, 2014; Lamb, 2017). This perspective reframes EFL learning as a lifelong journey of communication and self development rather than a finite academic requirement.

4.2 Pedagogical Strategies

Reflective dialogue emerges as a central pedagogical strategy within existentialist EFL instruction. Open discussions and reflective writing activities provide learners with opportunities to articulate personal experiences, emotions, and viewpoints in English, thereby strengthening both linguistic competence and self confidence. From an existentialist perspective, dialogue is not merely a technique but an ethical encounter through which learners construct meaning in relation to others (Biesta, 2015). Studies in language education

indicate that reflective dialogue encourages deeper engagement and supports learners' willingness to communicate, particularly in contexts where anxiety and fear of error are prevalent (Lamb, 2017; Marwan, 2018). By positioning students as meaning makers rather than knowledge receivers, reflective dialogue aligns language learning with personal growth.

Project based learning further operationalizes existentialist principles by integrating language use with identity, purpose, and social relevance. Projects centered on personal narratives, social issues, or community based themes enable learners to use English as a tool for exploring matters that are meaningful to their lives. Research on project based EFL pedagogy shows that such tasks enhance learner autonomy and sustained motivation, as students perceive learning as purposeful rather than routine (Richards, 2015; Tan, 2018). Within an existentialist framework, project work supports the notion of becoming, allowing learners to see language development as part of an ongoing process of self formation (Kramersch, 2014). This approach shifts assessment focus from isolated linguistic accuracy to holistic communicative engagement.

The use of authentic materials and communication is another key strategy emphasized in existentialist EFL pedagogy. Materials such as films, songs, stories, and real life tasks situate language learning within meaningful social and cultural contexts. Scholars argue that authenticity enhances relevance and enables learners to engage with language as it is used beyond the classroom (Kramersch, 2014; Richards, 2015). From an existentialist standpoint, authentic materials invite learners to interpret, respond, and position themselves in relation to real world texts and issues. This engagement supports identity construction and critical awareness, reinforcing the idea that language learning is inseparable from lived experience (Biesta, 2015).

Differentiated instruction reflects existentialist commitments to individuality and learner autonomy by acknowledging that students differ in interests, abilities, and learning trajectories. Offering varied pathways such as multiple task options, flexible grouping, and alternative modes of expression respects learners' uniqueness and supports meaningful choice. Literature on learner centered pedagogy suggests that differentiation enhances motivation and reduces disengagement, particularly in heterogeneous classrooms (Lamb, 2017; Musthafa, 2014). Existentialist philosophy reinforces this approach by emphasizing that education should respond to the learner as a person rather than as a standardized unit. Differentiation thus becomes an ethical practice grounded in respect for individual becoming.

Finally, humanistic classroom management plays a crucial role in creating conditions for existentialist EFL pedagogy. Rather than relying on external control or punitive discipline, humanistic management emphasizes mutual respect, trust, and internal responsibility. Research indicates that supportive classroom climates reduce anxiety and increase learners' willingness to participate in communication activities (Marwan, 2018; Richards, 2015). From an existentialist perspective, discipline is understood as self regulation arising from responsibility rather than obedience imposed from outside (Biesta, 2015; Tan, 2018). Such environments encourage learners to take risks, express themselves, and engage authentically in language use, thereby supporting both linguistic development and personal growth.

4.3 Assessment Implications

Existentialist EFL pedagogy calls for a reorientation of assessment practices toward more authentic and learner-centered forms of evaluation. From an existentialist perspective, assessment should not merely function as a mechanism for ranking or controlling learners, but as a means of understanding learners' growth, choices, and engagement in the learning process. Scholars argue that traditional standardized tests tend to privilege accuracy and uniformity while neglecting learners' voices, experiences, and developmental trajectories (Biesta, 2015; Tan, 2018). In contrast, authentic assessment aligns more closely with existentialist commitments to meaning-making, responsibility, and becoming.

Portfolios are frequently highlighted in the literature as a key form of authentic assessment within existentialist and humanistic pedagogy. Portfolios allow learners to document learning over time, showcasing drafts, reflections, projects, and evidence of progress rather than isolated test performance. Research in language education suggests that portfolio assessment supports learner autonomy and self-awareness by encouraging students to reflect on their strengths, challenges, and development as language users (Richards, 2015; Lamb, 2017). From an existentialist standpoint, portfolios emphasize learning as an ongoing process of becoming rather than a fixed achievement measured at a single point.

Reflective journals and self-assessment further reinforce existentialist principles by positioning learners as active evaluators of their own learning. Through reflective writing, students are invited to articulate experiences, emotions, and insights related to language learning, thereby integrating cognitive and affective dimensions. Studies indicate that reflective assessment practices enhance metacognitive awareness and foster a sense of responsibility for learning outcomes (Marwan, 2018; Noddings, 2013). In existentialist pedagogy, such reflection is central because it enables learners to interpret their experiences and assign personal meaning to learning activities rather than relying solely on external judgment.

Project presentations also serve as an important component of authentic assessment in existentialist EFL classrooms. Projects that culminate in presentations allow learners to demonstrate language use in purposeful and socially situated contexts. Literature on project-based and communicative language teaching suggests that project presentations assess not only linguistic accuracy but also creativity, collaboration, and communicative effectiveness (Richards, 2015; Kramsch, 2014). Within an existentialist framework, these assessments value authenticity and engagement, recognizing learners' efforts to communicate ideas that matter to them.

Overall, assessment within existentialist EFL pedagogy focuses on process, growth, and engagement alongside linguistic accuracy. Rather than treating assessment as an endpoint, it is integrated into learning as a reflective and developmental practice. Scholars emphasize that such assessment approaches support learner confidence, reduce anxiety, and encourage sustained participation, particularly in contexts where high-stakes testing has traditionally dominated (Lamb, 2017; Tan, 2018). By adopting authentic assessment strategies, EFL education can better align evaluation practices with its humanistic and existentialist foundations, supporting learners' linguistic development as well as their personal and ethical growth.

4.4 Teacher Roles

Within an existentialist EFL framework, the role of teachers undergoes a fundamental transformation from knowledge authorities to facilitators and dialogic partners in learning. Rather than positioning themselves as the sole source of correct knowledge, teachers are encouraged to create learning spaces where students can explore meanings, express perspectives, and negotiate understanding through interaction. Scholars argue that this shift is essential for learner-centered pedagogy, as it redistributes agency and recognizes students as active participants in the construction of knowledge (Biesta, 2015; Tan, 2018). In this sense, teaching becomes a relational and ethical practice rather than a purely technical transmission of content.

This transformed role requires a high degree of pedagogical sensitivity and openness to learners' experiences. Teachers must be attentive to students' emotional states, cultural backgrounds, and individual learning trajectories, particularly in EFL contexts where anxiety and lack of confidence are common challenges. Research indicates that when teachers acknowledge learners' voices and experiences, classroom interaction becomes more meaningful and inclusive, leading to higher engagement and willingness to communicate (Lamb, 2017; Marwan, 2018). From an existentialist perspective, such sensitivity reflects respect for learners as persons rather than as objects of instruction.

Openness to learners' experiences also implies a dialogic orientation to teaching. Dialogue, as emphasized in existentialist and humanistic education, is not merely a method but a way of relating that values listening, responsiveness, and mutual recognition. Studies in educational philosophy highlight that dialogic teaching enables learners to articulate meanings, question assumptions, and take intellectual risks without fear of judgment (Biesta, 2015; Hodgson et al., 2018). In EFL classrooms, dialogic interaction allows language to function as a medium for exploration and self-expression, reinforcing both linguistic development and personal growth.

At the same time, adopting a facilitative and dialogic role does not mean abandoning curricular goals or instructional structure. Teachers are still responsible for designing flexible learning environments that align with curricular expectations while accommodating learners' choices and interests. Literature on curriculum enactment suggests that effective learner-centered teaching involves balancing guidance and autonomy, ensuring that freedom is pedagogically purposeful rather than unstructured (Richards, 2015; Sulistiyo, 2016). Existentialist pedagogy supports this balance by framing structure as a support for meaningful choice rather than a constraint on learning.

Finally, the transition from authority to facilitator has implications for teacher identity and professional development. Teachers are required to reflect on their beliefs about control, expertise, and student capability, often challenging deeply ingrained instructional habits. Research on teacher development indicates that sustained reflection and professional learning communities are crucial in supporting teachers as they adopt more dialogic and humanistic roles (Lamb, 2017; Tan, 2018). Within an existentialist framework, this reflective process mirrors the learners' own journey of becoming, positioning teachers themselves as lifelong learners engaged in continuous professional and ethical growth.

4.5 Challenges and Mitigation

The implementation of existentialist EFL pedagogy in Indonesian school contexts is constrained by several structural and pedagogical factors, most notably limited instructional time, the dominance of standardized examinations, and varying levels of teacher preparedness. Time constraints often restrict opportunities for reflective dialogue, project-based learning, and individualized feedback, all of which require sustained engagement beyond traditional lesson formats. Research on EFL classrooms indicates that tightly scheduled curricula frequently prioritize content coverage over depth of learning, limiting teachers' capacity to experiment with learner-centered approaches (Sulistiyono, 2016; Richards, 2015). As a result, existentialist practices may be perceived as impractical within existing instructional routines.

Standardized examinations constitute another significant constraint on the adoption of existentialist pedagogy. High-stakes testing systems tend to emphasize measurable outcomes such as grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension, often at the expense of reflective, dialogic, and expressive language use. Studies in language education suggest that exam-oriented environments reinforce teacher-centered instruction and discourage pedagogical risk-taking, as teachers feel pressured to align classroom practices with assessment demands (Lie, 2017; Lamb, 2017). Within such contexts, existentialist approaches that value process, authenticity, and personal meaning may be marginalized or implemented only superficially.

Teacher preparedness also plays a critical role in shaping the feasibility of existentialist EFL pedagogy. Many teachers have been trained within traditional instructional paradigms that prioritize control, accuracy, and syllabus completion. Transitioning toward facilitative and dialogic roles requires not only new pedagogical skills but also shifts in professional identity and beliefs about teaching and learning. Research on teacher development indicates that without adequate support, teachers may struggle to operationalize learner-centered philosophies in concrete classroom practices (Tan, 2018; Lamb, 2017). This challenge underscores the importance of sustained professional learning rather than one-time training initiatives.

Addressing these constraints requires targeted professional development that supports teachers in integrating existentialist principles into their existing practices. Professional development programs that emphasize reflective practice, collaborative learning, and classroom-based inquiry have been shown to enhance teachers' confidence and pedagogical flexibility (Richards, 2015; Tan, 2018). Such programs can help teachers reinterpret curricular goals through an existentialist lens, enabling them to design activities that balance communicative authenticity with assessment requirements. Importantly, professional development should be continuous and context-sensitive, acknowledging the realities of Indonesian classrooms.

Curricular flexibility and balanced integration are also essential for addressing structural constraints. Rather than positioning existentialist pedagogy as a replacement for existing curricula, scholars advocate for its gradual integration within established frameworks. For example, reflective tasks, project components, and authentic assessment can be embedded within mandated syllabi without abandoning examination preparation entirely (Lamb, 2017; Sulistiyono, 2016). This balanced approach allows existentialist practices to coexist with institutional demands, ensuring that innovation remains pedagogically meaningful and sustainable. By addressing constraints through professional development, curricular adaptation, and reflective integration, existentialist EFL pedagogy can be realistically implemented within the boundaries of existing educational systems.

5. CONCLUSION

Existentialism offers a powerful philosophical foundation for rehumanizing English as a Foreign Language education in Indonesian schools by restoring the centrality of learners as thinking, feeling, and acting subjects. Throughout the discussion, this study has shown that existentialist principles challenge reductionist

views of language learning that treat students merely as performers of linguistic accuracy or recipients of predetermined content. By emphasizing freedom, responsibility, authenticity, and reflective experience, existentialist pedagogy reframes EFL learning as a human endeavor grounded in meaning-making and personal engagement. This philosophical orientation enables English education to move beyond technical mastery toward a more holistic educational purpose that addresses both linguistic and existential dimensions of learning.

By foregrounding freedom of choice and responsibility, existentialist pedagogy transforms English learning into a meaningful process of becoming rather than a static accumulation of skills. Learners are encouraged to make choices related to topics, tasks, and modes of expression while simultaneously assuming responsibility for their learning processes and outcomes. This balance between freedom and responsibility supports the development of learner agency, self-awareness, and ethical engagement. Within EFL contexts, such an approach allows students to connect language use with their identities, aspirations, and lived experiences, thereby fostering deeper motivation and sustained engagement in learning.

The discussion further demonstrates that when existentialist principles are integrated with communicative, project-based, and differentiated pedagogical approaches, EFL education becomes more responsive to learners' diverse needs and contexts. Communicative interaction enables authentic self-expression, project-based learning situates language use within purposeful and socially relevant activities, and differentiated instruction respects individual learning trajectories. Together, these approaches enhance not only linguistic competence but also confidence, creativity, collaboration, and character formation. Existentialist pedagogy thus supports the development of learners who are capable of using English meaningfully while also growing as reflective and responsible individuals.

Alignment with the spirit of Merdeka Belajar further strengthens the relevance of existentialist EFL pedagogy in the Indonesian context. Both emphasize learner autonomy, flexibility, contextual relevance, and meaningful engagement rather than rigid compliance with standardized procedures. However, the discussion also highlights that such alignment requires careful pedagogical interpretation. Existentialism provides the philosophical grounding necessary to ensure that flexibility is not reduced to administrative freedom alone, but becomes pedagogically purposeful and ethically informed. Through this grounding, Merdeka Belajar can be enacted in classrooms as a coherent educational vision that balances autonomy with responsibility and innovation with contextual sensitivity.

And the sustainability of existentialist EFL pedagogy depends on several interrelated conditions, including teacher readiness, supportive institutional frameworks, and the continued refinement of assessment practices. Teachers play a pivotal role in translating existentialist principles into classroom realities, which requires ongoing professional development, reflective practice, and openness to dialogic teaching. At the same time, assessment systems must evolve to recognize process, growth, and engagement alongside linguistic accuracy. By addressing these conditions, existentialist pedagogy can be realistically integrated within existing educational structures. In doing so, EFL education in Indonesia can better fulfill its role in developing linguistically competent, ethically grounded, and adaptable learners prepared to navigate the complexities of an increasingly interconnected world.

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