



## Existentialism in Independent Curriculum Education: An Analysis of Student Freedom and Responsibility

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### ABSTRACT

Existentialism philosophy emphasizes individual freedom, responsibility, and the subjective search for meaning in life in an uncertain world. Therefore, education is a human activity that continues throughout time, so a study of the concept of education according to existentialism philosophy is needed. This study aims to review the literature of several research findings that have been previously published in a journal related to the extent to which existentialist thought influences the current curriculum, especially the independent curriculum by exploring how these values influence learning approaches, educational strategies, and goals to be achieved. This type of research is a qualitative literature study that examines theories in depth to draw conclusions by selecting journals published between 2021 and 2025. The results of this study show that the relevance of these thoughts is analyzed in the context of today's education, which is faced with the challenges of globalization, technological advances, and cultural pluralism. The Independent Curriculum practices the values of freedom in existentialism by providing space for students to determine their learning experiences, while still emphasizing mentoring so that this freedom is beneficial to their personal development. Through an analysis of educational philosophy literature, this study seeks to identify essential values and principles. The Independent Curriculum practices the values of freedom in existentialism by providing space for students to determine their learning experiences, but still emphasizing mentoring so that this freedom is beneficial for their personal development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is essentially not only aimed at transferring knowledge, but also at forming humans who are able to understand themselves, make conscious decisions, and be responsible for every action they take. In this context, existentialist philosophy becomes a relevant foundation for examining the dynamics of freedom and responsibility in the educational process. Existentialism emphasizes that humans are free beings, but this freedom is always accompanied by moral consequences in the form of responsibility towards themselves, others, and the world. The thoughts of figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Soren Kierkegaard, and Simone de Beauvoir emphasize that education ideally becomes a space for individuals to realize their existence authentically. Considering the essence of education, namely humans as subjects who are free to elaborate their potential, both in thinking activities and actions based on their free choices (Siswadi., 2024)

Educational issues are complex and encompass all aspects of human life. Education also faces questions that cannot be answered through scientific analysis alone but require deeper analysis and thought, namely philosophical analysis.

The relationship between philosophy and educational theory is illustrated in: First, Philosophy, which means analysis which is one of the methods used by educational experts to solve educational problems and formulate educational concepts (theories); Second, Philosophy functions to provide direction (guidelines) so that educational theories that have been developed are based on and in line with certain philosophical views and schools that have relevance to real life; Third, including the philosophy of Education which has a function in providing guidance and direction for the development of educational theories (concepts) into educational science or pedagogy (Rohmah., 2019).

According to Martin, humans are not merely objects in the world but rather living, thinking, and acting subjects within a context that involves a dynamic relationship with their environment (Rahmania, 2025). Thus, education serves not only to transfer knowledge but also to shape students' self-awareness so they can face life's various challenges wisely and authentically.

Education is a crucial factor supporting a nation's progress. Through education, the needs of society, the nation, and the state can be adequately met, resulting in high-quality human resources. The better the quality of a nation's education, the more advanced it will be. Through education, people can increase their intellectual capacity, skills, and knowledge to face the challenges of an ever-evolving era (Wijaya et al., 2016; Istiarsono, 2016) in Firah, M. (2024).

Jean Paul Sartre proposed the concept of education that frees students to optimize their abilities by freely learning from any source and any learning style according to their interests. Liberating education means education that fosters critical awareness and absolute responsibility for what is done. Existentialism, according to Heidegger, emphasizes the individual's freedom to choose and be responsible for themselves (Izzah & Usman., 2024). His opinion states that every individual has the freedom to determine their role and path in life, although still within the limitations of being 'thrown' into the world without choice. This freedom allows humans to shape their identity, but also requires courage.

The history of the emergence of Existentialism can actually be traced back to the humanism of the Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries AD and continued into the Enlightenment period in the 18th century AD. This is because both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment periods, movements of resistance to dogmatic authority, the affirmation of humanity, belief in individuality and the freedom movement (freedom) as well as great respect for the individual, were given much attention.

Existentialism generally opposes the doctrines of rationalists and empiricists who believe that nature is certain (determined, resolute), organized in a system that can be understood by the researcher's mind, so that they can discover the laws of nature that govern everything that exists, as well as the role of reason that can increase human activity (Mufidah., 2025).

Existentialism is closely related to education, especially primary education. Because both intersect in the same issues: humans, life, interpersonal relationships, individual nature, freedom (independence). Humans are the center of the existentialist story, but education can only be carried out by humans. In the period of its existence there are two periods, namely: (a) the pre-existent period and (b) the pre-existent period. The pre-existent period is childhood (before puberty), children are not yet aware of their human condition, children are not yet aware of their personal identity and destiny, are in the primary education period, the skills developed are reading, writing, mathematics and communication, physical skills, recreation, social skills and problem-solving skills (Mulyadi et al., 2024).

Formulating an effective curriculum is one strategy for achieving educational goals. The curriculum serves as the primary guideline for implementing learning activities in schools, encompassing planning, learning processes, and evaluation. The Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) is a curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to address various learning crises caused by various factors, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. Independent learning encourages the development of an independent spirit, allowing teachers and students to freely and enjoyably explore knowledge, attitudes, and skills from their environment (Khotimah, 2024).

The learning crisis in Indonesia is characterized by various factors, including low student learning outcomes, low literacy skills, low numeracy skills, and disparities in educational quality across various regions. Of course, recovering from the learning crisis cannot be achieved through curriculum changes alone.

The Independent Curriculum is an innovative education policy in Indonesia that gives students and teachers freedom to design and implement the learning process.

The development of education policy in Indonesia through the Independent Curriculum presents a new paradigm that positions students as active subjects in the learning process. This curriculum offers learning freedom, differentiated learning, and emphasizes holistic competency development. Students are given the space to determine their learning path, choose activities that align with their interests, and develop learning projects that foster creativity and independence. Philosophically, this idea aligns with the main principle of existentialism, which asserts that humans "exist" through their own choices and actions.

However, the broad freedoms within the Independent Curriculum cannot be understood partially without considering the aspect of responsibility. The implementation of learning freedom must not fall into relativism or confusion, but rather must be guided by the awareness that every educational choice has consequences for both personal development and social life. This is where the relevance of existentialist analysis becomes crucial, namely to assess whether the mechanisms of the Independent Curriculum have encouraged the formation of authentic, free, and responsible individuals, or have instead created new gaps in learning practices.

Furthermore, changes in the education system often present challenges for teachers, schools, and students. Not all freedoms can be correctly interpreted without a strong philosophical understanding. Therefore, academic studies on the relationship between existentialism and the Independent Curriculum are significant for a deeper understanding of the meaning of freedom to learn. By analyzing how the concept of existentialism is implemented in the curriculum, this research seeks to provide philosophical and practical insights into how education can shape students who are not only free to make choices but also able to account for those decisions.

Existentialism holds that everyone has a responsibility to exercise their free will without considering right and wrong. Therefore, in an educational setting, as an effort to emphasize personal subjectivity, teachers must foster self-awareness and responsibility, foster values, and create their own essence. Students are the only ones capable of defining themselves and creating their own essence without any assistance from others (Wahid., 2022).

Based on this background, this study aims to critically examine the relationship between existentialism and the Independent Curriculum, particularly regarding student freedom and responsibility. This analysis is expected to contribute to the development of educational theory and provide recommendations for implementing a curriculum that is more humanistic, reflective, and centered on students' existential development.

This article is a literature review of several research findings that have been published in a related journal. The use of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method in research on Existentialism in Independent Curriculum Education: Analysis of Student Freedom and Responsibility is very important for

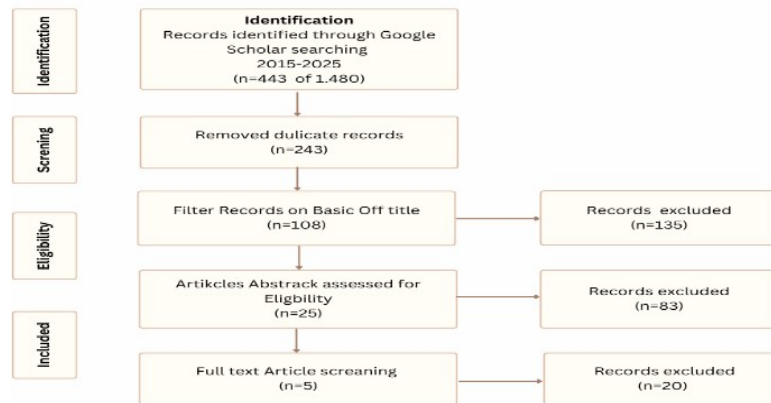
several fundamental reasons related to the need for more comprehensive, objective, and tested scientific data. The purpose of this study is to determine how teacher performance influences the quality of learning. The following research question will guide the literature review: how is the concept of freedom in existentialist philosophy understood and explained in educational literature, especially in the context of the independent curriculum?

## METHOD

The method used in this research is a literature study, which is a research approach that relies on the study and analysis of written sources, such as books, articles, journals, and other scientific works. The stages of the literature study are carried out in several steps, first; the author selects relevant literature. Second, identifies key concepts related to the research theme, such as Existentialism, independent curriculum, freedom, responsibility, education. The analyzed literature sources provide a strong theoretical foundation regarding the basic principles of existentialist philosophy and how these principles can be applied in educational contexts to enhance more authentic and meaningful learning. Third, this literature analysis is carried out critically, comparing various existentialist thoughts with the Merdeka Belajar perspective to identify students' freedom and responsibility in the current education system. This literature study relies on qualitative analysis, in which the author concludes the findings from the selected literature by comparing and connecting the basic ideas of existentialist philosophy with their practical applications in education (Sari,2025).

The analysis process was carried out by reviewing the literature on research articles on existentialism in Independent Curriculum Education: Analysis of Student Freedom and Responsibility published between 2021 and 2025. The analysis process was carried out by mapping how these theories can be used as a basis for improvements in educational approaches in their application. The criteria set for the sources selected in this literature review were national articles relevant to the theme to be discussed. The criteria set for the sources selected in this literature review were national articles relevant to the theme to be discussed. To find the articles to be used, the author used the keywords "Existentialism, independent curriculum, freedom, responsibility, education."

Using this method, the research aims to provide in-depth insight into the contribution of existentialist philosophy to educational reform, particularly in developing a learning system that is more authentic, meaningful, and responsive to students' freedom and personal needs. The collected data will be analyzed and summarized to draw conclusions regarding teacher performance management for improving learning quality.



## RESULTS AND DISSOLUTION

Researchers	Research Results
<b>(Al Ayyubi dkk., 2024)</b>	The Independent Curriculum provides freedom for teachers and students to conduct the learning process according to their individual abilities and needs. This freedom does not stand alone, but is accompanied by students' responsibility to develop their potential, act independently, and take responsibility for the learning process and outcomes.
<b>(Tri Rahayu Setya Ningrum et al, 2025)</b>	This study concludes that the Independent Curriculum aligns with the principles of existentialism, particularly regarding freedom, responsibility, and respect for individual uniqueness. This curriculum provides students with the freedom to choose their learning styles based on their interests and potential, and to develop more meaningful and authentic learning experiences. However, its implementation still faces challenges, such as teacher preparedness, students' ability to manage learning freedom, disparities in school facilities, and difficulties in authentic assessment. Therefore, improving teacher competency and providing support from the education system are necessary for the Independent Curriculum to be implemented optimally and truly humanize students.
<b>(Attika Nazira dkk, 2024)</b>	This journal examines the influence of existentialist philosophy on modern educational curricula through a literature review. Formally, the article identifies four main findings: the importance of student-centered learning, strengthening individual responsibility, the need for a flexible and inclusive curriculum, and a more humanistic teacher-student relationship. Research shows that existentialist philosophy has significantly influenced the direction of modern educational curricula. The teacher-student relationship has shifted to a more personal and humanistic one, enabling teachers to act as mentors, fostering students' self-discovery. These findings reinforce the theory that education not only transfers knowledge but also shapes the meaning of life and individual character. Overall, existentialist values have been shown to support the creation of an education that is more adaptive, humane, and relevant to the needs of the times. Core values such as freedom, responsibility, and authenticity drive changes in learning approaches.

Overall, this journal illustrates that existentialist values can enrich modern curricula, even if the methods used do not fully meet SLR standards.

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**(Firah, M, 2024)** The analysis of the ideas in this paper links the Independent Curriculum to Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist thinking, which emphasizes the importance of freedom, self-awareness, and individual responsibility in learning. Evidence suggests that these perspectives are closely related because the Independent Curriculum provides opportunities for students to choose subjects that suit their interests, learn independently, and develop their personalities. The teacher's role as a guide aligns with the idea that students are active subjects who have control over the learning process. Therefore, this analysis states that the Independent Curriculum is not only pedagogically relevant but also has a solid philosophical foundation in promoting students' freedom and existence as individuals with the potential to grow to their full potential.

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**(Khotimah, 2024)** The research results show that the concept of Independent Learning, which emphasizes freedom of thought, innovation, independent learning, creativity, and the pursuit of happiness, is not fully appropriate for elementary school students because children aged 6–12 are still highly dependent on external factors, especially teacher guidance. Based on the analysis of existentialist philosophy, children at this stage do not yet understand their existence and essence, so they are not yet able to make independent learning choices. Therefore, the implementation of independent learning at this level is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to provide direction, guidance, and reinforcement. The research concludes that the concept of independent learning can still be implemented, but not in the form of complete freedom; rather, freedom that is directed, structured, and adapted to the child's cognitive, moral, social, and religious development stages.

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How Is The Concept Of Freedom In The Philosophy Of Existentialism Understood And Explained In Educational Literature, Especially In The Context Of The Independent Curriculum?

The concept of freedom in existentialist philosophy is understood as a space for each individual to determine the direction of their life through conscious choices. In educational literature, especially when associated with the Independent Curriculum, this freedom is understood as an effort to provide students with the opportunity to actively participate in their own learning process. The Independent Curriculum provides flexibility for students and teachers in designing learning, allowing students to choose activities or learning methods that suit their individual interests and abilities (Ningrum et al., 2025). This principle aligns with the existentialist view that freedom is always associated with responsibility. In learning, this responsibility is evident when students are required to develop their potential and undergo the learning process independently (Al Ayyubi et al., 2024).

However, the literature also emphasizes that not all freedom can be granted, especially at the elementary level. Children still need guidance to prevent freedom from confusing their choices or leading them

astray in their learning. Therefore, the role of teachers is crucial as facilitators who ensure freedom remains within developmentally appropriate limits (Khotimah, 2024).

Nazira, Andriani, and Sari's (2024) journal asserts that existentialist values, particularly personal freedom and responsibility, influence the development of modern educational curricula by encouraging a more humanistic and individualistic approach. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, this concept of freedom is clearly evident in the principle of "independent learning," which grants students greater autonomy to choose subjects, learning paths, and project activities according to their individual interests and potential. Thus, freedom is not understood as the absence of rules, but rather as a space to develop meaningful and responsible choices.

Some literature also highlights the role of teachers in relation to existential freedom. In the Independent Curriculum, teachers are no longer the sole source of knowledge, but rather act as companions, helping students discover their potential and learning direction. This approach creates a more humane learning environment while also providing space for the growth of student self-awareness a value strongly emphasized in existentialism (Firah, 2024).

Overall, the literature shows that the Independent Curriculum practices the values of freedom in existentialism by providing space for students to determine their learning experiences, but still emphasizing mentoring so that this freedom is beneficial for their personal development.

## CONCLUSION

The Merdeka Curriculum and the concept of Merdeka Belajar demonstrate strong relevance to the existentialist educational philosophy. The core of this alignment lies in existentialism's emphasis on freedom, personal responsibility, and authenticity, reflected in Merdeka Belajar as the freedom granted to educators and students. This concept encourages students to be active subjects who design their own learning experiences, in line with existentialism, which holds individuals responsible for their own knowledge. The application of these values has a positive impact in creating a more personalized curriculum oriented towards the development of individual interests and talents, where educators act as facilitators, not as the sole source of knowledge. However, implementation faces structural and cultural challenges, such as limited teacher understanding and a tendency toward uniform educational standards. These challenges are even more pronounced at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah/Elementary School level, where students are still heavily influenced by external factors and do not yet fully understand their own existence. Therefore, the success of Merdeka Belajar depends heavily on teacher direction and guidance. Thus, philosophy provides a systemic and universal direction for education, and the Independent Curriculum is seen as a strong foundation for creating a more humane and adaptive education in the 21st century.

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the concept of freedom in existentialist philosophy is highly relevant to the principles of the Independent Curriculum. Existentialism places freedom

as the foundation for a person to shape themselves through the choices and actions they take. This is clearly evident in the Independent Curriculum, which provides opportunities for students to determine their learning methods, express their interests, and develop their abilities more independently. Research findings also indicate that the freedom in this curriculum aligns with existentialist values, particularly regarding respect for student uniqueness and personal responsibility in the learning process (Ningrum et al., 2025).

However, implementation still faces challenges. Not all teachers are ready to implement flexible learning, not all students are able to manage their freedom independently, and not all schools have adequate facilities. Furthermore, at the elementary level, learning freedom needs to be introduced gradually because children still need guidance and assistance in making choices (Khotimah, 2024).

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