# UNIT 11: EXISTENTIALISM AS A SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


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## 11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define existentialism and its salient features as an educational philosophy
- explain existentialism and its influence in educational thought and practice

## 11.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have learned about the three important schools of philosophy. This unit introduces you to a new philosophy known as Existentialism. Existentialism may be described as the youngest modern philosophy. The unit highlights the meaning of existentialism and its influence on educational thought and practice. Moreover, in the later part of the unit, there is a reflection of both the merits and demerits of existentialism as a school of philosophy.

than any statement we make on him. Man's existence is more important than his essence.

- Existentialism profoundly believes that man cannot accept the ready-made concepts of existence forced upon him. He is a free agent capable of shaping his own life and choosing his own identity.

### 11.3.2 Existentialism: its Influences on Educational Thought and Practice

By now, we have developed a fair understanding about the three major philosophies of education, i.e., idealism, naturalism and pragmatism. Now we will discuss existentialism, which may be described as the youngest modern philosophy. It is a twentieth century philosophy. Existentialism developed as a result of opposition to the methods of Western philosophy after the Second World War. According to existentialism, the individuality of man is supreme. The individual is greater and more important than the existence of man, nation and the world. Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher is considered to be the founder of the philosophy of existence. Other exponents are Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger from Germany; both of them were professors of philosophy in two German Universities. France contributed two other existentialists. One of them was Gabriel Marcel, a philosopher and playwriter and the other Jean Paul Sartre, a great litterateur and philosopher, professor of philosophy at Sorbonne University, France.

**Fundamental Principles of Existentialism:**

Let us examine the fundamental principles of existentialism. They are:

- One of the fundamental, foundational concepts of existentialism is that "Existence precedes essence". It was Plato who said that the surrounding world is a world of essences, i.e., ideas and purpose of life is to discover these essences. This means that essences are already there and they precede existence.

his individuality secondary. In fact, the whole philosophy is a revolt against any type of system building in philosophy and the consequent mechanization, abstraction and rationalization of human existence.

## 11.3.2 Educational Implication of Existentialism

Now let's discuss how existentialists have tried to explain education.

**Objectives of Education:**

- Existentialism believes that every individual is unique. Education must develop in him this uniqueness. The objective of education is to enable every individual to develop his unique qualities to harness his potentialities and cultivate his individualities.
- Another belief of existentialists is that man is free by nature. Education must make pupil aware of the infinite possibilities of his freedom and the responsibilities that he must bear in life. Education must also foster the capacity of self-direction.
- Education must also develop in the pupil a scale of values consistent with freedom. The pupil must develop a commitment to these values and act for them.
- Education is not to have any intellectualistic goals. In terms of the fundamentals of existentialism, it is more important to develop the effective side of life i.e, the emotional and aesthetic side of man than the rational and cognitive side of life.
- Development of introspective powers should also be the aim of education. It should develop powers of self-observation among pupils.

**Curriculum of Existentialism:**

Existentialists don't believe in prescribing a curriculum. The pupil must choose his own curriculum according to his needs, abilities etc. But they agree to provide some amount of fundamental knowledge about the universe in general. They feel that the curriculum must be related to the immediate social, economic, political and other problems which the individual will have to face. They emphasize that curriculum must not be studied for examination

**Critical Estimate of Existentialism:**

Existentialism has been criticized on the following grounds:

- Firstly, the terminologies used in existentialism are not very clear. Concepts like 'Being', 'existence', 'Meaning' are ambiguous.
- Secondly, it requires a good deal of efforts on the part of the teacher to understand each child individually and teach them accordingly.
- Thirdly, the methods of teaching in existentialism appear to be impractical and inapplicable in an industrial society.

In conclusion, we can say that it is a new philosophy which is still growing. We have to wait for some more time to draw conclusions.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1 :** Who is the founder of existentialism?

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**Q 2:** What are the objectives of education according to existentialism?

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**Q 3:** Existentialists prefer 'home education to school education'. Briefly explain within 50 words.

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**Q 4**: What type of subjects has received importance in existentialist curriculum?

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## 11.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher is considered to be the founder of the philosophy of existentialism.

**Ans to Q No 2:** The objective of education, according to existentialism, is that every individual is unique and education must develop in him this uniqueness. Man is free by nature and education must make the students aware of the infinite possibilities of his freedom and responsibilities he must bear in life.

**Ans to Q No 3:** Existentialists prefer home education to school education because they are in favour of Socratic approach to teaching which demand an intimate contact between the teacher and the taught.

**Ans to Q No 4:** In existentialist curriculum, the subjects of humanities receive more importance than science subjects. They prefer subjective knowledge to objective knowledge.



## 11.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Short Questions:** (Answer each question in about 150 words)

**Q 1:** What are the assumptions of existentialism?

**Q 2:** What are the objectives of education according to existentialism?

**Q 3:** What is existentialism? What are its fundamental principles?

**Q4:** Mention the points of demerits of the philosophy of Existentialism.

**B) Long Questions:** (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

**Q 1:** Explain how education should be provided according to existentialism? Explain.

**Q 2:** Discuss the aims of education and methods of teaching according to existentialism.

**Q3:** Select some educational principles from Existentialism that you may feel may be usefully applied in Indian schools.

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