Abstract

Existentialism is primarily, a reaction to and a voice of protest against, all the rationalistic and speculative philosophies. It emphasizes human existence and the qualities which are distinctive in man. It signifies restoration of man to himself and calls him to face the problems and to realize the possibilities of his own existence as a “concrete individual.” Existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding self and the meaning of life through free will, choice and personal responsibility.

Existentialism has both theistic and atheistic forms. Theistic Existentialists consider God to be ‘the source of one’s being’, ‘the ground of all being’, or ‘one’s ultimate concern’. Religious existentialists include Soren Kierkegaard Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber and Paul Tillich. The atheistic existentialists’ presuppositions and belief systems preclude any supernatural or any idea of God. Atheistic existentialists include Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus.

Atheistic view of existentialism from our point of view does not leave a strong impression. Now thousands of studies prove the spiritual nature of man. Man is not simply a material being but in essence is spiritual. When man comes to understand himself he also realizes his spiritual nature and the existence of God. A famous Sufis dictum is “one who knows himself, knows his lord”. So self actualization through self analysis and self progress will eventually lead to spiritual realization.

Justification of the study:

Existentialism came into existence as a consequence of tragic events of the two World Wars especially the Second World War.
Existentialism started gaining ground and enthusiasm in the beginning of twentieth century with the support of some very original and forceful writers and thinkers. Now a great number of scholars and writers have been attempting to critically examine and interpret existentialism in all its shades and aspects. As a result concepts and issues of existentialism have been explored and treated at length and in depth, if not exhaustively. But the question is whether existentialism is meeting the demands of present society. In present society, man’s existence is in danger, he is depressed and regressed, there is need to secure man’s existence and bring him out of depression and lead toward progress. In such situation existentialist themes and more importantly its educational implications acquire great importance as education is considered an important tool for solving the problems of the modern society. Existentialism, through its themes and educational programmes can combat all those forces that tend to dehumanize society and are a threat to human existence.

Moreover review of literature shows that studies on educational implications of existentialism have not carried out in depth. No study has discussed directly the relevance of educational implications to human existence and progress.

The researcher feels a need for further studies in the field of existentialism to explore its educational promises and possibilities and their role in securing human existence and enhancing human progress. This justifies the selection of the problem of the present study.

The present study in specific terms is “A Critical Study of the Existentialistic View of Education and its Relevance to Human Existence and Progress”.
Objectives of the Study:

1. To study and analyse ontological, epistemological and axiological beliefs of existentialism.

2. To identify the educational implications of existentialism in the context of aims, curriculum and methods of education.

3. To examine the relevance of existentialism to human existence and progress in the light of its basic themes and educational implications.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study the researcher has divided the study into seven chapters namely Introduction, History/Development of Existentialism, Review of Literature, Philosophical Beliefs of Existentialism, Educational Implications of Existentialism, Relevance of Existentialistic View of Education to Human Existence and Progress and Conclusions and Suggestions.

Conclusion:

Existentialism advocates an education that helps the individual living an existential life.

Existentialistic aims of education include development of authenticity, self realization, choice making power, responsibility, ability to face tragic situations, social adjustability and uniqueness in child. In addition, it also develops creative abilities, spirituality, individual potential, integrity, self mastery, critical attitude, subjectivity and self-actualization.

Existentialism favours diverse curricula suiting the needs, abilities and aptitudes of the individual. It should serve both immediate as well as ultimate needs. Humanities
and arts acquire central place in curriculum. Arts and humanities courses, especially in the secondary schools can provide challenging opportunities for the introduction of existentialism. It is during the adolescent years that the youngs confront crucial questions of life’s meaning and value and of the search for personal identity. Adolescence, indeed, is a process of self-definition. Teaching of social sciences and sciences, vocational education, moral education and religious education are permissible. Existentialism leads to self reliance and self directedness which is an important aspect of new methodology of learning. Schools exist to assist children in knowing themselves and their place in society. The task of teacher is to awaken in students self awareness and help them to be ‘original’ and ‘authentic’. Nietzsche advocates that teacher must satisfy students’ hunger for education with auspicious teaching and must know how to stimulate hunger. This implies that teacher should have additional quality of motivating students. Existentialism stresses informal, intimate, lively and personal relation between the teacher and his students. Both teachers and student are treated as individuals.

Existentialism through its themes explores how man can live existentially and existential education develops the skills required for existential life.

Existential education makes student able to live existential life- the life that is meaningful to the living individual, the life that is by and for the individual and most importantly that can face existential reality. Existential reality is characterized by the existential conditions like inauthenticity, absurdity, anxiety, alienation, despair, dread, nothingness and facticity. Most individuals do not want to confront such issues and therefore there is always a lingering tension of uncertainty. All these conditions can bring man closer to the destruction of his life by attempting to suicide or indulge in substance use like drug addiction or attacking the mental state of man that is depression.
A man living meaningful and purposeful life is far away from these tragic situations. Existential education through its aims, curricula and teaching methodology attempts to make man’s life meaningful and purposeful by inculcating in him the skills required for living such life.

According to existentialism, the aim of education is realization of inner truth. Self realization means to be one's own genuine self, not deceptive. The education should make student realize his subjective consciousness-consciousness for his self. Being self conscious he will recognize his ‘self’ and get an understanding of his ‘being.’ When one knows himself thoroughly, he knows his sufferings and weaknesses, he understands others and as human being he can respond more fruitfully and purposefully at global level. Understanding is critically important as many of the differences, issues, hatred and even violence result from the lack of understanding. So when man come to understand himself through authentic experience, he can understand others also, others suffering, others weaknesses and embrace them out of love. The Sufis in India e.g. Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Nizamuddin Aulia Rahmatullah Alaihi (P.B.U.H) gave practical demonstration of understanding and love to other human beings.

Existential education prepares individual to face death. This idea of education for death can be expelled into an experience for better understanding of good life and one's obligation in it. Man should remember one’s death quite often infact at every moment. Psychologically remembrance of death brings refinement and balance in one’s personality, he seizes to be cruel and violent. The awareness of death neutralizes emotions of both extremes i.e. of extreme happiness (particularly due to material achievement) and extreme sorrow. Under theistic paradigm of existentialism humans can be prepared to face death through spiritual development.
Looking at the large data of suicide, existentialism offers a solution. Since a person owes responsibility towards his own existence, he is nobody to end his life which is a sheer irresponsibility therefore a training of being responsible towards one’s existence brings a solution to suicide and depression—depression may be removed by being engaged in responsible actions and experiences which will bring authenticity, meaningfulness and purpose in life.

Existential education aims to develop creative abilities in children. Creativity is an important aspect not only for individual but also for the society. Since existentialism offers opportunity for individual experiences that may involve even those initiatives that are not taken by anyone before, such experiences bring out the creative spark inherent in individual. His creative potential is recognized that can take society to new dimensions, to reforms. And in this process of leading society to progress, human also progresses.

Existential education aims to develop individuality. When man takes himself as an individual seriously only then he can focus on his individual growth and thus progress. Existentialism is the most thoroughgoing philosophy of individualism in present time. To think that existentialism overemphasize individualism would not be correct. Self which comes through personal experiences, inner dialogues and introspection is essentially creative and can contribute to the society through the I-Thou relationship which is very much human and imparts discoveries/knowledge about authentic life experiences to others.

Furthermore existentialism holds that man is responsible for his deeds. Thus there is accountability towards world, but it is pity that existentialists have limited/narrowed man's sense of accountability only to this world. Man's nature is such that he wants continuation of life even after death.
Existentialism also aims to inculcate ideal of love in children. Love in its broader sense has the capacity for growth into leaps and bounds. The field of intellect is limited whereas love knows no bound it can lead man to progress immensely to the extent of wonder.

Existential education inculcates choice making power in individuals. Freedom of choice and will makes man or helps man to build his destiny and the destiny of society. In the course of building his destiny man progresses.

Thus existentialism by developing in children, authenticity, responsibility, spirituality, love, choice making power, sense of being oneself, self awareness, self knowledge, critical attitude, subjectivity, individualism and uniqueness enables them to live existentially that is making their existence meaningful, their life worthy of living, stopping them from committing suicides/ ending their existence. It makes them able to face tragic life situations like anxiety, alienation, despair and frustration which helps them to resist from substance use and fall in depression. All these traits, qualities or abilities developed by existential education bestows the individual, the potential to progress. Thus it saves human existence and leads humans to progress.