

# An Enquiry into The Kenya's Holistic Education: An Existential Philosophical Perspective

William Kipkemboi<sup>1</sup>, Mary Wahome<sup>2</sup>, Cletus N. Chukwu<sup>3</sup>

*School of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy, Religion and Theology, Moi University, P. O. Box 3900-3010, Eldoret, Kenya*

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**Abstract** - Kenya's Education Sector is committed to the provision of holistic education. There has been a debate as to whether the Kenya's Education is "holistic". It is against the backdrop of this problem that this research sought to enquire the Kenya's holistic education using existential philosophical theory by examining the impact of existentialism on Kenya's holistic education and to explore the importance of existential holistic education. The study is library based, and it employed critical and existential methods of philosophical investigations. The Findings shows that existentialist theory has influenced Kenya's provision of holistic education in terms of educating the "whole" person, teacher's role, learning environment, broad curriculum, choice-making, instructional methods, and the place of learners as the main subjects of education. Importance of existential holistic education includes the development of critical thinkers, the formation of ethical persons, choice-making power, social adjustment, achievement of freedom, ability to face the tragic situations of life, and promotion of human dignity. However, Kenya's holistic education faces many challenges. The study recommends the involvement of all stakeholders in the provision of holistic education, continuous evaluation, and improvement of holistic education, and the need to have a clear concept of holistic education in Kenya by all stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Holistic Education, Existentialism, Enquiry

## I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, education is treated as a human right and very important for every nation because it contributes to the development of both the individual and the society. UNESCO (1975) viewed education as the acquisition of accumulated knowledge, skills, and values as passed down through generations and which is needed for playing roles in the society. It involves molding the youth towards a desired goal or a personal awakening to what they are already in potency. Education comprises organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning. Education is responsible for maintaining cultural heritage and improving self and society.

Consequently, the Kenyan Government has taken the provision of holistic education as key. This is evidenced by the huge budget given to the education sector every year and many commissions mandated to evaluate and make recommendations of improving the provision of quality education. Some of these commissions include Ominde Report (GoK, 1964), Gachathi Report (GoK, 1976), Mackay Report (GoK, 1981), Wanjiki Report (GoK, 1983), Mungai Report (GoK, 1995), Koech Report (GoK, 1999), and The Basic Education Act (GoK, 2013).

The above-mentioned interventions have emphasized the holistic development of the learners. In the sessional paper No. 14 of 2012, The Ministry of Higher Education Science and Technology (MOEST) outlined that education in Kenya shall focus on the development of the individual potential in a holistic and integrated manner, while producing individuals who are intellectually, emotionally, and physically balanced.

On the other hand, philosophers have not been left behind in the discussion about the provision of holistic education. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, posited that, by education, I mean an all-around drawing out of the best in the child and man's body, mind and spirit. Existentialist school of philosophy has influenced the provision of education in its holistic sense.

## A. Statement of the Problem

The Kenyan education sector has been committed to the provision of holistic and quality education. Basome, Nyakito, Koskey, Wampande, Mbuti, Magaletta, and Allida (2017) argue that with a holistic approach, the viewpoint is concerned with the improvement of every person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative, and spiritual potentials. However, this endeavor has attracted a lot of criticisms and debates as to whether the Kenyan education system is truly holistic and whether it produces graduands who are all-around. It is against this background that this research sought to enquire into the Kenya's holistic education from an existential philosophical perspective.



### **B. Objectives of the Study**

This paper was guided by the following research objectives

1. To find out the impact of existentialism on Kenya's holistic education.
2. To explore the importance of existential holistic education.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

This study is a library based and in adopted critical and existential methods of philosophical investigations.

## **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. Holistic Education**

Holistic education is both fairly a new movement and a popular area of discussion in the current education discourses. Just like any other given definitions, holistic education has varied definitions. The word holism comes from the Greek concept *holon*, denoting that the universe is composed of integrated wholes that cannot be reduced to parts. Socrates, therefore, qualifies as a proponent of holistic education because he encouraged individuals to examine their own lives. Forbes (2003) defines holistic education as a group of beliefs, feelings, principles, and general ideas that share a family of resemblance. Miller (1997) philosophically viewed holistic education as a philosophy based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to the spiritual values such as compassion and peace. Miller (1992), on the other hand, argues that holistic education is not to be defined as a particular method or technique; it must be seen as a paradigm, a set of basic assumptions and principles that can be applied in diverse ways. The above definitions clearly show that, holistic education encompasses a wide range of philosophical orientations and pedagogical practices targeting the wholeness of human experience devoid of any significant dimension. Holistic education is, therefore, an inclusive dimension whose educational objective is to foster a balanced development of an individual, who is the center of learning and in a manner in which all the different aspects such as intellectual, physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and aesthetic, and any other aspect of human existence are catered for. All the stated aspects moreover have to relate to the "other", that is, other people, environment, and all the "things".

It is therefore philosophically and existentially plausible to argue that the learner's connection in a holistic perspective should begin with a concrete person (learner) who has ideas, feelings, passions, dreams, fears, and hopes by employing critical skills, curiosity, creativity, and sensitivity to the dynamics of the world one finds himself/herself into. This is justified and supported by the belief that our lives ought to draw meaning and purpose that transcends mechanical laws designed empirically for a value-based authentic life. In this sense, holism ought to prepare

the learners of any given education system to live a life with a clear purpose and creativity in this precarious and complex world. This observation further indicates that holistic education should prepare the learners to meet their daily challenges, including those related to their careers.

Holistic education movement developed as a result of a revolt against the mechanistic, reductionist, and materialistic orientations that dominated the popular thinking in education in the last century. This argument is supported by Miller (2004) and Schreiner (2005). On the other hand, Njoroge and Bennars (1986) observe that the holistic education movement challenges the present approach in education, which is so much on cognitive development of the learner at the expense of other dimensions, which they call normative, creative, and dialogical. The present education in Kenya is obsessed with the passing of exams and certification, a practice that reduces schooling to the training of individuals to become marketable commodities for the global marketplace.

In the 1980s, the holistic paradigm became a prominent movement supported by thinkers invariant fields. In as much as it is a recent movement, Mahmmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi, and Liaghatdar (2012) are of the view that the holistic education movement has deep roots in ancient spiritual traditions and cosmologies described as perennial philosophy. When the so-called Enlightenment of the eighteenth century elevated analytical, scientific reason to near-total dominance in the west, this perennial wisdom- the recognition of humanity's intimate connection to the evolving cosmos- was relegated to a dissident movement labeled romanticism. From this observation, it can therefore be concluded that holistic education has its genesis from the romantic education and the theories of Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Fredrick Froebel.

Nava (2001) notes that holistic education has four pillars; these are learning to learn, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. Learning to learn begins with learning to ask, and in the process, one is enabled to cultivate skills such as attention, curiosity, listening, imaginativeness and creativity and therefore taking responsibility for one's learning. Learning to do implies taking a deliberate move to influence the society positively through one's responsible actions and intelligence, for example, through productive work. Learning to live together constitutes living responsibly through respect and cooperation with other people and relating well with other living things in the universe. Learning to be is achieved when one discovers his/her true human nature and encounters with the real oneself and to belong to the whole. Nava (2001) insists that holistic education nurtures this learning in a special way, by recognizing the human being as a basically spiritual being in search of meaning. Forbes (2003) observes that the goal of holistic education is ultimacy. Ultimacy means the highest stage of human development or the highest state the human being can aspire to achieve. Abraham Maslow calls this "self-actualization".

## **B. Existentialism**

Existentialism is a catch-all term that is used to describe all those philosophers who hold the belief that philosophical thinking begins with a human being as a subject distinct from that of animals, plants, and other non-living things like rocks. American Heritage Dictionary of English (1992) describes existentialism as a philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and the isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as an explainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for consequences of one's acts. Existentialism is, therefore, a style of philosophizing that employs different convictions about the world and human existence. This Philosophy, emerged as a revolt against the traditional philosophy, for example, rationalism and empiricism, which was perceived to be abstract and insensitive to human conditions and experience. The traditional Philosophy pursued the quest of discovering the ultimate order based on observation and metaphysical principles, and this prompted the emerging existentialist philosophers to claim that individual human beings bear full responsibility for creating meanings of their own lives. This is because, the reality is lived, and human beings can discover fundamental truths of their existence through lived experience. Consequently, this Philosophy became prominent in the continental thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, especially in France and Germany, and received considerable attention in the English-speaking world (Popkin & Stroll, 1993).

Existentialism has many philosophical positions, and the prominent one is "Existence precedes Essence". This declaration originated from Jean Paul Sartre (1946) in his famous work *Existentialism id Humanism*. This implies that for human beings, existence is given, and one spends his life creating meaning (essence). For Sartre therefore, man first exists, confronts himself, emerges in the world, and defines himself afterward. At first, therefore, the man simply is. Man does not have nature when coming into the world, and he becomes what he is (essence) by creating himself when he begins to choose. By creating meaning, man defines himself in his own subjectivity by confronting choices, freedom, and angst. Existentialism emphasizes action, freedom, personal responsibility, subjectivity, and authenticity as fundamental to human existence. Existentialists focus on human feelings such as anxiety, dread, freedom, and awareness of death.

In its recognizable 20<sup>th</sup> Century form, the Philosophy of Existentialism is linked with thinkers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Fredrick Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Albert Camus, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Edmund Husserl, and Simon de Beauvoir. It is evident that the existential themes have been hinted at throughout history, for example, in the teachings of Socrates, Gautama Buddha, Biblical books of Ecclesiastes and Job, St Augustine of Hippo, Descartes, and John Locke.

## **C. Relationship between Existentialism and Holistic Education**

Both existentialism and the holistic education movement developed as a result of a revolt against the traditional thinking. While existentialism emerged as a revolt against the traditional philosophy of rationalism and empiricism, which was too abstract from the concrete human experience, holistic education revolted against the traditional, mechanistic, reductionistic, and materialistic orientations that dominated the popular thinking in education in the last century, Miller, (2004); Schreiner, (2005).

As a philosophical thought, existentialism encounters existence in its wholeness with its complexities and paradoxes. This aspect of "wholeness" is in agreement with the true essence of education. While existentialism focuses on human feelings, passions, ideas, dreams, fears, and hopes in conditions of human existence, holistic education also addresses the same through what Mahatma Gandhi argues when he observes that all-round education means drawing out the best in the child and man's body, mind and spirit, Aggarwal, (1991). Holistic education, therefore, develops all dimensions of the learner.

Both existentialism and holistic education are concerned with developing persons who are able to shape and give meaning to their lives for quality living. Using existential language, Miller (1997) describes holistic education as a philosophy based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life. Concisely, existentialism and the holistic education movement have a lot to share in terms of developing persons who are capable of creating their essence and becoming what they are capable of.

## **D. Impact of Existentialism on Kenya's Holistic Education**

As one of the most contemporary schools of Philosophy, existentialism has helped to study the problems of education from a philosophical perspective. Historically, education has been built on theories of Philosophies. Every education system is guided by a philosophical thought. Without a philosophical perspective, education becomes a blind endeavor. Existential Philosophy has therefore influenced the provision the holistic education in Kenya in the following ways;

**a) Educating the "whole person":** Maheshwari (2011) argues that, in educating the whole person, the existentialists propose a more individualistic notion, that is, the unfolding of the individual as a whole in a situation in which he finds himself. This dimension is reflected in the Kenya's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, *Sessional Paper No 14* (GoK, 2012), which states that education in Kenya shall focus on the development of the individual potential in a holistic and integrated manner, while producing individuals who are intellectually, emotionally and physically balanced. Training the whole person requires that that education trains the

learners to be aware of the fact that they are becoming human persons who live and makes choices about what they will do and what they anticipate to become.

**b) The role of educators:** To clearly capture the existentialist concept of a teacher, Harper (1955) explains that a good teacher knows that he is educating individuals, not just man, and will use any method that will educate the whole man. Existentialists expect a teacher to redefine his role and to discover the implications and the commitment that is required for being a teacher. The role of a teacher in the provision of holistic education is therefore critical. Inspired by this existentialist viewpoint, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) in Kenya has developed the teacher's code of conduct, which guides the delivery and the discipline required from teachers. The teachers who do well in mentoring the learners are recognized and even given promotions, and those who mess up with learners face the full force of the law.

**c) Learning environment:** Educational existentialism recommends schools to create learning environments characterized by large classes with a flexible atmosphere. Merhmohammadi (2009) insisted that existentialism advocates for learning environments filled with trust, mutual respect, cooperation, and friendship in such a manner that the student can share his feelings with others. Furthermore, there should be abundant availability of reading resources for learners to discover their skills based on their interests and talents. In the spirit of recognizing the significance of a good learning environment, the Ministry of Education (2010) emphasized the importance of creating an enabling environment for the learners and formulated a Child-Friendly School Manual for implementation. Other interventions that are done to foster a conducive school environment include supervision by the Ministry officials, safety precautions requirements, school infrastructure fund, recruitment of staff, and provision of learning resources. A good learning environment motivates the learner and makes the learning enjoyable.

**d) Broad curriculum:** Existentialism treats curriculum as the world of knowledge to be explored with the sole aim of self-examination and self-realization. Such curriculum should recognize the individual differences while accommodating diverse curricula that respond to the aptitude and the needs of the individual. Elaborating on this orientation, Scotter (1985) posits that the subjects of the existentialist curriculum are unspecified, although any subject can do, at the right moment, the tool, the vehicle to engage the individual in his or her striving to be. In the endeavor to provide a holistic curriculum, Kenya's education has provided a broad curriculum that gives space to individual learner's aspirations, conditions, and needs related to their unique individual differences. Kenya's education curriculum has a provision of compulsory and elective subjects or courses,

science-related subjects, and humanities or art-related subjects. The 'holistic', the contribution of humanities, for example, is that they reveal the inner feelings and thoughts of a person, such as love and suffering. History challenges the learner to appreciate the past and to shape the future, and social sciences generally inculcate moral values.

**e) Good teacher-learner relationship:** Existentialism emphasizes a more lively and personal relationship between the learner and the teacher. This kind of relationship, as Buber (1970) puts it, raises learning into a dialogue which for him is the main aim of education. The teacher-student relationship translates to "I-Thou" or subject to subject relationship and not "I-It" or subject-object relationship. In this kind of interaction, human beings are aware of each other as sharing the unity of the human condition, engaging in a dialogue that involves each other's whole being. Kenya's education system has been impacted by this thought, and now encourages teachers to be friendly, mentors, facilitators in the learning process, and supporters of the learners. A practice such as corporal punishment that destroys the relationship between the teacher and the learner has been banned, and more humane ways of disciplining such as guidance and counseling encouraged.

**f) The learner as the center of learning:** According to Akinpelu (1981), existentialists regard man as "an open possibility", that is, a person who is in the process of becoming, but who is capable of actually becoming whatever he wants to be. This thinking shows the existentialist understanding of the learner, which is the center of learning. The primary emphasis, therefore, in the education process must always be the learner. Kenya's quest for holistic education tries to put the learner at the center of learning. This is evidenced by the emphasis on the learner-centered teaching methods, the recent discouragement of ranking, though still a bit practiced during the national examinations, the creation of child-friendly learning institutions, and generally the attention which the government has given to education.

**g) Instructional methods:** Akhter and Malik (2013) are of the view that existential instructional methods are those that support sound methodologies for inquiry, which are applied to any given situation. Any adopted pedagogy should be applicable to learners considering their ages and environment. Such instructional methods should also focus on individualized learning with a great deal of individual contact with the teacher who relates to each student openly and honestly. Education in Kenya encourages the teachers to use varied methods of teaching which guarantee effective delivery. The teachers were all called upon to be innovative and creative in their teaching pedagogies. Learner-centered teaching methods are recommended because they allow discussion and avoids the temptation of the teacher being intoxicated with his own knowledge and authority.

### **E. Importance of Existential Holistic Education**

Existential holistic education aims at developing the learner to develop, to transform toward the good, to unleash the potential, and to be what the author of life intended one to be. The following are, therefore, the importance of existential holistic education:

**a) Development of critical thinkers:** Existential holistic education fosters the power of critical thinking among the learners. Namwamba (2007) explains that critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide or a belief and action. For education to develop a holistic individual, the instructors should be creative by ensuring the following:

- The teaching and learning should be learner-centered.
- Avoiding rote learning and the “banking” style of education.
- Being sensitive to the learner’s individual differences and uniqueness.
- Providing an abundant supply of resource materials to allow the learners to work on.
- Giving the learners enough time to do their best work.
- Allowing the learners to be curious, to question ideas, and to see the relationships.

Critical thinking helps the learners to overcome prejudices, biasness, narrow-mindedness, and liberates the individuals from deceptions, conjectures, and half-truths. A critical thinker can liberate himself/herself from enslaving chains and entanglements.

**b) Development of an ethical person:** Philosophically, ethics is a branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles. Moral principles govern a person’s behavior, or more specifically, the conduct of human beings. Ozumba (2004) contends that ethics deals with judgments as to rightness or wrongness, virtuousness or viciousness, desirability, approval or disapproval of our action. Ethics emphasizes ethical norms that define human life, such as honesty, integrity, equality, justice, and respect for others.

The existential “aims of education” advocate for the education system that is corrective. The inclusion of the teaching of humanities in the curriculum, for example, empowers the learners to embrace moral obligations that are necessary for facing social problems in life. Existential holistic education, therefore, helps the learners to develop morally by instilling desired virtues, values, norms, dispositions, qualities, and aspirations. In this way, the learners are helped to become ethically mature adults who are capable of moral reasoning and with the desire to act ethically.

**c) Preparation to face the tragic situation of life:** Existential and holistic education prepares the learners to face the tragic situations of their lives. Examples of the tragic situations of life include sickness, depression, examination failure, unemployment, wars, discrimination, and death. Such unfortunate situations make the learners to experience dread, anguish, anxiety, and fear. This reality confronts the importance of exposing the learners to realize the facticity and their categories in their existence.

Consequently, an existential and holistic education should prepare the learners to face such situations resolutely and courageously to finally prepare to meet death with readiness. Such endeavor furthermore, helps the students to enjoy each moment of life while realizing the best they are capable of when they are still alive. Education for death helps the learners to be integrated with the experience of a better understanding of good life and its commensurate obligations. In this connection, the learner discovers that it is better to die for an ideal, just like the Christian Martyrs than to live and to betray it.

**d) Empowerment of the learners with the choice-making power:** Azhar (2013) argues that an existential education should train men to make better choices and give the idea that since his choices are never perfect, consequences cannot be predicted. Life is a continuous process of choice-making, and all choices are personal and individual. Choice per-se to some extent, cannot be avoided since it constitutes the human condition.

This observation, therefore, shows that education should inculcate choice-making power in the learners. This awareness makes the learners to make their choices as persons who are constantly free, independent, and creative. When education empowers the learners to make authentic choices, then they are enabled to realize their authenticity. Existentialism warns that individuals should not blame other people such as parents and the society for all the choices they have made, and they should not blame the conditions in which they find themselves. Nevertheless, existential and holistic education helps the learners to make their choice and accept the consequences with complete personal responsibility despite the fact that the consequences may be precarious and unpredictable.

**e) Preparation for social adjustment:** Existential and holistic education prepares the learners for social adjustment. Social adjustability helps the learners to live and coexist with other human beings. This happens when the social aspect of education prepares the learner to respect freedom of all, by first by willing his freedom and at the same time by willing the freedom of all. Recognition of one’s freedom and that of others empowers the individual learner to see beyond the personal interests and goals by appealing to the logic of “I am responsible for all and myself”. In this way, a socialized, educated learner will be able to cooperate with others,

contribute well in group situations, and will be able to work as an efficient member of the team or a group. Instructors, therefore, in educational institutions should be very careful when glorifying groups because sometimes group situations can frustrate the individual by instilling fear in them. Group learning situations in a school learning environment ought to provide opportunities for individual learners to demonstrate unique features of their personalities.

**f) Achievement of individual freedom and empowerment:**

Existentialistic and holistic education train the learners to understand the place of freedom in their lives. Viewing man as an 'open possibility', Akinpelu (1981) states that teachers and schools help the learners to realize their selves. The key factor to this realization is freedom. Freedom helps the learner to know his "self" and to recognize his being for the purposes of converting imperfection to perfection. Freedom facilitates the learner's natural development based on his abilities, aptitude, and needs. Consequently, such freedom leads to the achievement of the educational aim of making man free from all kinds of chains, entanglements, and enslavements. The responsibility of freeing oneself from such undesired and oppressive conditions squarely rests on the empowered individual. Free and empowered individual is capable of working hard to overcome what limits or oppresses him with the help of the other. In a nutshell, a holistic education in an existential way frees and empowers the learners to understand themselves, develop their talents, potentials, and all-natural endowments, utilize them to the full, become complete human persons, and to achieve what they were meant to achieve by the creator.

**g) Promotion of human dignity:** According to Kahiga (2015), a human being belongs to one species called "homo sapiens", the fundamentals of what constitutes a human being or a person is the same all over the world, genetically, we are the same. This is our common bond. Fooshay (1991) explains that the continuing purpose of education since ancient times has been to bring people to as full a realization as possible of what it is to be a human being. Holistic and existential education, therefore, aims at producing individuals who are aware of the fact that a human being is a person, is a subject and not an object, 'I' and not an 'it'. A good education fights against anything which objectifies, depersonalizes, and dehumanizes a human being. This is done through having an education system, which works towards the elimination of vices that threatens personhood, such as terrorism, unemployment, tribalism, racism, poverty, corruption, and any form of oppression. Respect for human dignity, as elaborated by the bill of human rights, helps the learners to see the "other" as a person by understanding themselves, appreciate increased contact with the others, and to be prepared to live in a world that is rapidly changing.

#### IV. SUMMARIES, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both holistic education movement and existential philosophy are products of a revolt against the traditional ideologies that were seen to be remote from the wholesomeness. Consequently, both advocate that "wholeness" ought to be the real essence of education. Existential and holistic education aims at developing persons who are able to shape, give meaning to their lives and be able to live their lives to the full potential.

Education per-se has to be built on philosophical theories. It is therefore evident that existential philosophy has influenced the provision of holistic education in Kenya. The existential philosophy has enriched the understanding of holistic education in terms of the education of the "whole" person, the key role to be played by the teachers, creation of enabling learning environment, the importance of a broad curriculum, appropriate instructional methods, and the place of the learner as the main subject of education.

The importance of existential and holistic education, on the other hand, is that, it develops learners who are critical thinkers, formation of ethical persons, and learners who can adjust socially and be able to live and coexist with other human beings. The learners also get empowered to make appropriate choices in life with full responsibility, pursue authentic freedom, which enables them to overcome oppressive factors and to get prepared to face the tragic situation in their lives. Existential and holistic education produces individuals who are aware that human beings are persons and therefore expected to promote human dignity at all costs.

In conclusion, existential and holistic education aims at preparing the learners to be all-around; intellectually, socially, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Kenya's education system has endeavored to provide holistic education. However, a lot is still required to be done by the all education stakeholders for this to be achieved. Kenya's education system continues to face many challenges such as underfunding, infrastructural issues, and inadequate human resources, and student motivational-related problems.

This study, therefore, recommends that all education stakeholders should be fully engaged and involved in the provision of holistic education. There is a need for continuous evaluation and improvement of holistic education to meet the needs of the dynamic society. Furthermore, the holistic philosophy of education should be well spelled, explained, and understood.

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