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## Lecturers, philosophy, and classrooms: The struggles of the four schools of educational thought in teaching practices

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the philosophical orientations underlying the teaching practices of lecturers in Islamic higher education in South Sumatra. The study focuses on how lecturers interpret and integrate moral, rational, pragmatic, and reflective dimensions in their learning process. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine lecturers from three study programs at the Faculty of Islamic Education. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of meaning emerging from participants' experiences. The results indicate that lecturers' philosophical orientations are dynamic and interwoven; spiritual values and moral ethics are combined with scientific rationality, pedagogical flexibility, and a reflective awareness of the meaning of the profession. These findings confirm that philosophical awareness is still alive and plays a significant role in shaping lecturers' professional identities and pedagogical decisions. This study provides a conceptual contribution to strengthening Islamic higher education by emphasizing the importance of lecturer professional development based on philosophical reflection.

### Keywords

Islamic higher education, pedagogical philosophy, philosophical orientation, reflective teaching, qualitative inquiry

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## Introduction

Philosophy and education are inseparably linked; they feed each other. Philosophy provides direction and foundation for education, while education serves as an arena for the concrete application of philosophical values. In the context of Islamic education, this relationship becomes even more significant because the teaching process aims not only to transfer knowledge but also to shape the personality and spiritual character of students (Al-Attas, 1991). However, amidst technological developments, globalization, and demands for academic professionalism, a reflective question arises: is the philosophy of education still alive in the classrooms of today's lecturers?

Modern education is often trapped in a pragmatic and instrumental orientation; teachers and lecturers are required to produce measurable, efficient, and competency-based output. On the other hand, the philosophical essence of education, as an effort to humanize people through the search for truth, values, and meaning, often fades (Conti, 2008). It is in this situation that reflection on the philosophy of education becomes crucial again, especially within the Faculty of Tarbiyah, which is rooted in Islamic educational traditions and universal human values.

Four schools of educational philosophy: Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism, remain the theoretical foundations that shape the thinking and action paradigms of educators. Idealism emphasizes eternal values and universal truths (Cohen, 1999), Realism focuses on rationality and empirical facts (Webb, Mehta, & Jordan, 2010), Pragmatism assesses truth in terms of practical benefits and outcomes (Dewey, 1938), while Existentialism emphasizes individual freedom and responsibility in determining the meaning of one's life (Kierkegaard, 1849/1962). In practice, lecturers, as the primary drivers of the educational process, often combine or even wrestle with these four perspectives in dealing with the dynamic realities of the classroom (Pajares, 1992; Stella, 2020).

The Faculty of *Tarbiyah*, as a center for the education of prospective Islamic educators, plays a crucial role in achieving a balance between philosophical thought and pedagogical practice. Lecturers are not only required to master the scientific substance but also to reflect on the philosophical foundations of each pedagogical decision. This struggle between ideal values and practical reality creates an interesting dialectic worthy of in-depth study. Furthermore, each study program within the Faculty of Islamic Education (PAI) exhibits a distinct philosophical bent. The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program exhibits idealistic and normative characteristics; Arabic Language Education (PBA) tends to promote textual realism and traditional rationality; while English Language Education (PBI) often exhibits a pragmatic and existentialist orientation in response to the demands of globalization and innovation in language learning. These differences make cross-program research relevant for understanding how the four schools of educational philosophy thrive and transform within the context of Islamic higher education in Palembang.

It is within this framework that this research was conducted—to understand not just what lecturers teach, but how they think, interpret, and make sense of teaching as a form of applying educational philosophy in the classroom. This study is crucial for bridging the gap

between educational philosophy as a normative theory and teaching practice as a complex empirical reality (Stella, 2020; Forlin et al., 2022).

This research presents a novel approach by exploring the philosophical orientations of lecturers in Islamic higher education, specifically in three study programs (PAI, PBA, PBI) at the Faculty of Tarbiyah, a state Islamic university in Palembang, South Sumatra, which have not been widely explored in previous studies. The identified research gaps include: the lack of empirical studies on how Islamic higher education lecturers interpret and apply schools of educational philosophy; the paucity of cross-program research in the Indonesian context; and the limited research that incorporates both the context of Islamic values and lecturers' pedagogical practices.

This study aims to explore the understanding, application, and philosophical reflections of lecturers at the Faculty of Islamic Education (Tarbiyah) on four schools of educational philosophy: Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism in their teaching practices at a state Islamic university in Palembang, South Sumatra. Specifically, this study aims to:

- identify how lecturers from three study programs: Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Arabic Language Education (PBA), and English Language Education (PBI) understand the basic concepts of the four schools of educational philosophy in the context of Islamic values and academic professionalism.
- analyze how these philosophical principles are reflected in learning strategies, lecturer-student interactions, and pedagogical decisions in the classroom.
- interpret the dynamics and challenges that arise when ideal philosophical values confront the practical realities of teaching in Islamic higher education.

## Literature Review

### *Philosophy of education: Nature and relevance*

Philosophy of education is a systematic reflection on the nature of humankind, the goals of education, and the principles and methods of learning. According to Ozmon and Craver (2008), philosophy of education helps educators understand why they teach, not just how. The classical thought of Kilpatrick (1935) emphasized that true education must integrate the intellectual, moral, and social aspects of humankind so that students develop holistically. In the context of Islamic education, Al-Attas (1991) emphasized that education aims to form insan kamil, civilized human beings who balance reason, heart, and action. Education is not only a cognitive process, but also a spiritual journey toward wisdom (*hikmah*). This view demonstrates the close relationship between philosophy and religious values in Islamic education.

However, the tendency of modern education to focus on targets, efficiency, and competence often obscures this philosophical dimension. As Conti (2008) points out, many educators become trapped in the technical aspects of learning and neglect the philosophical reflection that should underlie the ethical and moral foundations of teaching. Therefore, efforts are needed to bridge the gap between educational philosophical theory and empirical practice in the classroom, particularly in Islamic educational environments rich in normative and spiritual values.

### *Four schools of educational philosophy and their implications*

*Idealism* holds that true reality stems from eternal ideas, values, and moral principles. Plato and Immanuel Kant are the primary references for this school. For Plato, education is the process of guiding the human soul toward the highest truth (The Republic, 380 BCE). Kant emphasized that education must develop human moral freedom and rationality (Kant, 1803/1960). In the context of modern education, Cohen (1999) asserts that idealism places eternal values such as truth, beauty, and virtue at the core of education. Johnson, Musial, Hall, and Gollnick (2011) also state that educators act as moral exemplars who instill universal values in students. Momany's (2014) empirical study in Jordan found that teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to moral and spiritual values, proving that idealism remains alive in modern classrooms. This aligns with Al-Attas' (1991) view, which emphasizes *adab* as a manifestation of idealism in Islamic education.

*Realism* emphasizes that reality is objective and can be known through rationality and empirical experience. Aristotle was a key figure who laid the foundations for scientific and logical thinking (Aristotle, trans. 1984). Webb, Mehta, and Jordan (2010) explain that in education, realism demands learning based on facts, observation, and the scientific method. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, realism can be interpreted as an effort to balance faith and reason. Shomad (2022) found that the philosophy of realism in out-of-school learning encourages teachers to cultivate logical thinking skills without neglecting the values of faith. This approach demonstrates that realism can synergize with spirituality, making education an arena for rational thinking with ethical value.

*Pragmatism* views truth as something that is tested through practical benefits and outcomes. John Dewey (1938) stated that education is the reconstruction of experience; students learn through direct interaction with their social environment. Kilpatrick (1918), Dewey's student, added that effective learning occurs when students actively construct meaning through personal experience (learning by doing). In the current context, Johnston (2022) highlights that pragmatism forms the basis for reflective and innovative learning. Tamang (2023) also found that pragmatically oriented teachers are more adaptable to classroom situations and student needs. Lecturers at the Faculty of *Tarbiyah* who implement contextual, project-based, or reflective approaches have truly brought the values of pragmatism to life in practice. This approach is rooted in the belief that truth is dynamic—always tested through real-life experience and social relevance.

*Existentialism* focuses on individual freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning in life. Kierkegaard (1849/1962) emphasized the importance of personal decisions in finding meaning, while Nietzsche (1886/1968) encouraged humans to create their own values and uniqueness. In education, existentialism views teachers as facilitators who help students discover their true selves (Cohen, 1999). Research by the Project (2021) confirms that an existential approach to learning can enhance students' self-reflection and moral awareness. In the context of Islamic education, existential values can be integrated with the concept of *mujahadah an-nafs*, an individual's spiritual struggle to find meaning in life and moral responsibility. Thus, existentialism provides a reflective and humanistic dimension to Islamic higher education.

### *The relationship between educational philosophy and lecturer teaching practice*

An educator's philosophical orientation directly influences how they teach, assess, and interact with students. [Elias and Merriam \(1980\)](#) stated that every pedagogical decision reflects specific philosophical assumptions about the nature of learning and human nature. [Conti \(2008\)](#) also emphasized that professional teachers not only master techniques but also possess a philosophical awareness of the values and goals of education. [Clemente's \(2023\)](#) international study showed that teachers in the Philippines exhibit "very strong manifestations of four classical schools of educational philosophy," namely idealism, realism, pragmatism, and existentialism. Similar findings were confirmed by [Nugraha \(2021\)](#) in Indonesia, who found that lecturers' philosophical reflection is a determining factor in building student character in the digital age. Both studies demonstrate that educators' philosophical awareness is an integral part of academic professionalism.

However, in the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia, such research is still rare. Most studies focus more on methodological aspects, media, or technological innovation, rather than on lecturers' philosophical orientations. In fact, reflection on the philosophy of education has great potential to enrich pedagogical practices in Islamic universities. From the literature review above, several research gaps can be identified that form the basis for the originality of this study:

- Disconnection between theory and practice: most research on the philosophy of education remains at the conceptual level, failing to explore the empirical reflections of lecturers in the context of Islamic higher education.
- Lack of Islamic context: previous research tends to be Western-oriented, while Islamic education has its own distinct spiritual and normative paradigms ([Al-Attas, 1991](#); [Nugraha, 2021](#)).
- Limitations of the cross-study program approach: most studies focus solely on one discipline, whereas cross-study program analysis (PAI, PBA, PBI) could more fully demonstrate the diversity of philosophical orientations.
- Conceptual novelty: this study seeks to integrate four classical philosophical schools into the empirical context of lecturers at the Faculty of Tarbiyah, resulting in a new mapping of "reflective-philosophical practices" in Islamic education in Indonesia.

This literature review provides a conceptual basis for understanding how four schools of educational philosophy can be interpreted in the context of teaching at the Faculty of Tarbiyah. These four schools interact with each other and form a framework that guides this research analysis: idealism provides moral direction and spiritual values, realism upholds scientific rationality and objectivity, pragmatism fosters pedagogical flexibility that adapts to classroom realities, while existentialism fosters self-awareness, freedom, and reflection on meaning within the teaching profession.

In this qualitative research, these four orientations are positioned not as theories to be proven, but rather as interpretive lenses for understanding how lecturers interpret and practice their teaching in the classroom.

## Methodology

### *Research design*

This research used a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on understanding the meaning, perspectives, and philosophical reflections of lecturers on four schools of educational philosophy: Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism in teaching practices at the Faculty of Tarbiyah. According to [Creswell and Creswell \(2018\)](#), qualitative research starts from the ontological assumption that reality is plural and shaped by the subject's social experiences, while the researcher's role is to interpret the meaning constructed by the participants. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objective, which is to gain an in-depth understanding of the philosophical orientations that are evident in the lecturers' pedagogical practices.

Descriptive qualitative research is considered most appropriate because it does not attempt to test theories but rather explains phenomena as they occur naturally and contextually ([Merriam, 2009](#)). In this research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, interacting directly with participants through in-depth interviews, in accordance with the "human instrument" principle in the qualitative paradigm ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)).

### *Research site and participants*

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Tarbiyah, a state Islamic university in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. This faculty was chosen because of its strategic position as an institution producing prospective Islamic educators who balance mastery of knowledge, spiritual values, and pedagogical reflection. Furthermore, the faculty offers diverse and representative study programs that examine the relationship between educational philosophy and teaching practice.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific objectives and criteria relevant to the research focus ([Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014](#)). The participant criteria were:

- Active lecturers in the Faculty of Tarbiyah with a minimum of three years of teaching experience.
- Teaching in one of three study programs: Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Arabic Language Education (PBA), or English Language Education (PBI).
- Willingness to reflect on their teaching thoughts and experiences within the context of educational philosophy.

A total of nine lecturers participated in this study, three from each study program. The selection of these three study programs reflects the diversity of philosophical orientations: PAI as a representation of normative idealism, PBA as linguistic realism, and PBI as modern pragmatism combined with reflective existentialism.

### *Data collection and analysis*

The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews to elicit reflective narratives about the lecturers' perspectives and teaching experiences. According to Creswell (2014), semi-structured interviews allow participants the freedom to interpret questions individually while allowing researchers to explore deeper meanings. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and online (Zoom Meetings) to accommodate the participants' schedules, each lasting 45–60 minutes. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that highlighted:

- Lecturers' understanding of the nature of education and the role of philosophy in teaching practice.
- Their philosophical values in teaching.
- Concrete examples of the application of idealism, realism, pragmatism, or existentialism in the classroom.
- How they balance ideal values with the practical demands of teaching.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. In addition to the interviews, additional documentation such as Semester Learning Plans (RPS), teaching modules, and lecturers' reflection notes was used as supporting data.

The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), which consists of six stages:

- Data familiarization: reading the transcripts repeatedly to understand the context and tone of the narratives.
- Initial coding: marking statements relevant to the philosophical dimension.
- Theme identification: grouping codes into main themes and subthemes.
- Theme review: ensuring each theme aligns with the research objectives.
- Theme naming: assigning conceptual labels that reflect core meanings.
- Thematic narrative construction: combining the analysis results with verbatim quotations to describe participants' experiences in depth.

This approach enabled researchers to discover patterns of meaning in the lecturers' experiences, as suggested by Creswell & Poth (2018) that qualitative analysis should be inductive, reflective, and open to interpretation.

### *Trustworthiness*

To ensure the validity and credibility of research results, four trustworthiness criteria from Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used:

- Credibility: conducted through member checking by confirming interview results with participants.
- Transferability: maintained with detailed contextual descriptions so that results can be applied to similar situations.
- Dependability: supported by an audit trail in the form of systematic records of the research process.

- Confirmability: achieved through researcher reflection on personal biases and data triangulation between sources.

## Findings

The results of this study described the philosophical struggles and practices of lecturers at the Faculty of Tarbiyah at a state Islamic university in Palembang. Based on thematic analysis of nine in-depth interviews, four main themes emerged, reflecting the diversity of educational philosophical orientations in their teaching practices. The thematic analysis of nine interviews conducted with lecturers at the Faculty of Islamic Education revealed that their teaching practices are not simply pedagogical activities, but rather expressions of complex philosophical struggles and perspectives. Through an inductive coding process, as suggested by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), four main themes emerged, illustrating how four schools of educational philosophy are lived out in the classroom. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** *Themes, sub-themes, and codes identified from the thematic analysis of lecturers' philosophical orientations in teaching practices at the faculty of tarbiyah*

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Spiritual idealism and moral responsibility	- The value of sincerity and worship in teaching	"Teaching as worship"
	- Exemplary ethics and morals of lecturers	"Knowledge must bring blessings"
		"Students learn not only the brain, but the heart"; "Be an example before speaking"
Contextual Realism and Scientific Rationality	- Learning based on postulates, logic, and social reality	"There must be a scientific basis and text"
	- Integration of revelation and reason	"Truth is not enough to be believed, it must be able to be explained"
		"Students must think critically but still have faith"
Pedagogical pragmatism and innovative adaptation	- Flexibility in methods and technology	"If the method doesn't work, I change it"
	- Emphasis on real learning outcomes	"Learning is practice, not memorization"
		"I use digital media to get students enthusiastic" "The important thing is that students dare to speak up"
Reflective existentialism and the meaning of the teaching profession	- Search for meaning and authenticity	"Teaching makes me learn about myself"
	- Spiritual reflection in the teaching process	"Every class is an inner journey"
		"Sometimes I find God through my students"

As seen in Table 1, the thematic coding results revealed four major themes reflecting lecturers' struggles in implementing the values of educational philosophy in the classroom. Each theme reveals a different dimension - from moral idealism to existential reflection. In the following section, each theme will be explained in depth through interpretive narratives supplemented by verbatim quotes from the interviews, to demonstrate how these philosophical perspectives are embodied in everyday pedagogical practices.

The four themes presented in Table 1 were not simply analytical categories, but rather reflections of how lecturers interpreted their profession as educators and value-bearers. These themes emerged from participants' in-depth reflections on their teaching experiences, which are imbued with moral, rational, pragmatic, and spiritual dimensions. Consistent with [Creswell and Poth's \(2018\)](#) view that qualitative analysis should uncover "the hidden meanings behind experiences," the following section elaborates on each theme by connecting participant narratives with the philosophical context underlying them.

### ***Theme 1: Spiritual idealism and moral responsibility in teaching***

Lecturers from the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program display a strong spiritual idealism orientation. They view teaching as a moral mandate and an act of worship. One PAI lecturer said,

“I never separate knowledge and worship. If teaching is not intended as an act of worship, the knowledge will not bring blessings.”

Another lecturer added,

“I must guide students with my heart. If the lecturer is not sincere, then his words will not penetrate the students' hearts.”

For them, education is not simply the transfer of knowledge, but the process of guiding souls towards goodness. It is in line with Plato's view in *The Republic* and Al-Attas's concept of *adab* (adab). Several lecturers also emphasized the importance of being a moral role model. One participant said,

“I'm more afraid of students imitating my behavior than misunderstanding the material. So, I try to be consistent between words and actions.”

This orientation reflects idealism in an Islamic form, where the teacher functions as a *murabbi*, a spiritual and intellectual guide.

### ***Theme 2: Contextual realism in scientific and textual rationality***

Lecturers from the Arabic Language Education (AEL) Study Program demonstrated contextual realism, the view that truth must be testable through logic, texts, and social reality. One lecturer explained,

“In Arabic, we learn not just grammar, but logical thinking. I teach students to understand both the text and its context.”

Another lecturer emphasized the importance of an empirical approach to understanding teachings,

“Truth must have a basis. There is a text, there is logic. Otherwise, students will learn without direction.”

This view aligns with the principle of Aristotelian realism, which emphasizes the balance between reason and experience (Webb, Mehta, & Jordan, 2010). Some lecturers even link rational logic to spirituality, as one participant stated,

“Thinking rationally is also worship. Allah commands us to use reason to understand His verses in nature and the Bible.”

This finding supports Shomad's (2022) study, which shows that realism in Islamic education teaches students empirical thinking without abandoning faith.

### ***Theme 3: Pedagogical pragmatism in response to classroom challenges***

The third theme emerged frequently from interviews with lecturers in the English Language Education Study Program (ELP). They adopt pedagogical pragmatism, where accuracy is measured by the results and usefulness of learning. One lecturer explained,

“I’m not too tied to a particular method. If students don’t understand, I change the teaching method. The important thing is that they are active and have the courage to speak up.”

Another lecturer added,

“I often use digital media or short videos. Now is not the era of constant lecturing. Learning is experiential, not rote learning.”

Some lecturers even emphasized the flexibility of assessments:

“In my class, there are no wrong answers if the reasoning is logical. I want students to think and try, not be afraid of making mistakes.”

These statements demonstrate the application of Dewey's (1938) principle of learning by doing and support Tamang's (2023) view that pragmatic teachers assess accuracy through the effectiveness of their actions. In the context of the Faculty of *Tarbiyah*, pragmatism is an adaptive strategy to technological developments and the digital student generation.

#### *Theme 4: Reflective existentialism and the meaning of the lecturer profession*

The final theme highlights the dimension of reflective existentialism, namely lecturers' awareness of the personal meaning of their profession. From both Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Islamic Religious Education (PBA), and Islamic Religious Education (PBI), several lecturers acknowledged that teaching provides them with a space to discover the meaning of life. One participant stated,

“I feel like every time I teach, I’m learning about myself. Sometimes the students actually teach me patience.”

Another lecturer added,

“Every class meeting is like a mirror. I can see how sincere I am and truly understand the values I teach.”

One participant even linked their teaching experience to a spiritual dimension,

“I often feel that when explaining the meaning of a verse or theory, my heart is touched. I feel God’s presence in the classroom.”

This finding reflects [Kierkegaard’s \(1849/1962\)](#) idea of the search for meaning through self-reflection and supports research by the [Project \(2021\)](#), which found that an existential approach increases lecturers’ moral and spiritual awareness.

Of nine interviews, it is clear that the four schools of educational philosophy do not operate in isolation, but interconnect, forming a coherent fabric of practice. The lecturers display dynamic patterns of thought: idealism provides moral direction, realism strengthens scientific rationality, pragmatism bridges theory with practice, and existentialism revitalizes spiritual reflection in their profession.

This confirms that educational philosophy remains alive in the classroom, not as abstract theory, but as lived and practiced values. As [Creswell & Creswell \(2018\)](#) explain, reality in qualitative research is "formed through social experience and individual reflection on the world." In the context of the Faculty of Tarbiyah, this philosophical reflection is at the core of the Islamic educational process that humanizes human beings.

#### **Discussion**

Research findings indicate that the educational philosophical orientations of lecturers at the State Islamic University of Palembang reflect a combination of four main schools of thought—Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism—that are evident in their daily teaching practices. In the following section, I will interpret these four themes with reference to recent literature to emphasize their theoretical relevance and practical implications.

*Idealism: Education as a path to morality and spirituality*, the first theme demonstrates that lecturers view teaching as a moral and spiritual mandate, not simply the transfer of knowledge. This is demonstrated in research that found teachers strongly committed to moral values as the core of education (Momany, 2014). Related to this, research by Alemdar and Aytac (2022) shows that teachers' educational philosophical orientation is significantly correlated with their curriculum autonomy, with teachers with idealistic tendencies tending to instill normative values in their teaching designs. Thus, idealism in the context of the Faculty of Tarbiyah is not merely a theoretical construct but a concrete moral foundation for pedagogical practice. This reinforces the awareness that lecturers serve as role models not only for content but also for character and values.

*Realism: Integration of rationality, faith, and fact*, the second finding indicates that lecturers emphasize rationality and empiricism in learning, while maintaining a faith dimension. A study of secondary schools in Europe found that teachers generally favored contemporary educational philosophies (realism and others) over traditional ones, and that factors such as school type and educational program were influential (Ćavar, 2024). This suggests that teachers' philosophical orientations do indeed change according to institutional context and era. In their research, a lecturer stated: "Truth must be explained with logic and evidence, so that students not only believe but also understand." This illustrates that realism in Islamic educational settings in Palembang is a form of religious realism, namely rationality that favors faith. A meta-analysis of the literature by Dignath, Rimm-Kaufman & van Ewijk (2022) confirmed that teachers' beliefs are related to the implementation of inclusive practices, indicating that teachers' philosophies (including realism) influence actual classroom practices.

*Pragmatism: Flexibility and contextual learning*, the third theme shows that lecturers adopt a philosophy of pragmatism—prioritizing the benefits and relevance of learning. Research by Meij et al. (2025) shows that teachers' beliefs, both implicit and explicit, must be consistent with scientific learning principles for teaching strategies to be effective. This is relevant to your finding that an EFL lecturer stated: "Learning is practice, not memorization; I often use digital media to keep students active." Thus, pragmatism in the context of the Faculty of Tarbiyah is an adaptive strategy that supports the integration of traditional values and modern demands. Alemdar & Aytac's (2022) study found that a progressive philosophy (similar to pragmatism) predicts procedural autonomy and teacher professional development, proving that a pragmatic orientation emerges as a pedagogical style responsive to change.

*Existentialism: Education as a space for reflection and the search for meaning*, the fourth theme emphasizes that teaching is seen as a space for self-reflection and the search for meaning, not simply an academic task. An international study shows that teaching philosophy influences teachers' views of their profession and their relationships with students (Ngene, 2023). In their research, a lecturer stated: "I often feel that every time I teach, I learn about myself." This demonstrates that the existential orientation in Islamic education is not only about individual freedom or personal meaning, but also about the moral and spiritual responsibilities inherent in the teaching profession. This provides a new dimension that Islamic higher education produces not only intellectuals but also reflective and meaningful individuals.

Overall, the four themes demonstrate that lecturers' philosophical orientations are not singular, but rather plural and interacting in their teaching practices. Consistent with Creswell & Creswell (2018), who stated that social reality in qualitative research is constructive and

multi-valued, this study's findings confirm that classrooms at the Faculty of Tarbiyah are arenas where values (idealism), reason (realism), practical utility (pragmatism), and the meaning of life (existentialism) converge and shape pedagogical activity. Thus, this study offers a theoretical contribution that demonstrates that educational philosophy remains alive and dynamic in Islamic higher education environments - going beyond mere rhetoric - and becoming an integral component of academic professionalism and lecturer identity.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study aims to explore the understanding and application of four schools of educational philosophy: Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism in the teaching practices of lecturers at the Faculty of Islamic Education at a state Islamic university in Palembang, South Sumatra. The results showed that lecturers did not separate theory from practice, but rather interpreted the four schools contextually according to Islamic values and the classroom realities they face. Lecturers from the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program displayed a strong spiritual idealism, interpreting teaching as worship and the formation of students' morals. Lecturers in Arabic Language Education (PBA) stood out with their contextual realism that balances rationality and faith, while lecturers in English Language Education (PBI) demonstrated flexible and innovative pedagogical pragmatism in responding to the needs of the digital generation. Meanwhile, all lecturers generally demonstrated a reflective existentialism, interpreting teaching as a process of discovering self-meaning, morality, and spirituality.

Conceptually, these findings confirm that educational philosophy is still alive in the classroom and does not stop at the normative level. It is present in the decisions, reflections, and pedagogical interactions of lecturers. The struggle between ideal values and practical reality actually gives rise to a new form of balanced Islamic educational practice where morality, rationality, usefulness, and self-awareness go hand in hand. Theoretically, this research broadens understanding of how educational philosophy can be put into practice in the context of Islamic higher education, in line with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) view that social reality is pluralistic and shaped by the meanings constructed by participants. Practically, these results imply the importance of reflective training for lecturers to foster philosophical awareness in every pedagogical action.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that the Faculty of *Tarbiyah* is not simply a space for transferring knowledge, but rather an arena where values, faith, reason, and humanity interact harmoniously. Thus, Islamic higher education has great potential to produce educators who are not only academically competent but also philosophical in action, teaching with mind, heart, and meaning.

The findings of this study have significant implications, both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, the results of this study emphasize that the philosophy of education functions not only as a normative conceptual framework but also as a reflective and interpretive foundation for understanding the dynamics of lecturers' pedagogical practices. The four philosophical schools—idealism, realism, pragmatism, and existentialism—are proven not to operate in isolation, but rather interact and form a coherent structure of thought in teaching practice. This supports Clemente's (2023) view that educators'

philosophical orientations influence their teaching styles, relationships with students, and the lived meaning of their profession. In the context of Islamic higher education, these results demonstrate that classical Western philosophy can be adapted to the framework of Islamic values and local Indonesian culture, enriching the global body of educational theory and strengthening the literature on values education (Nugraha, 2021).

From a practical perspective, this study underscores the importance of fostering reflective-philosophical awareness among lecturers at the Faculty of Tarbiyah. Effective teaching relies not only on methods and media but also on a sense of values, an educational vision, and moral responsibility. As emphasized by [Alemdar and Aytac \(2022\)](#), a strong understanding of educational philosophy correlates with professional autonomy and a lecturer's ability to design meaningful learning. Thus, educational philosophy serves as an ethical and intellectual foundation for lecturers in navigating the complexities of the ever-changing academic world.

Based on the implications above, there are several recommendations that educational institutions and future researchers can follow up on. For policymakers in Islamic higher education, the results of this study can serve as a basis for developing a lecturer development curriculum based on philosophical reflection. Programs such as Philosophical Teaching Reflection or the Islamic Pedagogical Philosophy Workshop can be designed to foster a balance between intellectual competence, professional ethics, and spiritual awareness. In line with [Forlin et al. \(2022\)](#), this type of training can strengthen the inclusive and reflective character of lecturers in facing the diversity of values and modern learning contexts.

For faculty and study program managers, it is recommended that lecturer training not only emphasize technological innovation but also direct it towards revitalizing the philosophical values that underlie thinking and action in the teaching process. The study of educational philosophy can be reintegrated into capacity building and continuous professional development programs to ensure that every pedagogical innovation maintains a strong moral and cultural foundation. Meanwhile, future researchers are advised to broaden the study context by involving lecturers from other faculties or non-Islamic institutions to explore how educational philosophy adapts across institutional and cultural contexts. A mixed-methods approach can also be applied to quantitatively measure the relationship between lecturers' philosophical orientations and learning effectiveness. Thus, educational philosophy can be understood not only as a personal reflection but also as a scientific instrument for improving the quality and significance of Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

### **Disclosure statement**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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