

# The Crisis of Meaning in Modern Education: A Philosophical Dialogue between Western and Islamic Thought

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## Abstract

Modern education faces a crisis of meaning characterized by the dominance of instrumental rationality, technocratization, and the reduction of educational goals to cognitive achievement and administrative performance. This condition causes education to lose its function as a process of holistic human formation—ethically, existentially, and spiritually. This study aims to analyze the crisis of meaning in education through a philosophical dialogue between Western and Islamic traditions, examining how both understand the goals of education and the formation of the human subject. The method used is qualitative *library research* based on an interpretive-hermeneutic paradigm. Primary data was obtained from the works of Western thinkers Dewey, Freire, Heidegger, and Islamic thinkers Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, Fazlur Rahman, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, while secondary data consisted of journal articles and contemporary academic works. The results of the study show that Western education emphasizes the formation of conscious, rational, free, and responsible subjects, but has experienced a narrowing of meaning due to technocratic pressures. Meanwhile, Islamic education emphasizes the formation of *adab* (ta'dīb), the integration of knowledge, ethics, and a transcendental orientation that guides humans to understand the purpose of life and their existential responsibilities. A synthesis of the two traditions shows that meaningful education is achieved through a balance between intellectuality and ethicality, critical reflection, and value orientation. These findings offer a philosophical framework for reformulating the goals of modern education as a process of understanding humans holistically from an Islamic perspective.

**Keywords:** modern education, crisis of meaning, Western education, Islamic education, moral formation

## Introduction Section

Modern education is generally understood as a strategic instrument for improving individual competencies so that they are able to adapt to the demands of development, technology, and the world of work. Within this framework, the success of education is often determined by functional measures such as efficiency, productivity, and the achievement of cognitive targets. This orientation indicates that education is increasingly guided by instrumental rationality, which is a way of thinking that assesses knowledge primarily based on its usefulness for achieving practical goals. A number of Western critical thinkers argue that the dominance of instrumental rationality has serious philosophical consequences, namely the narrowing of the meaning of rationality itself. Rationality, which originally served to reflect human values and life goals, has slowly been reduced to a technical tool for regulating and controlling social processes (Horkheimer, 1947).

In the context of modern education, the tendency to treat knowledge as an instrumental means is growing stronger. Knowledge is more often positioned as a tool to achieve practical goals, such as work efficiency, productivity, and career success, rather than as an intrinsic goal that shapes the way humans understand themselves and their world. This kind of orientation shows that education is experiencing a narrowing of meaning, where the learning process is no longer directed at the formation of human consciousness

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as a whole (MacIntyre, 2007). As a result, education has experienced an erosion of its existential and spiritual dimensions, namely its role in guiding humans to reflect on fundamental questions about self-identity, life purpose, and the meaning of learning in the entirety of their existential journey. Modern education tends to be trapped in procedural formalities and achievement-oriented goals, so that the learning process loses its depth as a space for the formation of consciousness and the search for meaning in life (Supriatna et al., 2018).

This crisis in the meaning of education cannot be separated from the dominance of technological thinking in modern life. This way of thinking views reality solely as an object that can be measured, controlled, and systematically optimized. Within this framework, education is driven to view students and knowledge as resources that must be managed efficiently in order to achieve certain performance targets. As a consequence, the educational process is increasingly controlled by the logic of utility and control, while the space for reflection and meaning-making is narrowing. The dominance of technological rationality has a direct impact on the way education is carried out. The learning process is more directed towards the mastery of technical competencies and functional skills than the formation of critical awareness and moral imagination. Education tends to function as a means of adjusting individuals to the existing social system, rather than as a space for the liberation of consciousness and the development of a meaningful life orientation. In such conditions, students risk losing their reflective ability to understand their social and existential reality in depth (Tilaar, 2009).

In contrast to this tendency, Islamic educational philosophy places meaning, values, and life goals at the core of the entire educational process. Education is not understood merely as the transmission of knowledge or skills training, but rather as a process of shaping civilized human beings who are able to place knowledge within the framework of ethics, moral responsibility, and broader life goals. From this perspective, the crisis in modern education is understood as a result of knowledge being detached from human values and existential responsibilities. It is this loss of integration between knowledge, ethics, and life goals that has caused education to lose its direction and fundamental meaning (Al-Attas, 1993) ,(Rasjidi, 1995).

In line with this view, a number of other contemporary Muslim thinkers assert that the crisis of modern knowledge is rooted in the disconnect between scientific rationality and the transcendental ethical dimension. Education that loses its value orientation risks producing people who are technically intelligent but lacking in wisdom and moral sensitivity. However, Islamic education does not reject the role of reason and rationality, but rather places them within an ethical framework and comprehensive life goals, so that reason functions as a means of meaning, not merely an instrument of domination (Rahman et al., 1982) ,(Azra, 2012).Based on this description, the crisis of meaning in modern education can be understood as a philosophical problem that transcends various intellectual traditions. The dominance of instrumental rationality and technological thinking has shifted education from a process of meaningful human formation to a purely functional mechanism. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the crisis of meaning in modern education through a philosophical dialogue between Western criticism of instrumental rationality and the Islamic educational perspective that emphasizes the integration of science, ethics, and the purpose of human life.

## **Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach based on *library research* with an orientation toward the philosophy of education. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is not directed at measuring empirical variables, but rather at examining the meaning, purpose, and normative orientation of education as formulated in Western and Islamic traditions of thought. The study of the philosophy of education places ideas, values, and ontological assumptions as the main objects of analysis, so that texts are understood as the main medium for meaning formation and critical reflection (Mason, 2002). Epistemologically, this research is based on an interpretive-hermeneutic paradigm that views knowledge as the result of interpreting the meaning contained in texts and intellectual traditions. Within this framework, the concept of educational goals is not understood as a fixed and universal definition, but rather as an idea that has developed historically and contextually. Therefore, this study does not aim to produce empirical generalizations, but rather to reveal the horizon of meaning that shapes educational thinking in the context of modernity (Crotty et al., 1998), (Gadamer, 2004).

The primary data in this study consists of original works by Western and Islamic thinkers that directly discuss modern rationality, the crisis of meaning in education, the formation of the human subject, and the concept of adab in education. In the Western tradition, primary data includes Max Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*, which criticizes the reduction of rationality to a technical instrument, Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, which highlights the disconnection of moral practice from ethical tradition, John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, which defines education as a process of human growth in social life, and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which emphasizes education as a praxis of liberation and the formation of critical consciousness. These texts are analyzed as representations of philosophical criticism of modern education, which has lost its intrinsic meaning and purpose. Meanwhile, in the Islamic tradition of thought, primary data includes works by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas such as *The Concept of Education in Islam* and *Islam and Secularism*, which affirm education as a process of instilling manners, works by Fazlur Rahman such as *Islam and Modernity* and *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, which place education in the framework of the integration of science, ethics, and human historical responsibility, as well as classical texts such as *Arā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* by Al-Farabi, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* by Al-Ghazali, and *Al-Shifā'* by Ibn Sina, which discuss the objectives of education in relation to happiness, moral perfection, and harmony between reason and the soul. These texts are treated as authoritative sources for understanding the normative and philosophical foundations of Islamic education. In addition to primary data, this study also uses secondary data in the form of reputable journal articles and contemporary academic works, particularly studies on the philosophy of education and Islamic education in Indonesia, which serve to enrich the context of the analysis and provide a critical reading of the ideas of key thinkers. Secondary data is used selectively, taking into account thematic relevance, the academic authority of the author, and their contribution to the discourse on the crisis of meaning in education (Hart, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using a hermeneutic-philosophical approach that places understanding as a process of dialogue between the text, historical context, and interpreter. This approach allows researchers to uncover not only the explicit content of the text, but also the basic assumptions, value orientations, and philosophical implications of the concept of educational goals that are presented. Through this process, the study attempts to bring together Western criticism of instrumental rationality with the Islamic educational perspective on adab as a dialogical-synthetic effort, without negating the epistemological differences between each tradition (Warnke, 1987). To maintain philosophical validity and academic accuracy, the interpretation of the texts is carried out by considering the historical context, intellectual background, and conceptual framework of each thinker, and comparing them with the critical readings of other scholars in the same field. Thus, the research results are expected to be neither speculative nor arbitrary, but rather a coherent philosophical reflection that is scientifically accountable and relevant to the development of educational discourse amid the crisis of meaning in the modern world (Ricoeur, 1992).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Crisis of Meaning in Education in the Modern World**

The crisis of meaning in education in the modern world shows a strong tendency toward a functional orientation that emphasizes efficiency, productivity, and measurable learning outcomes. The success of education is increasingly reduced to cognitive achievements, technical competencies, and administrative indicators, while the reflective dimension and the formation of meaning in life receive less attention. A number of educational studies in Indonesia show that this orientation reflects the dominance of instrumental rationality in educational practice, where knowledge is positioned primarily as a means of achieving pragmatic goals, rather than as a medium for the formation of human consciousness (Tilaar, 2012).

The dominance of instrumental rationality in education is also closely related to the strengthening of the technocratic paradigm in the management of modern education systems. Education is increasingly understood as a managerial process that emphasizes standardization, performance measurement, and results-based accountability, thereby reducing pedagogical relationships to technical relationships between curriculum, methods, and learning outcomes. Within this framework, education loses its philosophical depth as a space for critical reflection on the purpose of life, values, and human responsibility, as the main focus shifts to system efficiency and the optimization of educational output. The implications of this technocratic approach are evident

in the narrowing of the role of education as a space for the formation of autonomous subjects. Education is directed more toward adjusting individuals to the demands of the social and economic system than toward developing critical awareness and freedom of thought. A number of international studies in philosophy and sociology of education show that when education is reduced to a mechanism for managing performance and competence, the relationship between the learning process and the formation of meaning becomes severed. As a result, students risk losing their reflective ability to deeply understand their social and existential reality, because education no longer provides space for normative questions about the meaning, purpose, and value of life (Giroux, 2011).

The crisis of meaning in education can also be understood as the loss of the existential dimension in the entire learning process. Modern education shows a tendency to move away from fundamental questions related to human nature, the purpose of life, and the meaning of learning in human life. The educational process no longer seriously invites students to reflect on who they are, what they are learning for, and how knowledge plays a role in shaping their life orientation and existential responsibilities. When education is trapped in administrative formalities, evaluation standards, and an orientation toward achieving results alone, the learning process loses its depth as a space for the search for meaning. In such conditions, learning tends to take place mechanically and procedurally, severing the relationship between knowledge and the formation of human self-awareness. Education is no longer understood as a reflective process that shapes the way humans understand themselves and the world, but rather as a technical activity aimed at fulfilling the demands of the system. As a result, the existential dimension of education weakens, and learning fails to function as a medium for the formation of critical awareness and a meaningful life orientation (Faiz, 2018) ,(Faiz, 2020).

The crisis of meaning in education is understood as a result of the separation of knowledge from human values and life goals. Education loses its meaning when science is separated from ethical dimensions and existential responsibility, so that knowledge no longer functions as a means of meaningful self-organization and human life. The loss of manners makes education prone to intellectual confusion and moral disorder in social life (Al-Attas, 1993) ,(Azani, 2019). This condition is also reflected in modern educational practices in Indonesia, which tend to adopt a technocratic global paradigm without adequate philosophical reflection. The emphasis on administrative aspects, formal curriculum, and cognitive achievements often takes place while neglecting the formation of moral orientation and existential responsibility of students. As a result, education risks losing its relevance as a process of forming whole and meaningful human beings (Azani & Harris, 2019) ,(Azra, 2012) .

Overall, the crisis of meaning in education in the modern world is a philosophical issue that is also strongly identified in Indonesian academic studies. Criticism of the dominance of instrumental rationality, the technocratization of education, and the reduction of educational goals to mere cognitive achievements and administrative performance shows that education is increasingly moving away from its basic function as a process of humanization. When humans are reduced to objects of the system and knowledge is detached from its ethical and existential orientation, education loses its ability to shape the reflective consciousness and moral responsibility of students. In such a situation, education no longer helps humans understand the meaning of life and their position in the social and human order, but only prepares individuals to be functional within existing social mechanisms. Therefore, the crisis of meaning in education cannot be understood solely as a matter of policy or learning methods, but as a philosophical issue that demands a review of the goals, value orientation, and essence of education itself.

### **The Purpose of Education as Human Development in the Western Perspective**

In Western thought, education is understood as the process of shaping humans as conscious and rational beings. Since classical philosophy, education has not been directed solely at mastering technical knowledge, but rather at developing the ability to use reason responsibly. Aristotle placed education as a means of cultivating virtue so that humans can achieve a good and meaningful life. Thus, the goal of education is to form an ethical and rational framework that guides humans in acting and making decisions wisely (Aristotle, 2009) . In the context of modern education, this ethical orientation is often marginalized due to the dominance of a curriculum approach that views education primarily as an instrument of economic development and increasing the

competitiveness of human resources. Education is reduced to a means of meeting the needs of the job market, pursuing growth, and producing technically functional individuals. As a result, the dimensions of ethics, moral reflection, and the formation of value awareness are no longer a primary concern in the formulation of learning objectives and practices. The curriculum places greater emphasis on measurable achievements, competency standards, and the effectiveness of outcomes, while fundamental questions about the meaning of life, social responsibility, and human moral orientation are increasingly sidelined (Tilaar, 2009) ,(Sastrapredja, 2013).

Entering the modern era, the purpose of education has become increasingly linked to the formation of rationality and individual freedom. Immanuel Kant asserted that education aims to bring humans out of immaturity and into the ability to think independently, a state in which a person dares to use their own reason without guidance or dependence on others. Education is understood as a process of maturing the subject so that they are able to use their reason critically and reflectively, not merely accepting knowledge or norms that are authoritatively inherited. Within this framework, education plays a role in shaping humans as moral subjects who are both free and responsible for their choices, because freedom only has meaning when accompanied by ethical awareness and a commitment to universal moral principles. Thus, education is not only directed at the mastery of rational knowledge, but also at the formation of character and moral responsibility that enables humans to participate maturely in social and public life (Kant, 2007) ,(Gutmann, 1987). In the educational process, it must be emphasized that an educational process must be balanced between intellectual and ethical processes so that rational freedom is only meaningful when accompanied by good morality. Education should not stop at strengthening instrumental reason, but must also shape the ethical sensitivity of human subjects.

In the early 20th century, John Dewey developed a pragmatic view that saw education as an ongoing process of experience that was inseparable from real human life. For Dewey, education was not merely preparation for the future, but an integral part of life itself. The learning process occurs through active interaction between individuals and their environment, where experience becomes the main medium for the formation of knowledge and meaning. Therefore, education cannot be separated from the social context, because humans always learn as beings who live together with others in a community. Within this framework, the main goal of education is the continuous growth of humans, intellectually, socially, and morally. Education serves to shape individuals who are capable of reflective thinking, problem solving, and active and responsible participation in democratic life. Dewey emphasized that democracy is not only a political system, but also a way of life that demands involvement, dialogue, and cooperation among citizens. Education, therefore, has a strategic role in fostering openness, tolerance, and communication skills that enable fair and meaningful coexistence (Dewey, 1916) ,(Biesta, 2006). These ideas are relevant for criticizing educational practices that are detached from the social reality of students and fail to build participatory awareness in community life.

In the process of human development, the purpose of education can be understood as an effort to liberate people from various forms of injustice and oppression that exist in the social system. Paulo Freire asserts that education is never neutral, because it always influences the way people understand and respond to reality. Therefore, education should help students become aware of their social conditions, not just adapt to the existing circumstances. Freire criticizes educational models that treat students as passive recipients of knowledge, or the banking model. This type of education hinders the growth of critical awareness because students are not encouraged to think and reflect on their own experiences. Education, according to Freire, should encourage dialogue and reflection so that students can understand social reality more deeply. Through dialogue and reflection, students are encouraged to see that social reality can be questioned and changed. Education does not only aim to increase knowledge, but also to build awareness and courage to act responsibly. Thus, the formation of human subjects in education means fostering critical awareness and the ability to play an active role in creating more just and meaningful social change (Freire, 1970). This approach is considered important to counteract the tendency of education to submit to market interests and power, thereby reducing students to objects of policy and statistics (Hardiman, 2018) .

Modern education that reduces the purpose of education to merely achieving competencies and performance tends to neglect the dimension of holistic human development. When educational success is measured primarily through indicators of qualifications, achievement standards, and measurable results, the educational process risks losing its orientation toward the formation of moral awareness and ethical

responsibility. In this situation, students are positioned more as objects of system evaluation than as subjects who are growing and shaping themselves. Gert Biesta emphasizes that an excessive emphasis on qualifications and measurable results has shifted the focus of education away from the fundamental question of what kind of human beings we want to shape. According to him, education should not only focus on what a person can do, but also on how a person is present as a responsible subject in relation to other people and the world. Education needs to open up space for experiences that enable students to learn to make ethical decisions, especially in situations that are uncertain and not fully controllable. Thus, education cannot be reduced to a matter of effectiveness, efficiency, or technical success alone. Meaningful education lies precisely in its ability to shape human subjects who are morally sensitive and able to respond to the challenges of the world in a reflective and responsible manner. In this framework, the formation of the subject is at the core of education, because that is where the ethical dimension and meaning of human life find their place (Biesta, 2015). This is in line with the view that reducing the essence of the educational process will shift the orientation of the meaning of education as a process of humanization (Tilaar, 2012).

Martin Heidegger's thinking also deepens our understanding of the formation of the human subject by emphasizing the existential dimension. Heidegger views humans as *Dasein*, beings who are always in the process of understanding and interpreting their existence in the world. From this perspective, education is not merely the teaching of objective knowledge, but rather a space for the authentic opening up of the meaning of human existence. Education that is solely technically oriented is considered to fail in forming the whole human being because it ignores this dimension of existential understanding (Heidegger, 1962), (Hardiman, 2015). The hermeneutic approach emphasizes that education must open up a space for dialogue between subjects, traditions, and life experiences, so that the learning process does not lose its existential meaning (Gadamer, 2004). Based on these various views, the meaning and essence of education in Western tradition can be understood as an effort to shape humans as conscious, rational, free, and responsible subjects. Education is not understood as merely the transfer of knowledge or skills training, but as a process of forming self-awareness, reflective abilities, and ethical commitment in facing the world. When education is reduced to a technical and economic instrument, it loses its primary function as a space for humanization. Therefore, the essence of Western education is rooted in the effort to open up possibilities for humans to live meaningful, authentic, and responsible lives, both personally and socially (Peters, 1966), (Habermas, 1984).

### **The Purpose of Education as the Formation of Manners in the Islamic Perspective**

Unlike the Western approach, which departs from humanism and critical rationality, Islamic thought views the purpose of education within the framework of shaping *manners* or *ta'dīb*. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, both classical and contemporary thinkers construct education based on revelation as a source of normative values, which is then enriched by the role of reason and scientific tradition. Fazlur Rahman emphasizes that Islamic education should not stop at the transmission of knowledge or mastery of religious texts, but must be directed towards the formation of a living and reflective ethical consciousness. Education, in this perspective, serves to help humans understand their purpose in life, organize the relationship between knowledge and values, and realize moral responsibility in social and historical life. Thus, *adab* is not understood as formal moral rules, but as a value orientation that guides the meaningful and responsible use of reason and knowledge (Rahman, 1989).

In Imam Al-Farabi's thinking, the fundamental goal of education is directed towards achieving *al-sa'ādah* (true happiness), which is a state of human perfection realized through harmony between reason, morality, and social life. Education is not understood as a technical activity for transmitting knowledge, but rather as a philosophical process that guides humans towards the full actualization of their rational and ethical potential. Thus, education has a clear normative orientation, namely to shape humans who are able to live in accordance with their purpose of existence (Al-Farabi, 1985). Al-Farabi views humans as rational and social beings, so that individual perfection can only be achieved in the order of communal life. In this context, education functions to shape *manners* as an awareness of cosmic and social order that places each human being in the right position and responsibility. *Manners* are not merely individual ethics, but guiding principles that ensure that the use of reason always remains within the framework of virtue and the common good (Al-Farabi, 1993). In *Ara' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, Al-Farabi emphasizes that an ideal society can only be realized if its

citizens are shaped through education oriented towards virtue. Education is seen as a strategic means of shaping civilized human beings who are able to actively participate in realizing a just and meaningful social order. Without education that instills *civility*, knowledge has the potential to give rise to moral and social chaos (Al-Farabi, 1995).

Furthermore, from Ibn Sina's perspective, education is understood as a process of developing human potential in its entirety, including intellectual, moral, and physical potential. Humans are seen as having rational abilities that must be guided through education in order to achieve self-perfection. Therefore, education does not merely aim to transmit knowledge, but to guide humans to actualize their reason correctly so that they are able to distinguish between right and wrong in life (Sina, 1952). Ibn Sina emphasized that the main goal of education is to shape civilized humans, namely humans who have a balance between intellectual intelligence and noble character. Knowledge without moral guidance is considered insufficient to achieve human perfection. In this framework, manners serve as a principle that guides the use of reason so that it does not deviate from the values of goodness and virtue (Fakhry, 2004).

Education must also be tailored to the developmental stages of students. He emphasized the importance of moral education from an early age through the habit of good behavior and a supportive environment. This process forms the foundation for character building before students enter a higher stage of rational development. Thus, the formation of manners precedes and accompanies intellectual development (Al-Abrasyi, 2003). Ibn Sina also viewed education as having an important social function. Education not only shapes individuals who are personally intelligent, but also humans who are able to live in society and carry out their social roles responsibly. Manners in this context include ethical awareness of others and the ability to position oneself appropriately in social life. Successful education is education that produces individuals who are useful to themselves and society (Sina, 1969).

The Sufi and Muslim philosopher Imam al-Ghazali also viewed education as a process of human development that focuses on character building and purification of the soul. Education is not intended solely to increase intellectual capacity, but to guide humans to be able to live in accordance with divine values. Knowledge acquires its meaning when it functions as a means of bringing humans closer to the truth and guiding their behavior towards goodness (Nasr, 2007). He emphasized that the fundamental goal of education is to shape humans who have manners, namely the ability to apply knowledge ethically and responsibly. Knowledge that is not accompanied by moral guidance has the potential to lead to misguided orientation, because reason is not guided by values of truth. Therefore, education must instill ethical awareness that guides the use of knowledge so that it does not stray from the goals of humanity and divinity (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

According to al-Ghazali, ideal education is education that integrates physical and spiritual dimensions. Mastery of rational knowledge without spiritual guidance is considered insufficient to develop a well-rounded individual. Knowledge must be accompanied by character building so that it does not remain at the cognitive level, but is manifested in meaningful and morally valuable actions. Education must emphasize the process of character building from an early stage of life. The habit of good behavior and the creation of a conducive educational environment are the foundations for the development of students' personalities. In this context, educators do not only play the role of teachers, but also as mentors and moral role models. The relationship between teachers and students is educational in a holistic sense because it concerns character building and life orientation (Nata, 2010).

In contemporary Islamic discourse, the formulation of educational goals has developed as a critical response to the tendency of modern education to become increasingly trapped in instrumental rationality. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas believes that the main problem with education lies not in methods or curriculum alone, but in the loss of manners. According to him, an educational crisis occurs when humans are no longer able to place knowledge, themselves, and reality proportionally within a system of meaning. Therefore, education must be directed towards instilling manners so that knowledge does not lose its ethical and existential orientation (Al-Attas, 1979). He emphasizes that the concept of Islamic education is best understood through the term *ta'dīb*, because this concept encompasses the integrated formation of the intellectual, moral, and spiritual aspects. Unlike teaching, which only emphasizes the transmission of knowledge, *ta'dīb* aims to shape

humans who are aware of their position, knowledge, and God in the structure of reality. In this framework, *adab* is not understood as mere social ethics, but as an epistemological principle that guides the way humans know and act (Al-Attas, 1980) , (Wan Daud, 1998).

Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman proposed an approach that emphasized the relevance of Islamic education to the context of modern life. He believed that Islamic education should produce individuals who possess moral sensitivity as well as the intellectual ability to interpret Islamic teachings contextually. Education should not stop at mastery of texts or traditions, but should encourage the development of critical thinking so that Islamic ethical values can be applied in a dynamic social reality. In this perspective, *adab* is reflected in the ability of humans to respond to changing times without losing their moral orientation (Rahman et al., 1982) (Rahman, 1989)(Rahman, 1989)(Rahman, 1989). Islamic education must integrate knowledge and values. Education is not solely aimed at producing academically superior individuals, but at shaping people who have ethical and social responsibilities. Thus, education serves to build human awareness of their roles and responsibilities, both as individuals and as members of society (Halstead, 2004) , (Nasr et al., 1989).

The crisis in modern education is a result of knowledge becoming detached from moral and metaphysical orientation. Education that is reduced to technocratic and administrative activities tends to separate science from its ethical responsibilities. In such conditions, knowledge is no longer understood as a mandate that guides humans towards goodness, but merely as an instrument for social and economic achievement. Islamic education, therefore, should function as a space for the formation of moral consciousness that guides humans to understand knowledge in a meaningful and responsible way. When this ethical dimension is ignored, education risks producing individuals who are intellectually superior but weak in their orientation towards values and human responsibility (Azani & Harris, 2019).

Thus, the essence of education in the Islamic perspective can be understood as a process of shaping individuals oriented towards *adab*, or the ability to place oneself, one's knowledge, and one's actions within a broader framework of meaning. Education is not directed solely towards the achievement of functional competencies, but rather towards the formation of ethical and existential awareness that enables individuals to understand their role in the world. In this context, Islamic education does not stand as an antithesis to Western thought, but rather offers a normative horizon that enriches the philosophical dialogue on the purpose of education. This perspective is relevant as an effort to respond to the crisis of meaning in modern education by reaffirming the dimensions of responsibility, value orientation, and the meaning of human existence in the educational process.

### **Synthesis of the Meaning of Education in Western and Islamic Perspectives**

The dialogue between Western and Islamic thought shows that the crisis of meaning in education can be understood as a problem of losing a comprehensive sense of purpose. Western thought offers a critique of education that emphasizes technical knowledge and stresses the importance of subjectivity, freedom, and responsibility . Meanwhile, Islamic thought presents an ethical and transcendental foundation that affirms the direction and purpose of education oriented towards the formation of manners (*adab*).

Both dialogues show that the crisis of meaning in modern education is not solely caused by the failure of the education system to achieve its practical goals, but by a more fundamental problem: the blurring of understanding about *what humans are* and *what humans are educated for*. Modern education often operates within an instrumental horizon, where the goals of education are defined externally by economic, technological, or public policy needs. As a result, education loses its capacity as a space for existential reflection that allows humans to understand the meaning of their existence. This criticism is prominent in contemporary Western thought, which sees education as one of the main arenas where the modern crisis of meaning manifests itself (MacIntyre, 2007) , (Higgins, 2010).

In Western tradition, efforts to overcome this crisis are directed at restoring human subjectivity. Education is understood as a process of forming subjects who are capable of reflective thinking, making independent decisions, and taking responsibility for their actions. However, further analysis shows that an

emphasis on subjectivity and freedom, when detached from a broader horizon of values, actually creates new problems. Modern subjects become free in a procedural sense, but lack substantive orientation. In this condition, education risks producing individuals who are cognitively competent, but experience moral and existential confusion because they lack an adequate framework of meaning (Taylor, 1991).

Within the Islamic paradigm, corrective criticism is offered against such tendencies by placing the goals of education within an ethical and transcendental framework. Education is understood as a process of human formation directed toward recognizing the purpose of life and a value system that transcends instrumental interests. This is because humans are not understood merely as autonomous subjects, but as beings whose existence is always linked to moral and cosmic responsibilities. Therefore, education is not only tasked with liberating the ability to think, but also with structuring value orientations so that this freedom does not lose its direction (Khalidun, 1967) , (Hashim, 2014).

Furthermore, both dialogues show that the crisis of meaning in modern education is a symptom of a broader crisis of civilization. When education fails to answer questions about the meaning of life and the purpose of human existence, it loses its moral legitimacy. The Western and Islamic dialogues show that restoring the meaning of education cannot be achieved through technical reforms alone, but requires a re-examination of philosophical assumptions about humanity, knowledge, and values. Meaningful education can only be realized when it is once again positioned as a process of shaping human beings in a holistic, rational, and ethical manner, open to dimensions of meaning that transcend instrumental interests (Noddings, 2003).

Thus, this analysis confirms that the synthesis between Western and Islamic thought is not merely a conceptual strategy, but rather a philosophical approach that allows for the reformulation of educational goals amid the contemporary crisis of meaning. Education is understood as a reflective practice that shapes human beings to be able to live meaningful, responsible, and value-oriented lives in an ever-changing world. Within this framework, good education is education that maintains a balance between intellectual development and ethical formation, so that knowledge is not separated from moral responsibility. This perspective enriches the discourse of educational philosophy by presenting a dialogical framework that transcends the dichotomy between modern rationality and religious values, and reaffirms education as a process of humanizing humans as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

The crisis of meaning in education in the modern world is rooted in the reduction of educational goals to technocratic instruments that emphasize competence, performance, and efficiency, while neglecting the dimensions of meaning, ethics, and the formation of the whole person . In Western tradition, criticism of this condition has developed through humanistic, critical, and existential thinking that places education as a process of forming conscious, reflective, and responsible subjects for the condition of students. Education is understood not merely as the transmission of knowledge, but as a space for reflective praxis that shapes humans to be able to respond to the world in a meaningful way. Meanwhile, the Islamic perspective offers a normative and transcendental framework through the concept of *adab* or *ta'dib* as the core objective of education. Islamic education, both in classical and contemporary thought, emphasizes the integration of revelation, reason, and scientific tradition in shaping civilized human beings who understand the purpose of life, the hierarchy of values, and their existential responsibilities. The loss of *adab* is understood as the root of the education crisis, because knowledge is detached from its ethical orientation and transcendent meaning.

The synthesis between Western and Islamic thought shows that meaningful education is education that shapes humans in a balanced way, integrating intellectuality and morality, critical rationality and value orientation, as well as reflective freedom and moral responsibility. This philosophical dialogue does not erase the epistemological differences between the West and Islam, but rather utilizes the strengths of each to reformulate educational goals that are relevant to the challenges of the times. Thus, good education cannot be reduced to cognitive achievements or functional skills alone, but must be understood as the praxis of forming whole human beings who are capable of critical thinking, ethical action, and understanding their existence in relation to others, nature, and values that transcend instrumental interests. This synthetic framework is expected

to enrich the discourse of contemporary educational philosophy while providing a conceptual foundation for the development of more meaningful education amid a global crisis of meaning.

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