

Existentialism in the Characterization of the Main Character in the Novel Joseito

***Fhoeby Nursoufiliani¹**

Program Studi Sastra Jepang, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Komputer Indonesia,

Jl. Dipati Ukur 112-116, Bandung, Indonesia

Fenny Febrianty²

Program Studi Sastra Jepang, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Komputer Indonesia,

Jl. Dipati Ukur 112-116, Bandung, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The novel "Joseito" by Osamu Dazai depicts the complex journey of a high school student caught in an existential dilemma. This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the themes of existentialism revealed in the novel. The purpose of this study is to understand how the novel "Joseito" reflects the concepts of existentialism, such as the search for meaning, loneliness, loss, and individual freedom. The method applied is descriptive qualitative research, with steps that include data provision through reading and note-taking techniques, data analysis through grouping data into relevant categories, and presentation of data analysis results. The results of this study show that the novel "Joseito" deeply depicts the main character's existential struggle in the face of uncertainty and internal conflict. The conclusion of this research is that the novel "Joseito" by Osamu Dazai successfully depicts the themes of existentialism well through the main character, which reflects the struggle of human beings in facing their existence in the modern world full of social pressure and individual anxiety.

Keywords: Existentialism, Joseito, Osamu Dazai

INTRODUCTION

According to Kosasih (in Haslinda, 2019), a novel is an imaginative work that explores various aspects of the life of a person or several characters. The main focus of novels is to present a comprehensive picture of the challenges and problems faced. The themes tend to be complex, with various derivative themes. The plot is often complex and long, characterized by significant changes in the characters' fates.

Meanwhile, according to Tarigan and Hayati (2023), humans are intrinsically creatures bound by culture, knowledge, and expression in conveying ideas and stories. Every culture has a philosophy that becomes the foundation of its life, which is also known as philosophy. Philosophy is the result of radical human thought and reflects civilization, aiming to investigate the truth of all things. Philosophy develops through various schools, one of which is existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophical trend that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, centering on the individual's existence, freedom, and decision-making (Solomon, 2017). Furthermore, existentialism validates human uniqueness and individuality. However, existentialism also has a deep psychological dimension. Psychological existentialism, as expressed by psychologists such as Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, and Irvin Yalom, delves deeper into the subjective experience of individuals in dealing with their existence in the world. Concepts such as existence, loneliness, freedom, and the search for the meaning of life are the main focus in psychological existentialism. In Rollo May's perspective, the concept of "self" is the ability of humans to realize

their every action in the world. Therefore, awareness of the “self” is an important first step for humans to exist. However, people are often caught up in forgetting themselves, so they drift, drown, and eventually lose themselves. This condition results in ongoing anxiety.

Novels as a literary art form are often a mirror for deep philosophical thoughts about human existence. One interesting example is Osamu Dazai's novel *Joseito*. In this work, Dazai not only tells the journey of an unusual high school student, but also delves into the complexity of her thoughts and feelings that refer to the concept of existentialism.

Existentialism, which emphasizes freedom, personal responsibility, and the search for meaning in human life, is an important foundation in understanding this novel. Literary works are often a source of inspiration for various philosophical and psychological studies. In this regard, *Joseito*'s novel offers a powerful depiction of an individual's existential struggle in the face of uncertainty and loneliness.

In a modern era filled with social pressures and individual anxieties, an understanding of existentialism has become increasingly relevant. *Joseito*'s novel not only presents an interesting narrative story, but also offers a deep perspective on the human condition in facing its existence.

Previous studies have revealed various interpretations of the themes of existentialism in literary works. Some studies have highlighted certain aspects of Osamu Dazai's characterization, plot, and writing style in a philosophical context. However, there is still an opening for further research that can provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of this novel in the context of existentialism.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the themes of existentialism in Osamu Dazai's *Joseito* through the characterization of the main character. This research aims to understand how the novel reflects the concepts of existentialism, such as the search for meaning, loneliness, loss, and individual freedom. Thus, this study is expected to provide a deeper insight into the human experience in dealing with its existence, as well as the novel's contribution to philosophical and psychological thinking about the human condition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The philosophical movement of existentialism, which emphasizes the subjective experience of individuals and the quest for meaning and purpose in life, has a well-established history dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Stewart, 2018). In this era of technological advancements and the neglect of human values, existentialism emerges as a fundamental philosophy that explores the essence of being human (Andayani, 2018). Existentialism is a philosophical school that emphasizes freedom, personal responsibility, and the search for meaning in human life. Philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus are the main figures in the development of existentialism.

Research related to existentialism has been carried out by several authors, including Dinda Emilia in 2023 with the title *Existentialism and the Meaning of Life Philosophical Analysis of Individual Choices*. Ucep Hermawan in 2021, with the title *Self-Concept in Rollo May's Existentialism*.

According to Emilia (2023), in existentialism, existence precedes essence, which means that individuals have the freedom to determine the meaning of their own lives through their choices and actions. This freedom, however, also brings great responsibility towards individuals to create meaning in their own lives.

The basic concept in existentialism involves three main aspects:

1. Freedom

Sartre (in Yusuf, 2020) asserts that humans have the responsibility of embracing their freedom to make choices and are accountable for the outcomes of those choices. In the perspective of existentialism, freedom does not only mean being physically free, but also having the freedom to make choices and determine the direction of life without being bound by fixed norms or values. Sartre calls it “absolute freedom,” where individuals have complete freedom to make decisions without any external guidance.

2. Responsibility

The concept of responsibility in existentialism emphasizes that humans are fully responsible for their actions and decisions. . The act of taking action is an inherent need for human beings, and the outcomes of these actions serve as evidence of their existence. Thus, the existence of humans is defined by their actions. (Putri, 2017). There are no moral rules or transcendental entities that provide absolute guidance; therefore, individuals must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

3. Individual Existence

Existentialism rejects the view that humans are part of a homogeneous collectivity. Instead, each individual is considered to have a unique and irreplaceable existence. Therefore, Sartre (in Vinod Acharya, 2014:2) highlights the importance of subjective existence and defines subjectivism as the liberty of the individual subject to determine their own essence. Humans are seen as beings who must find and create their own meaning of life, and have a unique and irreplaceable existence in the world. Heidegger's concept of "dasein" also highlights that humans always exist in the world together with others, but still have a unique and individual existence that cannot be equated.

Novels as a literary art form are often a mirror for deep philosophical thoughts about human existence. One interesting example is Osamu Dazai's novel *Joseito*. In this work, Dazai not only tells the journey of an unusual high school student, but also delves into the complexity of her thoughts and feelings that refer to the concept of existentialism.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to find and describe the form of existentialism in the novel *Joseito* by Osamu Dazai. Based on these objectives, the method used in this study uses qualitative descriptive research. The method used in this study is elaborated into steps in accordance with the stages of implementation, namely (1) the data provision stage, (2) the data analysis stage, and (3) the stage of presenting the results of data analysis.

According to Abdussamad (in Tarigan and Hayati, 2023), qualitative research is more oriented towards the qualitative aspects of research objects such as values, meanings, and human emotions, as well as appreciation of the diversity and beauty of works of art, and historical values. Qualitative research methods are used to investigate research objects in natural conditions, with researchers acting as the main instrument. Based on the facts found and then can be constructed into a hypothesis or theory. So in qualitative research analyzing data to build hypotheses, while in quantitative research analyzing data to test hypotheses.

From the findings of facts, hypotheses or theories can be built. In qualitative research, data analysis aims to develop hypotheses, while in quantitative research, data analysis aims to test existing hypotheses.

Qualitative methods are used to collect data that has depth and meaning. Meaning is considered the core of the data, which represents the value hidden behind the visible information. Therefore, qualitative research is not focused on generalization, but rather on revealing meaning. The concept of generalization in qualitative research is called transferability, which indicates that the results of the study can be applied to other contexts that have similar characteristics.

This study uses data from the novel *Joseito* by Osamu Dazai and focuses on existentialism in the novel through the characterization of the main character.

Data collection was conducted using reading and note-taking techniques. The reading technique was conducted on the novel *Joseito*. At first, the whole novel was read with the aim of knowing the general identification. After that, a careful reading is done to see the existence of existentialism in the novel. After careful reading, the next step is data recording which is done by recording direct quotes or called verbatim from the novel under study.

In this study, a qualitative descriptive data analysis technique was used because the data required a detailed explanation. The description technique was used to understand the purpose of this research, as well as the steps applied in its methods. It includes comparisons between the data, followed by grouping the data into relevant categories to make subsequent analysis easier. With this method, it allows the researcher to explore the complexity of the concept of existentialism in the characters in *Joseito's* novel, through an objective approach.

The steps taken include the data provision stage, the data analysis stage, and the stage of presenting the results of data analysis.

First, in the data provision stage, data collection was carried out using reading and note-taking techniques. The reading technique was conducted on the novel “Joseito” by Osamu Dazai. The reading was done as a whole to identify in general, then careful reading was done to find the existence of existentialism themes in the novel. After that, the data is recorded by recording direct quotes or verbatim from the novel under study.

Second, the data analysis stage is carried out using qualitative descriptive data analysis techniques. This analysis aims to understand the concepts of existentialism revealed in the novel “Joseito”. The data that has been collected is then analyzed by comparing the data, grouping the data into relevant categories, and exploring the complexity of the concept of existentialism in the characters in the novel.

Third, the stage of presenting the results of data analysis is carried out by compiling the findings of data analysis in the form of a structured narrative. The results of this analysis are presented systematically to provide a clear picture of how the novel “Joseito” reflects the themes of existentialism through in-depth characterization.

By using the descriptive qualitative research method specifically and explicitly, this study can provide a careful interpretation of the complexity and uncertainty in human existence revealed in Osamu Dazai's novel “Joseito”. This method also allows for a good unveiling of the themes of existentialism in the context of everyday life.

DISCUSSION

In Osamu Dazai's Joseito, existentialism is explored in depth through the main character. The main character in the novel goes through an emotional journey that depicts a deep inner conflict. The dialogues and thoughts of the main character give a clear picture of the existential thoughts faced, reflecting the battles that humans generally face in dealing with their existence in the world.

Concept in Existentialism	Excerpt from the novel “Joseito”
Freedom	素直になりたい、素直になりたい。
	よく生きて我想います。

Individual Existence	本が、自分の気持と関係なく、ひとりでに成長がたまらなく、困惑する。
	は、いやだ。自分が女だけに、女の中にあるよくわかって、歯ぎしりするほど、厭だ。
	ど去ったことは、みんな懐かしい。
Responsibility	れ生活の目標が無いのもっと生活に、人生になればいいの、自分には矛盾があるのどうきりに考えたり悩んだりしているようだが、感傷だけさ。

The table above lists the concepts of existentialism identified in Osamu Dazai's "Joseito", along with the quotes that support these themes. This helps in systematically describing how these themes are reflected in the characterization and journey of the main characters in the novel. The following is an explanation of the concept of existentialism and the quotes found in the novel.

「自然になりたい、素直になりたい」

"Let me be natural, let me be genuine."

The quote reflects the concept of freedom in existentialism. The main character yearns for the freedom to be himself without having to be influenced by external norms or demands. This is in line with Sartre's idea of "absolute freedom," where individuals have complete freedom to determine their path in life without any external guidance.

Underlining the concept of individual existence in the face of the emptiness of the meaning of life. The main character in Joseito's novel feels adrift between the gap between the desire to achieve a greater goal and the realization of the uncertainty in his existence. This is in line with the concept that in existentialism, individuals are fully responsible for the creation of meaning in their lives. As seen in this quote.

やれ生活の目標が無いのもっと生活に、人生に、積極的になればいいの、自分には矛盾があるのどうのって、しきりに考えたり悩んだりしているようだが、おまえのは、感傷だけさ。

There I go again—pondering the purposelessness of my day-to-day life, wishing I had more ambition, and lamenting all the contradictions in myself—when I know it's just sentimental nonsense.

The excerpt highlights the existential struggle experienced by the main character in Joseito's novel. Firstly, the excerpt depicts the character's awareness of uncertainty and emptiness in everyday life. The thought of lacking a clear purpose in life and the desire for greater ambition reflects a common existential feeling, where individuals contemplate the meaning of their lives amidst daily routines and challenges.

Furthermore, the quote also depicts the character's internal conflict between the aspiration to achieve greater goals and the realization of his ambiguous existence. This reflects the theme of existentialism which emphasizes the responsibility of individuals in creating their own meaning of life. In existentialism, individuals are given the freedom to determine the meaning of their lives, but the responsibility to do so is also placed entirely on themselves.

肉体が、自分の気持と関係なく、ひとりで成長して行くのがたまらなく、困惑する。

It made me miserable that I was rapidly becoming an adult and that I was unable to do anything about it.

The above quote highlights the concept of the uncertainty of existence and the conflict between individual desires and unchangeable reality. The main character faces the uncertainty of the future and the inevitability of change, which is an important aspect of existentialism that emphasizes the awareness of limitation and uncertainty in human life.

女は、いやだ。自分が女だけに、女の中にある不潔さが、よくわかって、歯ざしりするほど、厭だ。

Women are disgusting. Being female, I am all too familiar with the impurity found in women, it sets my teeth on edge with repulsion.

The quote illustrates a common internal conflict in the context of existentialism related to self-identity. In existentialism, individuals are given the freedom to determine the meaning of their own lives, including the meaning of their self-identity. However, individuals often have to deal with social pressures, stereotypes, and expectations placed by society towards their identity.

In the quote, the main character is annoyed and disgusted by the stereotypes and negative perceptions of women. The statement "Women are disgusting" reflects the character's dissatisfaction with how women are often portrayed or perceived by society. This creates an internal conflict between the character's personal identity as a woman and the negative expectations or views that may be encountered from outside.

This conflict reflects the existential struggle that often occurs, where individuals seek to understand and accept their own identity, while also feeling oppressed or limited by the views and expectations determined by the social environment. This shows how existentialism is not only concerned with the search for the meaning of life in general, but also with the search for and acceptance of the meaning of an individual's self-identity, including how that identity is viewed by others.

過ぎ去ったことは、みんな懐かしい。

I yearned for everything long gone.

The main character in the quote experiences a deep desire to return to the past that has passed. This thought is reflected in the gap between the daily life lived today and the past that he longs for. This concept of nostalgia is an important aspect of existentialism, where individuals often feel connected to a simpler, more innocent, and more meaningful past.

This feeling of longing for the past can also be understood as the main character's attempt to rediscover meaning and innocence that may feel lost in an increasingly complex life. In existential complexity, nostalgia is often a way for individuals to deal with the uncertainties and contradictions in their existence. By longing for things gone by, the character expresses a deep desire to find peace and a more meaningful existence in the journey of existence.

Meanwhile, the main character's aspiration or desire to live a life of beauty and peace is seen in the quote below.

美しく生きたいと思います。

I want to live beautifully.

The term “living beautifully” in this context refers not only to the physical or visual aspects, but also to the overall experience of life that is considered meaningful, meaningful and fulfilling.

In the context of existentialism, the desire to live beautifully can be interpreted as an individual's attempt to find meaning in his or her existence, create worthwhile moments, and live life with full awareness of the values that are considered important. This often involves a deeper understanding of oneself, relationships with others, as well as how individuals go about actions and choices in daily life.

By expressing the desire to live beautifully, the main characters show that they do not only seek material satisfaction or momentary pleasure, but also seek inner peace, harmony with the surrounding environment, and life experiences that are rich in meaning. This is in line with the themes of existentialism that emphasize the search for the meaning of life, individual freedom, and personal responsibility in creating a meaningful and authentic life.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the novel “Joseito,” the themes of existentialism are explored through the journey of the main character who experiences various conflicts and fundamental questions about existence and the meaning of life. The author uses the main character as a representation of the general human struggle in facing his existence in the world.

The main character goes through a journey of searching for self-identity and personal truth. At first, the character yearns for authenticity and existence without having to conform to social pressures or expectations. However, as the story progresses, the character begins to contemplate the meaning of life and the emptiness of existence. Thoughts about the empty meaning of life, the desire for greater purpose, and regret over internal contradictions are the main considerations that affect the character's journey. In addition, the character also faces the fear of aging and losing control over her future. Feelings of helplessness and being trapped in a cycle of uncertainty about identity and life goals surround the main character. There is also an internal conflict related to gender stereotypes and negative perceptions of women, which creates feelings of constraint and disturbance in the character. The feeling of nostalgia is also very strong in this story, where the characters long for the lost past. This reflects the characters' desire to return to a simpler and happier time, while struggling with the increasingly complex realities of life.

Overall, this discussion highlights the themes of existentialism in “Joseito” through the use of in-depth characterization and powerful quotes. Through this analysis, readers are invited to reflect on the meaning of existence, the search for self-identity, and the internal conflicts that plague humans in the face of life's realities.

This study reveals substantial findings related to the themes of existentialism in Osamu Dazai's Joseito. An in-depth analysis of the selected excerpts highlights the main character's journey in searching for the meaning of life, facing loneliness, dealing with the uncertainty of existence, and struggling with identity conflicts.

Further research could expand the scope of analysis to further explore the psychological and philosophical implications of the existentialist themes in the novel. Comparative studies with other literary works that carry similar themes can provide richer insights into the way various authors deal with existential issues in their works. In addition, research could involve analyzing readers' responses to the themes and examining their relevance in a broader social and cultural context.

REFERENCES

- Acharya, Vinod. (2014). *Nietzsche's Meta-existentialism*. German: Walter De Gruyter.
- Andayani, A. (2018). Sartre's Existentialism in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. *Anaphora: Journal of Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies*, 1(1), 23-27.
- Dazai, O. (2011). *Schoolgirl*. Translated by Allison Markin Powel. New York: One Peace Books.
- Dazai, O. (2011). *Joseito*. Japan: Aozora Bunko POD.
- Emilia, D. (2023). Eksistensialisme dan Makna Hidup Analisis Filosofis atas Pilihan Individu. *literacy notes*, 1(2).
- Haslinda. (2019). *Kajian Apresiasi Prosa Fiksi Berbasis Kearifan Lokal Makassar*. CV. Berkah Utami.
- May, R. (1958). Existential psychology. In S.
- Putri, I. G. A. M. C., Winaya, I. M., & Pratiwi, P. A. A. S. (2016). Existentialism On The Novel "The Trial" By Franz Kafka. *Jurnal Humanis*, 16(3), 109-117.
- Solomon, R. C. (2017). *Existentialism*. Oxford University Press. *Morals and Ecce Homo*. Vintage.
- Stewart, J. (2018). Existentialism. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://iep.utm.edu/existent/>.
- Tarigan, D., & Hayati, S. (2023). ANALISIS EKSISTENSIALISME FEMINISME DALAM NOVEL LAUT BERCERITA KARYA LEILA SALIKHA CHUDORI. *ENGGANG: Jurnal Pendidikan, Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya*, 3(2), 290-299.
- Yusuf, F., & Susilo, M. I. (2020). Existentialist Feminism of Woman's Struggle in Cigarette Girl Novel. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 8(1), 67-79.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Fhoeby Nursoufiliani, email: fhoeby.63820006@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id

Fhoeby Nursoufiliani a Japanese literature student at Universitas Komputer Indonesia.

Fenny Febrianty, S.S., M.Pd is a lecturer of courses related to Literature and Literary Studies.