



## UNVEILING THE ESSENCE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF KARL JASPERS' EXISTENTIAL APPROACH

**Thi Thao Tran<sup>i</sup>**

Lecturer,

Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance,

Vietnam

### **Abstract:**

This paper critically assesses Karl Jaspers' existential viewpoint concerning the fundamental nature of university education. In a contemporary context where the pursuit of credentials prevails, Jaspers challenges traditional paradigms by underscoring the university's distinctive role beyond the mere acquisition of job-related skills. The abstract delves into Jaspers' critique of an education system fixated on efficiency, advocating for the cultivation of intellectual life and existential awareness. Through a thorough analysis, the article reexamines the objective of university education, transcending the narrow focus on credentials to embrace a comprehensive vision that aligns with Jaspers' philosophical principles. Practical insights for applying Jaspers' philosophy in contemporary educational settings are presented, facilitating a transition towards a more purposeful and contemplative academic experience. The research methodology employed encompasses narrative analysis and philosophical inquiry.

**Keywords:** Karl Jaspers, existential education, university essence

### **1. Introduction**

In the face of global uncertainties surrounding the future of higher education, this article embarks on a critical exploration, seeking to unveil the essence of university education through a meticulous analysis of Karl Jaspers' existential approach. As we navigate an era characterized by instability, rapid change, and vulnerability, pivotal questions linger about the trajectory of traditional universities. How can they adapt to the surge of massive online courses in the digital age while preserving individualized education? Can the ideals of equal internationalization and global cooperation withstand the pressures of one-way globalization? Amid these uncertainties, the role of universities in shaping

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [trunghieutr252@gmail.com](mailto:trunghieutr252@gmail.com)

integral and humane personalities is under scrutiny, raising concerns about potential transformations into structures driven solely by commercial imperatives.

Within the realm of futuristic and foresight studies in the philosophy of education, our objective is to thoroughly examine and critically analyze Karl Jaspers' existential conceptualization of the university.

As we navigate the intricacies of these evolving educational landscapes, the study delves into a philosophical examination of the fundamental principles underlying Jaspers' existential approach. Through tasks like literature review, content analysis, and foresight analysis, this research aims to provide perspectives on Jaspers' higher education philosophy. The gained insights hold significant value for educators in higher education institutions, education philosophers, and individuals with a keen interest in the diverse challenges and opportunities shaping the contemporary higher education paradigm. This exploration not only enhances our comprehension of the essence of university education but also offers practical considerations for navigating the evolving landscape and fostering a purposeful and contemplative academic experience.

## 2. Literature review

The exploration of Karl Jaspers' existential approach to university education is significantly enriched by an extensive body of scholarly works that critically engage with his profound philosophical contributions.

In the seminal work, "The Idea of the University" (1923), Jaspers lays the conceptual groundwork for his subsequent reflections on education. This masterpiece articulates a profound existentialist argument for the university, emphasizing its role as an institution concerned with freedom and the cultivation of human potential. Through a nuanced examination of freedom, truth, and knowledge pursuit, Jaspers envisions the university as a crucible for the development of individuality and intellectual exploration. Jaspers' extensive exploration of existentialism in education is further encapsulated in "Philosophy of Existence" (1938). This work delves into the fundamental principles of existentialism, offering a philosophical framework that extends its influence to the realm of education.

"Man in the Modern Age" (1933) demonstrates Jaspers' interdisciplinary approach as he addresses the challenges of modernity and their implications for education. This work provides valuable insights into Jaspers' reflections on the changing dynamics of society and their impact on the educational landscape.

Exploring Jaspers' views on truth and human understanding, "Truth and Symbol" (1947) sheds light on his epistemological considerations and their implications for knowledge pursuit within the university.

In "Reason and Existenz" (1935), Jaspers engages in a philosophical dialogue, tackling questions of reason, existence, and their intersection in education. This work contributes to a deeper understanding of Jaspers' intellectual journey and his perspectives on the role of reason in higher education.

Jaspers' reflective piece, "The Cosmos of Knowledge" (1960/2009), offers an initial glimpse into his conceptualization of knowledge and the university's role within this cosmic framework.

"The Future of Mankind" (1961) encompasses Jaspers' reflections on the future, morality, and the responsibility of education in shaping a better world. This forward-looking perspective resonates with ongoing discourse on the purpose of university education in fostering ethical and responsible individuals.

The landscape of Karl Jaspers' existential philosophy in the realm of university education is intricately woven through a tapestry of seminal works that span across decades.

Burch explores the intricate dimensions surrounding the concept of the university and the nuanced efforts required for its sustained relevance across various facets of university life. The challenges confronting universities, including economic dependencies, teaching and research limitations, and threats to innovative ideas, are carefully examined. The author emphasizes the continuous and sophisticated task of preserving the essence of the university, stressing the importance of ongoing reflection and dialogue. While the article does not provide a direct evaluation of Karl Jaspers' perspective, Burch encourages a thoughtful consideration of specific objections within the broader context of Jaspers' philosophy of the university (Burch, 1976).

In Riordan's (1976) essay, "Karl Jaspers: An Existentialist Looks at University Education," the focus is on Jaspers' views. Jaspers emphasizes recognizing the limits of science, avoiding a single authoritative figure and sees the university as a place to actively pursue truth. He envisions it as vital for preserving intellectual integrity in society, fostering continuous questioning of absolutes, and promoting awareness of human knowledge limitations. Education, according to Jaspers, is pivotal in shaping humanity's future existence. Riordan provides a succinct exploration of Jaspers' existentialist perspective on university education (Riordan T. M., 1976).

Wyatt's groundbreaking exploration in "Karl Jaspers' The Idea of the University: An Existentialist Argument for an Institution Concerned with Freedom" delves into the profound aspects of Jaspers' viewpoint on the university's role in facilitating communication and knowledge transmission. The author of the article expresses a high regard for Jaspers' perspective, asserting its continued relevance and significance in the contemporary era. This recognition comes at a time when the functions of universities and related institutions undergo reevaluation, influenced not only by financial pressures but also by a trend towards consolidation rather than expansion. By highlighting Jaspers as a prominent and robust existentialist thinker, the author emphasizes his unwavering advocacy for the core values of higher education (Wyatt, 1982).

This foundational understanding is strengthened by the collaborative work of Jürgen Habermas and J. R. Blazek in their publication, "The Idea of the University: Learning Processes". This work delves into Karl Jaspers' perspectives on university and education, shedding light on his significant contributions to the educational reform debates in Germany during the 1960s. Beyond a focus on Jaspers' viewpoints, the article

also addresses the perspectives of other educational reformers and traces the evolving changes in the German education system over time. In essence, the paper offers a comprehensive overview of Jaspers' beliefs and his influential contributions to the discourse on education in Germany (Habermas, J. & Blazek, J. R. , 1987).

Östling examines the post-World War II academic landscape, particularly focusing on Karl Jaspers and the Humboldtian Tradition. After Germany's capitulation in 1945, Jaspers emphasized the need for the university's "*regeneration*" in a speech, envisioning it as a profound infusion of new life. Östling's exploration provides insights into the philosophical underpinnings that shaped the post-war academic landscape, highlighting keywords such as German University, Humboldtian Tradition, Karl Jaspers, philosophy, and Second World War (Östling, 2014).

Röhr focuses on Karl Jaspers' philosophy in exploring the crucial subject-object relationship within his periechontological framework. The author underscores the significance of this philosophical concept in fostering an education that encourages openness, tolerance, and existential realization. The article not only complements the discussion on Jaspers' philosophical perspectives but also provides insights into the practical implications for education. It contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the role of education in promoting essential values and existential awareness in individuals (Röhr, 2016).

Sztobryn-Bochomulska explores Karl Jaspers' philosophy and its relevance to education. Jaspers highlights the significance of boundary situations for personal transformation, arguing that education should not only impart knowledge but also foster character development. Sztobryn-Bochomulska addresses the challenges of translating theoretical concepts into practical education and emphasizes the importance of transcending empirical existence towards self-creation. Overall, the article prompts reflection on the intersection of philosophy and the realities of teaching and learning (Sztobryn-Bochomulska, 2016).

Burwood explores the tension between the university's public utility and its academic mission, drawing on Jaspers' reflections and his disagreement with Heidegger. Jaspers advocates for a normative ideal centered around complete academic freedom as a goal for real-world institutions. The article addresses contemporary challenges to academic freedom posed by despotism, autocracy, populism, and technocratic values. Burwood argues that Jaspers' vision remains relevant, emphasizing that an institution aligning with this ideal serves societal interests by being free from state control, with truth and knowledge as its core aims. This perspective prompts readers to consider the critical role of academic freedom in navigating modern challenges within the broader societal and political landscape (Burwood, 2020).

V. Lidz's adds a contemporary dimension, exploring Jaspers' conceptualization of paradigmatic individuals within the broader context of world religions and axial civilizations. This intricate tapestry of academic contributions not only encapsulates Jaspers' profound philosophy of education but also illuminates the ongoing scholarly

dialogue surrounding his enduring impact on the essence of university education (Lidz, 2021, p.67).

Prazny explores Karl Jaspers' commitment to defending the philosophical essence of the university amid the risk of reduction to a utilitarian concept. The study emphasizes Jaspers' view of philosophy as integral to preserving the university as a space deeply connected to both science and humanity. The historical context, particularly the rise of Nazism in Germany, underscores the importance of philosophical life as a precondition for safeguarding the university. Prazny's work highlights the critical role of philosophy, science, and education in Jaspers' vision, which is crucial for maintaining a free university. The study also discusses the historical restoration of the university in democratic conditions post the Nazi Era, providing insights into Jaspers' enduring struggle for the university's core ideals (Prazny, 2023).

This review provides a deep exploration of Karl Jaspers' philosophy of education, offering a comprehensive narrative rather than a mere compilation of research works. From the foundational "The Idea of the University" to detailed examinations of ethics, academic freedom, and the existential depth of Jaspers, the review paints a nuanced portrait of his significant contributions to higher education. By placing Jaspers' seminal works alongside those of various authors, the review clarifies and extends his ideas. These works are not static philosophical canvases but dynamic components that infuse vitality into the discourse on the essence of university education. The review goes beyond being a comprehensive exploration of the resurgence of educational philosophy in Jaspers' context and the post-World War II era. It presents a contemporary viewpoint on the challenges and opportunities facing higher education today. Through the works of contemporary authors, this review builds a bridge between the past and present, underscoring the enduring influence of Jaspers and his educational philosophy.

Based on this overview, the next task of the article is likely to delve deeper into specific aspects of Karl Jaspers' existential approach to university education. The article may focus on analyzing key themes, concepts, or arguments present in Jaspers' works, as well as exploring how other scholars have engaged with and expanded upon his ideas. Additionally, the article could provide a critical analysis of the implications of Jaspers' philosophy for contemporary discussions on university education, addressing challenges and opportunities in the present educational landscape. Ultimately, the goal would be to contribute new insights, perspectives, or interpretations that add value to the existing body of knowledge on Jaspers' philosophy of education.

### **3. Material and Methods**

In this study, our research methodology is carefully crafted as a synergistic blend of narrative analysis and philosophical inquiry, with Karl Jaspers' existential approach at its core. This strategic choice positions our inquiry to unravel the profound layers embedded within Jaspers' philosophy, particularly concerning its implications for university education.

The narrative analysis takes a deliberate and focused approach to explore the textual narratives associated with Jaspers' philosophy. Our aim is to unearth the intricate insights woven within these narratives, providing a nuanced perspective on the essence of university education from an existential lens. Simultaneously, philosophical inquiry acts as a guiding compass, steering our exploration towards the foundational principles that underpin Jaspers' critical analysis. Through this meticulous examination, we uncover the bedrock of principles shaping Jaspers' distinctive existential approach to university education.

As we traverse this intellectual landscape, three pivotal research questions serve as our guiding stars. The first question prompts a nuanced examination of how the narrative elements within Jaspers' works contribute to our understanding of the essence of university education from an existential perspective. This inquiry propels our analysis towards extracting profound insights, shedding light on the existential nuances embedded within Jaspers' textual narratives.

The second question acts as a compass, directing our philosophical inquiry towards the exploration of the fundamental tenets of Jaspers that form the basis of his critical analysis. This meticulous examination unveils the foundational principles shaping Jaspers' unique existential approach to university education, providing clarity on the philosophical underpinnings.

The third question underscores the contemporary relevance of our chosen methodology. It prompts an exploration into how Jaspers' insights resonate with the evolving landscape of higher education, seamlessly bridging the past with the present. This exploration enriches our understanding of the enduring significance of Jaspers' existential approach in the context of modern higher education.

Building upon this robust methodological foundation, our research hypotheses emerge as interconnected threads, weaving together the narrative and philosophical dimensions. The first hypothesis anticipates that the collective analysis of narrative elements within Jaspers' works will yield a comprehensive understanding of the existential essence embedded within his philosophy. The second hypothesis asserts that the philosophical principles underpinning Jaspers' existential approach are pivotal in deciphering the nuanced layers of his perspective on higher education. The third hypothesis envisions a seamless integration of narrative analysis and philosophical inquiry, yielding insights that bridge the historical context of Jaspers' works with the modern challenges and opportunities in higher education.

In essence, our chosen methodology, guided by these research questions and hypotheses, embarks on a journey to illuminate Karl Jaspers' existential philosophy, offering profound insights into its enduring implications for the essence of university education.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. The Existentialism of Karl Jaspers

Karl Jaspers, born in 1883, was a prominent German-Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher who made profound contributions to the field of existentialism. Drawing inspiration from philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, Jaspers developed his own unique perspective on existentialism, focusing on themes of human existence, freedom, consciousness, and the pursuit of authenticity.

One of Jaspers' key contributions lies in his concept of "*Existenz*," which he described as the subjective experience of one's own existence. He believed that true understanding of oneself and the world can only emerge through personal experience and self-reflection. Jaspers wrote, "*As being-there, as men living in our environment, we experience in it what we perceive with our senses, what achieves reality for us as the presence which cannot be reduced to universal knowledge.*" (Jaspers, 1951a, p. 32) According to Jaspers, individuals must confront the limits of their own existence, grapple with their anxieties, and make meaningful choices to find authenticity and purpose in life.

Jaspers underscored the significance of two types of thinking: "*encompassing*" and "*illuminating*." Encompassing thinking pertains to our ability to objectively grasp the external world. In Jaspers' view, Existence, in the context of Being, is termed encompassing. "*It is the form of our awareness of being which underlies all our scientific and common-sense knowledge and which is given expression in the myths and rituals of religion.*" (Jaspers, 1951b, p. xv) It is not the awareness of an object but a reflection on the subjective situation of being. Jaspers asserts, "*The encompassing always announces itself in present objects and within horizons but never becomes an object. It is the backdrop against which everything else appears, rendering all things not only what they seem but also transparent.*" (Jaspers, 1951b, p. 18)

On the other hand, illuminating thinking involves our capacity for subjective insight and self-understanding. Jaspers contends that a comprehensive understanding of reality necessitates both forms of thinking. The interplay between encompassing, which provides the context for objective understanding, and illuminating, which offers subjective insight, creates a holistic approach to grasping the complexities of existence.

Furthermore, Jaspers underscored the profound significance of what he termed "*boundary situations*." Lauken acknowledged Jaspers as the pioneer in employing the term "*situation*" as a precise philosophical concept (Lauken, 1996, p. 929). In his work "*Philosophie*," Jaspers views situations as multidimensional realities intricately linked to the existence of a subject. He defines situations as meaningful, physically and psychologically concrete entities in constant evolution. While individuals can actively influence situations, they can never exist outside them, transitioning from one to another. Jaspers emphasizes the interplay between knowledge and situation, noting that new knowledge not only emerges within the situation but also has the power to reshape it. Overall, Jaspers portrays situations as complex realities woven into the fabric of human existence.

*"Boundary situations,"* as conceptualized by Jaspers, represent enduring facets of the human experience. These encompass fundamental aspects like navigating various situations, grappling with suffering, confronting guilt, and facing mortality. Jaspers characterizes boundary situations as unchanging and impenetrable, comparable to a formidable wall within our existence. Notably distinct from ordinary situations, these boundary situations resist modification; our only recourse is to shed light on them without seeking explanations or deductions (Jaspers, 1951b, pp. 178-179). Boundary situations are an intrinsic part of existence itself. Jaspers contends that, from the perspective of a comprehensive consciousness, a boundary situation no longer qualifies as a situation. It is either seen as purely objective or intentionally disregarded, often leaving existing consciousness in a state of contemplative stupor as it grapples with this distinction. The notion of boundary situations is integral to the concept of *"Existenz,"* aligning with a consciousness that remains immanent within predetermined limits.

In *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Jaspers discusses the concept of *"Grenzsituationen"* or boundary situations, where individuals are forced to confront conflicting values, leading to the destruction of certain values. He emphasizes that human existence is a process of both value creation and destruction. These situations, experienced in various concrete instances, may not initially appear as absolutely necessary. However, Jaspers argues that there are crucial, essential situations inherent in human existence, beyond individual circumstances, which are inevitable and connected to the finite nature of being (Jaspers, 1919, p. 202).

Jaspers draws a crucial distinction between limit-situations and temporary situations. Unlike temporary situations that individuals can navigate away from, limit-situations are intrinsic to human existence. The inability to escape these limit-situations defines human beings constitutively. While one can leave temporary situations, the fundamental *"situatedness"* persists, portraying situatedness itself as a constitutive limit-situation. These represent extreme experiences that compel individuals to directly confront their deepest fears and values. Critical junctures, such as severe illness, bereavement, or existential dilemmas, provide individuals with a unique opportunity for transformative self-discovery and personal growth. Jaspers posited that embracing these boundary situations can lead to a more profound understanding of oneself and foster a quest for authenticity. He expressed, *"Within the realm of existence, one encounters both the exultation of a self-fulfilling life and the anguish of feeling adrift. Emerging in opposition to both, however, is the discontent with mere existence, the monotony of repetition, and the apprehension in the boundary situation of potential failure: every facet of existence carries within it the seeds of its own dissolution."* (Jaspers, 1951b, p. 40)

Karl Jaspers's existentialism holds profound implications for the realm of education. Rooted in the belief that human existence is deeply subjective and individual, Jaspers' philosophy challenges traditional educational paradigms. The relevance of his existentialism lies in its capacity to reshape our understanding of learning. His philosophy advocates for the acknowledgment of individual freedom and responsibility, urging educators to create environments that empower students to shape their own



intellectual paths. The existential lens encourages a departure from traditional, rigid structures, fostering a more personalized and meaningful educational experience. In embracing Jaspers' ideas, education transforms into a dynamic process that goes beyond the mere transmission of information, focusing on the holistic development of individuals and their ability to engage authentically with the world.

By emphasizing the subjective nature of human experience, Jaspers prompts a reevaluation of educational approaches, advocating for an environment that honors individual perspectives and fosters a sense of personal responsibility. In embracing Jaspers' existential principles, education becomes a transformative journey, encouraging students to explore, question, and actively engage in shaping their own intellectual paths. This paradigm shift underscores the enduring relevance of Jaspers' existentialism in redefining the essence of education.

Karl Jaspers, an influential existentialist philosopher, challenges traditional education paradigms, particularly the prevalent emphasis on credentials. In his existential philosophy, education transcends the mere acquisition of qualifications; it becomes a profound exploration of self and the world.

Jaspers vehemently critiques the reduction of education to a pursuit of credentials. He argues that this narrow focus stifles genuine intellectual growth and self-discovery. According to Jaspers, education should not be a mere checklist of degrees but a transformative journey that engages individuals in questioning their existence and understanding their place in the world.

Jaspers's existentialist perspective underscores the importance of fostering critical thinking and individual autonomy in education. Credential-centric approaches, he contends, risk producing conformist individuals more concerned with certificates than with genuine intellectual curiosity. Jaspers advocates for an education that encourages students to grapple with fundamental questions, to confront the uncertainties of existence, and to develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning.

This critique sets the stage for exploring Jaspers' views on higher education, where he delves deeper into the role of universities in cultivating true intellectual and existential growth. The subsequent discussion will further unveil Jaspers' vision for a meaningful and transformative educational experience.

#### **4.2. Jaspers' perspective on the purpose of university**

Karl Jaspers' profound insights into the purpose of a university have made an enduring impact on the field of educational philosophy. In exploring Jaspers' perspective, one encounters a vision that surpasses the traditional boundaries of academia. Jaspers contended that a university should transcend its role as a mere institution for knowledge dissemination; instead, it should function as a crucible for the comprehensive development of individuals. As we delve into an examination of Jaspers' views on the purpose of a university, we become immersed in a philosophy that places paramount importance not only on intellectual growth but also on the cultivation of self-awareness, ethical consciousness, and a profound engagement with the world. Jaspers' vision

challenges us to reassess the fundamental role of higher education, prompting us to envision universities as transformative spaces that shape individuals capable of critical thinking, independent inquiry, and a lifelong commitment to learning. This exploration of Jaspers' perspective unveils a profound understanding of education as a catalyst for personal and societal evolution, transcending the conventional boundaries of disciplinary divisions. Jaspers' conception of a university consistently emanates from his epistemological foundation. In delineating the immediate aim of the university, he provides the following description:

*"The university is the corporate realization of man's basic determination to know. Its most immediate aim is to discover what there is to be known and what becomes of us through knowledge. This eagerness to know expresses itself through observation, through methodical thought, and through self-criticism as a training for objectivity"* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 2).

The imperative for an unceasing commitment to the exploration of existence, as articulated by Jaspers, aligns with his characterization of the university. Jaspers, in his epistemological framework, underscores the necessity for an ongoing scrutiny of purported absolutes and an acknowledgment of the inherent limitations of human knowledge. This emphasis on perpetual questioning finds resonance in his conception of the university, where he envisions its purpose as the revelation of *"what there is to be known."* According to Jaspers, it is only logical that an institution of higher learning should be devoted to such a noble objective, as it mirrors the fundamental goal of humanity itself.

Contrary to being detached from human objectives, the university, in Jaspers' view, maintains a seamless continuity with the intrinsic human quest for knowledge. Jaspers articulates this alignment, stating that the university is not a separate entity but rather intricately connected to the elemental human desire to understand. Jaspers emphasizes that *"To be permeated by the idea of the university is integral to a way of life characterized by an unwavering will to search and seek without limitation, to allow reason to develop unrestrictedly, to maintain an open mind, to question everything, and to uphold truth unconditionally, all while recognizing the peril of daring to know."* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 68)

In Karl Jaspers' perspective, the essence of an individual unfolds as they strive for intellectual honesty, equating one's authenticity with the earnest pursuit of truth. Put differently, a person remains true to themselves in direct proportion to their commitment to seeking truth. The university, according to Jaspers, should not only serve as a source of inspiration but also as a practical avenue for manifesting this profound search. Importantly, this role must remain integral to the university's identity.

Jaspers regards the university atmosphere as an indispensable component of society, envisioning it as a guardian of intellectual integrity. Ideally, the university should actively contribute to preserving this facet of integrity, serving as a force that dispels foggy thinking and clarifies ambiguous goals within the human milieu. Without a

deliberate effort to maintain open minds and broad horizons, life itself risks constricting into narrow and stifling dimensions. He emphasizes, *"the university is an institution with practical objectives, but it attains them through an effort of the spirit that initially transcends them, only to subsequently return with greater clarity, strength, and calm."* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 2)

The purpose of a university, rooted in the pursuit of truth, is multifaceted and revolves around the systematic search for knowledge. Research stands as the foremost concern, as truth is deemed accessible through a meticulous exploration. In recognizing that the breadth of truth extends beyond the confines of science, the university emphasizes the dedication to truth as a human quest, transcending the limitations of specialized knowledge.

The second paramount concern of the university is teaching, recognizing that the transmission of truth is as crucial as its discovery. Teaching is not merely about conveying facts and skills; it serves as a vital component because understanding requires not only intellectual maturity but also the holistic development of an individual. Consequently, the university's mission, encompassing both instruction and research, goes beyond the mere imparting of information. It strives to mold the complete individual, fostering education in its broadest sense. In summary, Jaspers proposed:

*"The university's second concern is teaching, because truth must also be transmitted. Understanding, moreover, presupposes the intellectual maturity not just of the mind but of the whole man. It therefore follows that instruction and research must aim for more than the transmission of bare facts and skills. They must aim for formation of the whole man, for education in the broadest sense of the term."* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 3)

To map out the idea of the university requires a nuanced understanding of intellectual life, a domain manifested in one of its forms within the university. This exploration unfolds in three dimensions. First, it delves into the nature of intellectual life in general, shedding light on its various manifestations within the university. Subsequently, attention turns to the inherent responsibilities entwined with the collective realization of intellectual life within the university setting. Lastly, the examination extends to the concrete foundations of the university and how these foundations shape and influence its functioning. In essence, the purpose of a university is intricately linked to the pursuit of truth, the holistic education of individuals, and the conscientious navigation of intellectual life within the academic community.

### **4.3. Jaspers' perspective on the function of university**

In Jaspers' perspective, the university serves a tripartite function: conducting research, instructing, and educating. Among these, research stands out as the most fundamental, directly linked to humanity's innate desire for knowledge: *"The task of the university may therefore be distinguished into the three functions of research, the transmission of learning, and*

*education to culture. Each of these when considered in isolation is clearly inseparable from the other two" (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 37)*

The primary role of the university is encapsulated in research, where the pursuit of discovery and research is an inseparable whole, forming the bedrock of scholarship and its connection to the broader context. Jaspers asserts that the university, to some extent, seeks truth through science, making research its fundamental task. Through research, students not only acquire knowledge but also engage in a symbiotic relationship with teaching. Teaching, in Jaspers' view, necessitates the substance that only research can provide. This intertwining of research and teaching is the lofty and inalienable basic principle of the university: *"Above all, teaching vitally needs the substance which only research can give it. Hence, the combination of research and teaching is the lofty and inalienable basic principle of the university [...] He awakens similar impulses in his students. He directs his students to the source of knowledge"* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 45)

According to Jaspers, engaging in research involves three critical factors. Firstly, it requires the preparatory labor of becoming a journeyman in one's discipline, mastering the craft. Secondly, research entails a sense of meaning and direction. The third factor in research work falls under the umbrella of *"intellectual conscience,"* which specifically involves connecting one's insights to the entire structure of one's discipline and, ultimately, to the unity of knowledge itself.

The second facet of the university's mission is instruction, involving the transmission of learning at the highest echelons. This educational endeavor unfolds across three domains: lectures, laboratories and seminars, and discussions.

According to Jaspers, the lecture format serves a unique purpose beyond the mere efficiency of content transmission. He contends: *"The lecturer himself presents this content in such a way as to suggest the total context which motivates his scholarship. Through his tone, his gestures, the real presence of his thinking, the lecturer can convey the 'feel' of his subject [...] The lecture situation evokes something from the teacher which would remain hidden without it."* (Jaspers, 1959b, p. 57)

Laboratories and seminars play a crucial role in providing students with practical research experience. These settings offer opportunities to master the techniques and methods of their respective disciplines, fostering direct engagement with the subject matter and the elements of learning.

In Jaspers' view, seminars serve as a catalyst for communication and the development of essential skills. The performance of university tasks is intricately tied to communication among thinking individuals—between researchers, teachers and pupils, and among the students themselves. Jaspers emphasizes the necessity of communication at various intellectual levels: *"In order to do the work of the university successfully, there must be the communication of thinking men. Scholars must communicate with one another, teachers with their students and the students among themselves. Communication of all with all is necessary - each according to his intellectual level. We shall have to take up the meaning of this communication, the forms it may take and its freedom. Here is the living core of university life."* (Jaspers, 1959b, p. 37)

The third function of the university, that of education to culture, aligns with Karl Jaspers' perspective on culture as an acquired state shaped by a historical ideal. According to Jaspers, culture encompasses a coherent system of associations, values, and abilities that becomes second nature to an individual. Cultural ideals, as he describes, may differentiate individuals based on various factors such as social class, intellectual sphere, area of competence, or the institution where education was acquired. The feeling for form, self-discipline, and the belief that culture must be practiced until it becomes innate are common threads among all cultural ideals.

Jaspers distinguishes specialized training, focused on specific occupations, from general education. This differentiation often leads to social privilege, as illustrated in historical examples such as Hellenistic Egypt, where gymnastic education qualified individuals for public office.

Furthermore, Jaspers emphasizes the pivotal role of universities in shaping cultural ideals, particularly through scholarly and scientific disciplines, as he argues:

*“As far as culture originates at the university, it takes the form of scholarly and scientific discipline. This is the function of the scientific outlook and of the particular subjects emphasized. The scholarly and scientific outlook is more than specialized knowledge and competence. It is the ability to suspend temporarily one's own values for the sake of objective knowledge, to set aside bias and special interests for the sake of an impartial analysis of data.”* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 31)

Culture extends beyond specialized knowledge and involves the ability to suspend personal values for the sake of objective knowledge. This transformation fosters true objectivity by eliminating bias and fanaticism. According to Jaspers, the scientific outlook at universities contributes not only to imparting specific factual knowledge but also to the holistic transformation of an individual's personality.

#### **4.4. Jaspers' perspective on the existential essence of education in the university context**

Jaspers' assertion regarding the true purpose of university education is deeply rooted in a philosophy that prioritizes fostering an existential transformation within individuals. This perspective transcends conventional academic pursuits, constituting a profound journey of self-exploration characterized by the development of intellectual freedom and the realization of personal authenticity. Rather than perceiving the university solely as an information repository, Jaspers envisions it as a crucible for students to undergo a transformative process of self-discovery and intellectual emancipation. This holistic view emphasizes the university's role as a dynamic space that extends beyond the impartation of facts, becoming an environment where individuals not only broaden their intellectual horizons but also cultivate a deeper understanding of their own identity. Jaspers' philosophy underscores the transformative power of education, emphasizing its capacity to shape not only the mind but also the fundamental essence of individuals within the

rich tapestry of the university landscape. He asserts: *"University education is a formative process arriving at meaningful freedom. It takes place through participation in the university's intellectual life."* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 52)

In Jaspers' perspective, the existential essence of tertiary education is expressed through the genuineness of intellectual pursuits and the entitlement to academic freedom.

The genuine intellectual growth is intricately connected to the concept of self-realization, which Karl Jaspers identifies as the true linchpin for an individual's educational success. For Jaspers, the path to authenticity involves the continuous striving for intellectual honesty and the fundamental pursuit of truth as a means of remaining true to oneself, *"man becomes more himself as he strives to be intellectually honest."* (Riordan, 1976)

Jaspers contends that the university holds a pivotal role in both inspiring and facilitating this quest for truth. Within the ideal university setting, he identifies two indispensable tools - the scientific spirit and the study of philosophy-emphasizing their central role in fostering self-realization.

In the pursuit of knowledge and personal development, life experience is undoubtedly vital. However, within the confines of the ideal university, Jaspers underscores the transformative potential of the scientific spirit and philosophy as potent catalysts for self-realization.

The scientific spirit, devoted to empirical inquiry and objective exploration, establishes a structured and systematic framework for understanding the world. It fosters a methodical thinking approach, nurturing analytical skills and a deep appreciation for evidence-based knowledge. In light of this, Petkovska evaluates, stating, *"From Jasper's point of view, all scientific knowledge is related to knowledge as a whole. On the other hand, we can still consider his approach to scientific knowledge as a variation of an ideal interdisciplinary point of view which deserves to stand as a long-time goal for education. Students should always be aware of the association of all other disciplines with scientific knowledge and consider all knowledge to be related as a whole."* (Petkovska, 2010, p. 28)

Simultaneously, the study of philosophy engages in meaningful discourse with the scientific spirit. The communication of Philosophy, as Jaspers posits, *"does not give essential reality, but makes it possible to become aware of it."* (Jaspers, 1959b, p. 79) Philosophy, with its emphasis on critical thinking, metaphysical exploration, and probing fundamental questions, adds layers of depth to the educational journey. It prompts individuals to challenge assumptions, contemplate the nature of existence, and construct a comprehensive understanding of both the world and themselves.

These intellectual tools collectively shape an environment within the ideal university that surpasses the mere transmission of information. They cultivate a sincere pursuit of knowledge, motivating individuals to navigate the complexities of life, question their surroundings, and ultimately realize their intellectual potential. Consequently, the authentic essence of intellectual pursuits within higher education

transcends the mere accumulation of facts, evolving into a transformative process that leads to a profound understanding of oneself and the world.

Academic freedom, as defined by Karl Jaspers, is not only a legal concept but also a crucial aspect of the existential essence of higher education. In Jaspers' vision, academic freedom is more than just a principle; it is a determining factor in the overall mission of the university.

For Jaspers, academic freedom revolves around both *Lernfreiheit* (freedom of study) and *Lehrfreiheit* (freedom to teach). This means that students should have the unrestricted freedom, even if it entails certain risks, to choose and delve into any courses or subjects of their preference. Likewise, both students and educators have the entitlement to engage in free thought and research. Teachers should possess the freedom to impart knowledge on any topic or content within their discipline, bound only by the discipline's rigorous standards. Jaspers emphasizes this viewpoint by stating:

*"To live freely in the world of ideas is, on first inspection, fraught with danger for the student. He is thrown back upon his own resources since such a mode of life thrives only on one's own responsibility. From the freedom of teaching springs the freedom of learning. No authority, no rules and regulations, no supervision of studies such as are found in high schools must be allowed to hamper the university student."* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 54)

The Socratic method, likened to a "*midwifery, in which the student is helped to give birth to his abilities and powers.*" (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 50) Rather than being compelled from external sources, students are encouraged to develop an awareness of their own capacities through self-realization. Jaspers underscores the importance of transcending empirical individuality to discover one's true self in the process of education.

The Socratic teacher, according to Jaspers, resists the temptation to become an authoritative figure. Instead of succumbing to students' urges to establish hierarchical relationships, the teacher guides students back to themselves, fostering an environment where they grapple with paradoxes and engage in a contest for truth. In this intimate relationship, submission is replaced by a mutual pursuit of knowledge.

By advocating for Socratic education, Jaspers proposes an educational environment where academic freedom flourishes. This approach cultivates an atmosphere of perpetual questioning, personal responsibility, and the pursuit of truth, providing students with the freedom to explore diverse subjects, challenge assumptions, and ultimately contribute to their own intellectual development.

#### **4.5. Navigating the transformative landscape of University Education**

In contemplating the role of education in shaping the trajectory of humanity, Karl Jaspers expresses his convictions with a profound sense of urgency. He emphatically declares, "*Education will determine the human existence of the future, and a decay of education would mean the decay of mankind.*" (Jaspers, 1957, p. 111) This powerful statement underscores Jaspers' firm belief that the quality of education holds the key to the very essence of human

existence in the times to come. This powerful assertion underscores Jaspers' profound belief in the transformative power of education. According to him, the state of education is intricately linked to the trajectory of human civilization, and any neglect or deterioration in educational standards carries significant consequences for the future of the human species. In essence, Jaspers posits that the nature of human existence in the future is intricately tied to the quality of education provided in the present, making education a key determinant in shaping the destiny of mankind.

The contemporary landscape of university education often depicts it as a commonplace endeavor, primarily viewed as a means to an end – a gateway to professional opportunities. It is perceived as a pragmatic stepping stone, providing individuals with the necessary credentials to secure employment. This pragmatic outlook on education, emphasizing its instrumental role, stands in stark contrast to the profound vision Karl Jaspers held for the university. While recognizing the influence of prevailing conditions and societal shifts on the present state of higher education, Jaspers would likely acknowledge these developments without outright condemnation.

In the context of a scientific era characterized by efficiency and mass production, the university has evolved into an institution that, like many others, feeds graduates into predefined occupational roles based on diploma classifications. Jaspers, however, advocates for a more expansive role for philosophy and, by extension, the university. Beyond being a mere step in an efficient career-oriented process, Jaspers envisions the university as a transformative space, fostering a deeper engagement with knowledge and self-realization.

Jaspers' acknowledgment of these influences, without outright condemnation, encourages reflection on the changing nature of education. His visionary perspective confronts the tendency to reduce the university to a mere utilitarian function, prompting a reassessment of its overarching significance. According to Jaspers, the university ought to surpass its present role as a conduit for job placement, embracing a more profound mission. This mission involves the cultivation of individuals capable of engaging meaningfully and holistically with the intricate challenges of the world. In the words of Burch: *"Jaspers' writing serves to combat the basic fragmentation that derives from having lost sight of first principles and origins, of that which provides the ultimate theoretical foundation for the university."* (Burch, 1976)

Jaspers would acknowledge the university's role in ensuring job security as long as it remains just one component of its broader mission. However, when external influences, particularly political and sociological forces, take precedence and shape the university, the authentic purpose becomes distorted. According to Jaspers, the timeless ideal of the university is intellectual insight, and he cautions against any influence that might compromise this fundamental goal. Drawing from his experiences during the Nazi era, where a narrow vision stifled intellectual freedom, Jaspers warns against succumbing to restrictive atmospheres.

Expressing concern about the transformation of the university under the sway of political and sociological factors, Jaspers emphasizes that despite the diverse changes it



undergoes, the timeless ideal of intellectual insight is meant to be realized within its confines. However, this ideal is in a perpetual state of jeopardy, facing a constant risk of erosion. Jaspers underscores the enduring importance of intellectual depth and highlights the persistent threat it encounters amid the evolving landscape shaped by political and societal influences. *"Influences both political and sociological transform the university. Yet behind its many changing forms looms the timeless ideal of intellectual insight which is supposed to be realized here, yet which is in permanent danger of being lost."* (Jaspers, 1959a, p. 123)

In our contemporary context, the scientific orientation of society deeply colors the university, fostering a pragmatic emphasis on efficiency. This practical orientation manifests in viewing the university primarily as a practical step toward occupational security. While adapting to practical times is expected, Jaspers would caution against allowing pragmatism to overshadow intellectual pursuits. If the university becomes tyrannized by societal pragmatism, it risks succumbing to the enemy of intellectual insight, as warned by Jaspers.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on a critical analysis of Karl Jaspers' existential approach to university education, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the essence and effectiveness of higher education institutions:

*First*, universities should embrace a holistic approach to education. This means not only prioritizing academic achievements but also nurturing the moral, ethical, and existential dimensions of students. By incorporating programs that promote self-reflection, critical thinking, and personal growth, universities can foster well-rounded individuals capable of contributing significantly to society.

*Second*, Jaspers staunchly believed in the importance of academic freedom and autonomy. Universities should therefore strive to cultivate an environment where diverse ideas can be explored and engaged with, without fear of censorship or retribution. This is crucial for fostering intellectual exploration and inquiry, which lie at the heart of a vibrant academic community.

*Third*, reflecting Jaspers' belief in the interconnectedness of knowledge, universities should encourage interdisciplinary studies. By breaking down the boundaries between disciplines, students can gain a deeper understanding of complex global issues and develop innovative problem-solving skills. This broad perspective can better prepare students for the multifaceted challenges they will face in their future careers.

*Fourth*, universities should establish platforms for existential dialogue, enabling students and faculty to engage in meaningful discussions about the human condition, purpose, and modern life's challenges. These discussions can foster a deeper understanding of oneself and others and promote empathy and community spirit.

*Fifth*, in order to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, universities should incorporate experiential learning opportunities such as internships, community service, and real-world projects. This can help students see the relevance of their studies and prepare them for their future professional and societal roles.

*Sixth*, Jaspers emphasized the value of lifelong learning and continuous personal development. Universities should therefore provide resources and opportunities for alumni to continue their education and remain engaged with the academic community throughout their lives.

*Seventh*, in the digital age, universities should embrace new technologies and integrate them into the educational experience without compromising the core values of existential education. This means utilizing digital tools to facilitate learning while maintaining a focus on human connection and interaction.

*Eighth*, in order to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving society, universities should regularly assess and refine their educational practices and policies. This dynamic approach aligns with the spirit of existential philosophy, ensuring that the educational experience continues to meet the evolving needs of students and society.

## 6. Conclusion

Karl Jaspers' viewpoint on the essence and function of the university aligns seamlessly with the theory of existential education. According to Jaspers, the university should serve as the ontogenesis of the idea of developing intellectual life, functioning as an institution that facilitates both research and educational life for its members.

In the context of existential education, Jaspers rejects the notion of external imposition on scientific and educational activities. He envisions the university not as an externally acting totalizing force but as a responsible creator of conditions that allow scientific life to develop spontaneously within a community of scholars, researchers, and students. This perspective emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment where intellectual pursuits and existential awareness coalesce.

Post-World War II, where scientists were entangled in totalitarian power, Jaspers underscores the significance of humanism alongside the idea of the university. This integration of humanism becomes an integral component of fostering science within the university. Jaspers' perspective serves as a contemporary appeal, highlighting the institutionalized responsibility of science as an essential aspect of the social responsibility of the university.

In this holistic view, philosophy retains the role of the guardian of the idea of the university, tasked with pioneering reforms. Jaspers emphasizes the transformative power of education beyond the mere impartation of facts, aligning with the theory of existential education. In Jaspers' perspective, the university becomes a dynamic space where intellectual pursuits and existential transformation intersect, shaping not only the minds but also the fundamental essence of individuals within the educational landscape.

## Acknowledgements

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### About the Author(s)

The author's research field is modern, near-Western philosophy and political philosophy. Some of the author's research projects include: Nausea – The Manifesto of Existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre; Discussing Human Freedom in the Philosophy of Education of Existentialism; The Issue of Human Freedom in the Fourth Industrial Revolution – A View from the Perspective of Existential Philosophy; Vietnamese Intellectuals' Perspectives on Jean-Paul Sartre's Existential Philosophy in South Vietnam during the Period 1954-1975; Jean-Paul Sartre's Concept of Freedom: The Rebellion of Intellectual European in Early 20th Century.

## References

- Burch, R. (1976). Jaspers' Concept of the University. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 6, 15-22.
- Burwood, S. (2020). Karl Jaspers (1883–1969): Truth, academic freedom and student autonomy. *Philosophers on the University: Reconsidering Higher Education*, pp. 137-148. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339524443\\_Karl\\_Jaspers\\_1883-1969\\_Truth\\_Academic\\_Freedom\\_and\\_Student\\_Autonomy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339524443_Karl_Jaspers_1883-1969_Truth_Academic_Freedom_and_Student_Autonomy)
- Habermas, J., & Blazek, J. R. (1987). The Idea of the University: Learning Processes. *New German Critique*, 41 (Special Issue on the Critiques of the Enlightenment), 3-22.
- Jaspers, K. (1919). *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*. Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer.
- Jaspers, K. (1951a). *Way to Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy*. USA: Yale University Press.
- Jaspers, K. (1951b). *Philosophy of Existence*. USA: Pennsylvanian Press.
- Jaspers, K. (1957). *Man in the Modern Age*. New York: Doubleday & Co.
- Jaspers, K. (1959a). *The Idea of the University*. (H. A. Reiche, Trans.) Boston: Beacon Press.
- Jaspers, K. (1959b). *Truth and Symbol*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Lauken, U. (1996). *Situation: Psychologie und Soziologie*. (R. J. (Hrsg.), Ed.) *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, pp. Bd. 9 (S. 929-937).
- Lidz, V. (2021). *Karl Jaspers on Paradigmatic Individuals. From World Religions to Axial Civilizations and Beyond*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Östling, J. (2014). The Regeneration of the University: Karl Jaspers and the Humboldtian Tradition in the Wake of the Second World War. *The Humboldtian Tradition*, pp. 111-126.

- Petkovska, S. (2010). Questioning The Idea of the University. (I. a. Apostolova, Ed.) Educational Structures in Context: At the Interfaces of Higher Education. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215591037\\_Questioning\\_the\\_Idea\\_of\\_the\\_University\\_in\\_the\\_Contemporary\\_World](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215591037_Questioning_the_Idea_of_the_University_in_the_Contemporary_World)
- Prazny, A. (2023). Jaspers's Struggle for the Idea of the University. *Ruch Filozoficzny*, 1-13. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375658508\\_Jaspers's\\_Struggle\\_for\\_the\\_Idea\\_of\\_the\\_University](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375658508_Jaspers's_Struggle_for_the_Idea_of_the_University)
- Riordan, T. M. (1976). Karl Jaspers: An Existentialist Looks at University Education. *Educational Theory*, 26(1), 113 - 120. doi:10.1111/j.1741-5446.1976.tb00717.x
- Riordan, T. M. (1976). Karl Jaspers: An Existentialist Looks at University Education. *Educational Theory*, 26(1), 113–120. doi:10.1111/j.1741-5446.1976.tb00717.x
- Röhr, F. (2016). The Subject-Object-Relationship in Karl Jaspers' Periechontology – A Contribution to an Education for Openness, Tolerance and Existential Realization. *Educação Temática Digital*, 18, 696-613. doi:10.20396/etd.v18i3.8646186
- Sztobryn-Bochomska, J. (2016). The Concept of Existence by Karl Jaspers as a Contribution to Reflection on the Everyday Reality of Education. *Interdisciplinary Studies*, 1(2), 147-155.
- Wyatt, J. (1982). Karl Jaspers' The Idea of the University: An existentialist argument for an institution concerned with freedom. *Studies in Higher Education*, 7(1), 21-34. doi:10.1080/03075078212331379281

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Social Sciences Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)