

Constructing Meaning in University Educational Spaces: A Logotherapy-Informed Conceptual Inquiry into Existential Experience

Indah Puspitasari¹, Haris Supratno², Suyatno³, Anas Ahmadi⁴

Abstract

This study aims to analyse how meaning in life is constructed within university educational spaces through a logotherapy-based conceptual reading inspired by the narrative of Guru Aini. The study departs from the view that educational spaces do not merely function as physical learning environments, but as existential spaces that shape individuals' experiences, values, and life orientations. This research employs a qualitative conceptual–interpretive approach through a critical synthesis of selected literature on educational space as a meaningful space, logotherapy in the context of higher education, and conceptual, narrative, and interdisciplinary approaches in educational studies. The narrative of Guru Aini is positioned as a non-textual interpretive framework to enrich conceptual reflection, without being analysed as a literary object. The analysis shows that university educational spaces can be understood as spaces for the search for meaning in life, spaces of struggle and academic resilience, relational spaces that shape social experience, and spaces for the formation of students' values and life orientations. The analysis also reveals thematic parallels between experiences of educational space and narratives of educational struggle articulated in Guru Aini. This study affirms that educational space plays a strategic role in the construction of meaning in life and the holistic formation of human beings, extending beyond purely instructional functions and academic achievement. The main contribution of this study lies in integrating educational space studies and logotherapy, while enriching higher education discourse by positioning meaning in life as a fundamental dimension of learning experience.

Keywords: *Educational Space, Meaning in Life, Logotherapy, Higher Education, Guru Aini.*

Introduction

Educational space in the context of higher education is not merely a physical container for teaching and learning activities, but a meaningful space that actively shapes users' experiences, values, and life orientations. In architectural and human experience studies, space is understood as a relational entity that simultaneously integrates physical, social, and psychological dimensions, such that learning experiences cannot be separated from the quality of the space in which educational processes take place. Recent studies indicate that the design and configuration of educational spaces significantly influence pedagogical practices, emotional engagement, and learning outcomes, particularly when such spaces enable social interaction, activity flexibility, and active participation. This perspective positions educational space as an integral component of the educational process rather than a passive and neutral backdrop.

The affordance approach in learning environment studies emphasises that educational spaces provide specific possibilities for action that directly influence how teaching and learning occur. Innovative learning environments are understood as spaces capable of expanding pedagogical repertoires and responding to the evolving dynamics of educational needs (Young & Cleveland, 2022). Accordingly, educational space functions not only as an instructional medium but also as a structure of experience that shapes how individuals understand, inhabit, and make sense of learning processes. Nevertheless, despite the rapid development of research on educational architecture and learning

¹ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia, Email: indah.22041@mhs.unesa.ac.id, (Corresponding Author)

² Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia, Email: harissupratno@unesa.ac.id.

³ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia, Email: Suyatno-b@unesa.ac.id

⁴ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia, Email: anasahmadi@unesa.ac.id

environments, the dimension of meaning in life constructed through experiences of educational space remains relatively underexplored in higher education literature.

Within the university context, attention to the quality of learning experience has intensified alongside a paradigm shift from quantitative orientations toward the quality of experience and meaningful learning. Several studies indicate that informal learning spaces play a significant role in shaping students' reflective experiences, particularly when such spaces support spontaneous interaction, collaborative learning, and contextualised use of technology (Chen et al., 2022). These findings underscore that spatial meaning is constructed not only through formal academic activities in classrooms, but also through everyday experiences occurring in transitional campus spaces. Within the framework of spatial production theory, educational space is understood as the result of complex interactions among design, social practices, and users' lived experiences, such that spatial meaning is not merely experienced but also socially and culturally produced and internalised (Enkhtur & Rakhshandehroo, 2024). This perspective enables an understanding of university educational space as an arena in which meaning in life, educational values, and personal identity formation intersect.

Educational space also functions as a social practice lived through relationships among students, lecturers, and the wider academic community. Social interactions occurring within educational spaces contribute to the formation of more reflective and meaningful learning experiences, particularly through emotional engagement, a sense of belonging, and collective experience. When space is understood as a social practice, analytical attention extends beyond physical form to the relational dynamics mediated by space. Ergonomic aspects of educational space design further reinforce this understanding, as physical comfort has been shown to influence students' focus, creativity, and productivity. Research in architectural studio contexts demonstrates that ergonomically informed spatial design can act as a catalyst for more effective and creative learning processes (Arshard et al., 2023). Thus, educational space can be understood as an active medium that mediates both learning experiences and the construction of meaning in life.

On the other hand, education does not merely function as a means of knowledge transfer, but also as an existential process that helps individuals discover meaning and purpose in life. In this context, Viktor Frankl's logotherapy offers a relevant theoretical framework for understanding how meaning in life is constructed through learning experiences. Logotherapy emphasises the search for meaning as a primary human motivation, including within educational contexts. Several studies indicate that the application of logotherapy contributes to enhanced life purpose, psychological resilience, and learner well-being (Sun et al., 2021; Akhavan et al., 2025). These findings suggest that meaning in life is not only a clinical concern, but also highly relevant in higher education environments characterised by academic and existential demands. Integrating logotherapeutic perspectives into educational space studies enables a more holistic analysis of learning experiences as processes of human formation.

The drastic transformation of educational practices resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic further highlights the urgency of meaning in the learning process. Changes in learning methods and limitations on physical interaction have prompted educators and learners to reflect on the purpose and meaning of education in conditions of uncertainty. The literature suggests that meaning-oriented learning approaches have become increasingly relevant in this context, as they strengthen learners' mental resilience and character development (Aprianti & Sugito, 2022; Anjarwati et al., 2024). In such conditions, university educational spaces, both physical and symbolic become important arenas for the search for meaning in life and the reconstruction of learning experiences.

To understand the complexity of the relationship between educational space and meaning in life, this study adopts a conceptual, narrative, and interdisciplinary approach. The conceptual approach enables systematic connections among space, values, and social context within educational experience, while situating educational space analysis within a broader normative framework (Zimm et al., 2024). The narrative approach allows subjective experience to be understood as a source of meaning and identity reflection (Hu & Stahl, 2023; Smith et al., 2023), while the interdisciplinary approach integrates perspectives from architecture, psychology, and educational humanities to capture the complexity of higher education realities (Martins et al., 2022). Within this framework, literary works can function as non-textual interpretive media that enrich conceptual and symbolic reflection without being positioned as primary objects of analysis (Mariani & Ciancia, 2023).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyse how meaning in life is constructed within university educational spaces through a logotherapy-based conceptual reading inspired by the narrative of *Guru Aini*. This study is important because it addresses a gap between educational space studies

and meaning-in-life research, which have often developed separately. By integrating perspectives from spatial architecture, logotherapy, and conceptual narrative, interdisciplinary approaches, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to educational space scholarship while offering a new reflective framework for understanding educational space as a space for the search for meaning in life. Thus, this research not only extends understanding of the function of educational space, but also affirms its role in the holistic formation of human beings, intellectually, emotionally, and existentially.

Methodology

This study is designed as a qualitative conceptual study employing a conceptual interpretive approach aimed at analysing the construction of meaning in life within university educational spaces through the integration of meaningful space studies and logotherapy. The research design is non-empirical and does not involve field data collection or human participants. The focus of the study is directed toward conceptual analysis of ideas, theoretical frameworks, and findings from previous research addressing educational space as a meaningful space and logotherapy as an approach to meaning construction in the context of higher education (Young & Cleveland, 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Enkhtur & Rakhshandehroo, 2024).

The unit of analysis in this study consists of conceptual and theoretical themes relevant to the relationship between educational space, learning experience, and the search for meaning in life. The analysis focuses on key themes including spatial affordances, social and relational experiences within learning environments, educational ergonomics, and the principle of *will to meaning* in logotherapy (Arshard et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2021). These themes are treated as analytical categories that enable cross-literature synthesis and the integration of perspectives from educational architecture, existential psychology, and educational humanities.

The research procedure involves systematic literature search and selection of sources relevant to the study focus, followed by critical reading and thematic coding of key concepts emerging from each work. The coding process is not directed toward quantification of findings, but toward identifying conceptual patterns, argumentative coherence, and interconceptual relationships related to the construction of meaning in life within university educational spaces. This approach facilitates the development of a reflective and integrative understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The narrative of *Guru Aini* is employed as a non-textual interpretive framework that is inspirational and reflective in nature, without being positioned as an object of literary analysis. Its role is to enrich conceptual readings with symbolic and existential dimensions, in line with narrative and interdisciplinary approaches in educational research (Hu & Stahl, 2023; Mariani & Ciancia, 2023). In this way, the narrative functions as a heuristic medium that helps articulate the meaning of educational space within the context of the search for meaning in life.

Data analysis is conducted through thematic conceptual synthesis by comparing, grouping, and integrating themes emerging from literature on educational space and logotherapy. The analytical process is directed toward the development of conceptual propositions regarding the role of university educational space in the construction of meaning in life. Conceptual validity is ensured through argumentative consistency, internal coherence among concepts, and traceability of sources, enabling the analytical process to be followed and replicated by other researchers through the same stages of literature selection, thematic coding, and conceptual synthesis (Akhavan et al., 2025; Anjarwati et al., 2024; Zimm et al., 2024; Martins et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2023; Dikmen & Bayraktar, 2021).

Conceptual Findings and Discussion

1. University Educational Space as a Space for the Search for Meaning in Life

The conceptual analysis indicates that university educational space can be understood as a continuous space for the search for meaning in life, rather than merely as a location for formal academic activities. Within this framework, campus space functions as a reflective arena in which individuals negotiate life goals, personal aspirations, and future orientations. Educational spaces, both formal and informal, provide a symbolic context that enables learning experiences to be connected with existential questions concerning the direction and meaning of life.

Understanding educational space as a space for meaning-seeking is consistent with studies in educational architecture that position space as a structure of experience rather than merely a physical structure. The affordance perspective emphasises that educational spaces provide possibilities for action that influence how individuals think, feel, and act in the learning process (Young & Cleveland,

2022). This conceptual finding extends this perspective by demonstrating that the affordances of educational space not only affect pedagogical practices but also facilitate students' existential reflection on life purpose and personal commitment. Thus, university educational space functions as an existential medium that enables the search for meaning in life to unfold implicitly and continuously.

2. Spatial Experience as a Space of Struggle and Academic Resilience

University educational space can also be conceptually constructed as a space of struggle that demands academic and mental resilience. Learning experiences in higher education are often marked by pressure, failure, and performative demands that require personal endurance. In this context, educational space functions as a symbolic arena in which individuals relate academic struggle to broader struggles in life.

Studies that conceptualise space as a social practice indicate that educational space is lived through experiences imbued with meaning and emotion. The ergonomic perspective in educational space design highlights that physical spatial conditions influence students' focus, productivity, and creativity (Arshard et al., 2023). However, the conceptual findings of this study suggest that the function of space does not end with physical comfort, but extends to the formation of psychological resilience through personally meaningful experiences of struggle. From a logotherapeutic perspective, suffering and difficulty are viewed as opportunities to discover meaning in life. Accordingly, university educational space can be understood as an existential context that enables individuals to interpret academic pressure as part of a process of growth and self-formation (Sun et al., 2021; Akhavan et al., 2025).

3. Social Relations within Educational Space as a Source of Meaning in Life

The next conceptual finding indicates that the construction of meaning in life within university educational space is strongly influenced by the social relations that take place within it. Educational space functions as a relational space that enables interactions among students, lecturers, and the academic community to shape meaningful learning experiences. Meaning in life is not constructed individualistically, but through social dynamics mediated by particular spaces.

The literature on meaningful learning experiences emphasises that instructor support and social interaction play an important role in fostering learners' emotional engagement and personal reflection (Dikmen & Bayraktar, 2021). Narrative approaches in educational research further suggest that learning experiences are often interpreted through personal stories and reflections developed within relational contexts (Hu & Stahl, 2023; Smith et al., 2023). Accordingly, university educational space can be understood as a collective space in which meaning in life is negotiated, constructed, and sustained through ongoing social interaction.

4. Educational Space as a Space for the Formation of Values and Life Orientation

The conceptual analysis also shows that university educational space plays an important role in shaping students' values and life orientations. Education does not merely transmit knowledge, but also values, norms, and moral orientations through everyday practices mediated by space. In the context of logotherapy, meaningful education supports individuals in discovering personal values that provide direction and purpose for their actions.

These findings are consistent with literature that conceptualises education as a holistic process of human formation, particularly in contexts of change and crisis (Aprianti & Sugito, 2022; Anjarwati et al., 2024). From the perspective of spatial production theory, values and life orientations are produced through interactions among spatial structures, social practices, and personal experiences (Enkhtur & Rakhshandehroo, 2024). Thus, the design and management of educational spaces have direct implications for processes of value internalisation and the formation of students' life orientations.

5. Narrative Parallels between Educational Space and the Inspiration of *Guru Aini*

The use of the *Guru Aini* narrative as a non-textual interpretive framework enables a symbolic reading of university educational space as a space of struggle, dedication, and hope. Conceptually, there are thematic parallels between the educational narrative presented in *Guru Aini* and higher education spatial experiences oriented toward the search for meaning in life. This narrative enriches the analysis with reflective and symbolic dimensions without being positioned as a primary object of literary study.

This approach aligns with scholarship that positions literature and narrative as reflective media in education, enabling deeper and more contextual exploration of meaning (Mariani & Ciancia, 2023). In

this way, *Guru Aini* functions as a source of conceptual inspiration that strengthens the understanding of educational space as a space of existential transformation.

Discussion

Overall, this study demonstrates that university educational space constitutes an existential space that enables the construction of meaning in life through learning experiences, academic struggle, social relations, and value formation. These conceptual findings affirm that educational space cannot be understood reductively as a merely physical environment, but rather as a structure of experience that shapes human beings intellectually, emotionally, and existentially. By integrating educational space studies and logotherapy, this research extends higher education discourse by positioning meaning in life as a fundamental analytical category.

Research Implications

Theoretically, this study reinforces the concept of educational space as a meaningful space and extends it into the existential domain through a logotherapeutic perspective. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the potential of a conceptual–narrative–interdisciplinary approach in bridging educational space studies and the psychology of meaning. Practically, the findings provide a reflective foundation for educational space designers and educators to consider the dimension of meaning in life in the design, management, and practice of higher education.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, it is conceptual in nature and does not involve empirical or quantitative measurement of meaning in life. Second, the use of *Guru Aini* as a narrative inspiration is contextual and is not intended to represent the full range of higher education experiences. Third, the study does not systematically compare different types of educational spaces. These limitations open opportunities for future research to develop empirical investigations or mixed-methods approaches to test and extend the conceptual findings of this study.

Conclusion

This study affirms that university educational space cannot be understood merely as a physical container for learning activities, but rather as a meaningful space that actively contributes to the construction of meaning in life for its users. Through a logotherapy-based conceptual analysis, the study shows that experiences of educational space are lived as spaces for the search for meaning in life, existential struggle, relational engagement, and the formation of students' values and life orientations. Such interpretations position higher education processes as experiences that are not only cognitive and instrumental, but also existential and reflective.

By employing the narrative of *Guru Aini* as a non-textual interpretive framework, this study highlights that the search for meaning in life in education can be understood through the symbolism of struggle, dedication, and hope articulated in experiences of educational space. This approach demonstrates that academic challenges, institutional pressures, and social relations occurring within educational spaces can be interpreted as integral components of personal growth and identity formation. In this context, educational space functions as an existential medium that enables individuals to connect learning experiences with broader life purposes.

The main contribution of this study lies in integrating educational space studies, logotherapy, and a conceptual–narrative–interdisciplinary approach into a coherent analytical framework. In doing so, the study extends discourse in educational architecture and spatial studies by introducing meaning in life as a fundamental analytical category that has thus far received limited systematic attention. Academically, these findings strengthen the positioning of educational space as both a pedagogical and existential entity, while opening interdisciplinary dialogue among architecture, the psychology of meaning, and educational humanities in understanding higher education as a holistic process of human formation.

Directions for Future Research

Based on the conceptual findings and limitations of this study, future research is encouraged to develop more diverse empirical investigations to test and enrich understanding of the construction of meaning in life within educational spaces. Subsequent studies may explore comparative analyses of different types of educational spaces, such as formal and informal settings, to identify variations in meaning-making experiences across spatial contexts. Methodological approaches may also be

expanded through the integration of conceptual analysis with quantitative or mixed-methods designs to examine relationships among meaning in life, psychological well-being, and academic resilience.

Furthermore, future research may more specifically examine the role of educational space design, including ergonomic aspects, learning technologies, and spatial configurations in supporting processes of meaning-making in higher education. Cross-cultural and cross-institutional studies are also needed to understand how constructions of meaning in life within educational spaces are shaped by social, cultural, and educational policy contexts. The use of other literary works or educational narratives as non-textual interpretive frameworks is likewise worth developing to explore symbolic and narrative variations in the meaning of educational space. Through these directions, future studies are expected to deepen both the theoretical and practical contributions regarding the role of educational space in the holistic formation of human beings, intellectually, emotionally, and existentially.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to BPI for funding the author's doctoral (PhD) studies. The authors also thank the supervisors for their continuous guidance throughout the completion of this article, as well as colleagues who assisted with language editing and grammatical revision.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this study.

References

- [1] Akhavan et al. (2025) "Integrating Meaning and Purpose: A Spiritually-Informed Approach to Psychiatric Care" *Cureus*.
- [2] Akhavan, R., Erdman, D., & Perera, M. (2025). Integrating Meaning and Purpose: A Spiritually-Informed Approach to Psychiatric Care. *Cureus*. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.90567>
- [3] Anjarwati, A., Sriwijayanti, R., Isyuniandri, D., Zahra, P., & Aulia, U. (2024). Training of "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka (IKM)" Through in House Training (IHT) For 21st Century Prospective Teacher Student Communities. *Gandrung Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 5(1), 1376-1384. <https://doi.org/10.36526/gandrung.v5i1.3416>
- [4] Aprianti, N. and Sugito, S. (2022). Pembelajaran dalam Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Selama Masa Pandemi Covid-19: Sebuah Literature Review. *Jurnal Obsesi Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 6(4), 2785-2794. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v6i4.1663>
- [5] Aprianti dan Sugito "Pembelajaran dalam Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Selama Masa Pandemi Covid-19: Sebuah Literature Review" *Jurnal obsesi jurnal pendidikan anak usia dini* (2022).
- [6] Aprianti, N. and Sugito, S. (2022). Pembelajaran dalam Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Selama Masa Pandemi Covid-19: Sebuah Literature Review. *Jurnal Obsesi Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 6(4), 2785-2794. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v6i4.1663>
- [7] Arshard, W., Kadir, T., Aziz, T., & Mokhtar, Z. (2023). Comparative Learning Environment of Architectural Design Studio Layout in Malaysia. *Iop Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science*, 1217(1), 012019. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1217/1/012019>
- [8] Century Prospective Teacher Student Communities. *Gandrung Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 5(1), 1376-1384. <https://doi.org/10.36526/gandrung.v5i1.3416>
- [9] Chen, Y., Wu, J., Zou, Y., Wei, D., & Zhou, X. (2022). Optimal Design and Verification of Informal Learning Spaces (ILS) in Chinese Universities Based on Visual Perception Analysis. *Buildings*, 12(10), 1495. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings12101495>
- [10] Dikmen, B. and Bayraktar, N. (2021). Nursing Students' Experiences Related to Operating Room Practice: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Perianesthesia Nursing*, 36(1), 59-64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jopan.2020.06.025>
- [11] Enkhtur, A. and Rakhshandehroo, M. (2024). Using Social Space Perspective to Explore SDGs Curricula Localisation: Case Study at Two Japanese National and Private Universities. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 79(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12585>
- [12] Hu, Y. and Stahl, G. (2023). Capturing Habitus: Reflections on the Use of Narrative Inquiry to Explore Female Learner Identities in Chinese STEM Higher Education. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231204772>
- [13] Mariani, I. and Cancia, M. (2023). Design for Narrative Change. A Pedagogical Model for Interactive Digital Narratives. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 42(3), 384-401. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12468>
- [14] Martins, F., Cezarino, L., Liboni, L., Botelho, A., & Hunter, T. (2022). Interdisciplinarity-Based Sustainability Framework for Management Education. *Sustainability*, 14(19), 12289. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141912289>
- [15] Smith et al. (2023) Smith et al. "Narrative-based learning for person-centred healthcare: the Caring Stories learning framework" (Hu & Stahl, 2023).

- [16] Smith, L., Villar, F., & Wendel, S. (2023). Narrative-based learning for person-centred healthcare: the Caring Stories learning framework. *Medical Humanities*, 49(4), 583-592. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2022-012530>
- [17] Sun, F., Chiu, N., Yao, Y., Wu, M., Hung, C., Chen, C., ... & Chiang, C. (2021). The effects of logotherapy on meaning in life, depression, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation, in patients with depression: An intervention study. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 58(4), 1891-1899. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.13003>
- [18] Young, F. and Cleveland, B. (2022). Affordances, Architecture and the Action Possibilities of Learning Environments: A Critical Review of the Literature and Future Directions. *Buildings*, 12(1), 76. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings12010076>
- [19] Zimm, C., Mintz-Woo, K., Brutschin, E., Hanger-Kopp, S., Hoffmann, R., Kikstra, J., & Schinko, T. (2024). Justice considerations in climate research. *Nature Climate Change*, 14(1), 22-30. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-023-01869-0>.