

HOLISTIC EDUCATION CONCEPT: HISTORICAL-PEDAGOGICAL, LEGAL, SOCIOCULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL SPACE

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to analyzing the existing views and formulated paradigms within holistic education as philosophy and pedagogical approach, based on the investigation of historical origins and humanistic essence of the concept of holistic education of the individual. A multidisciplinary approach to the formation of literature sources sample is applied, which enabled to consider the concept of holistic education from various view angles and viewpoints within its evolution and essence. The sample size included 26 entries. The paper outlines the historical-pedagogical, legal, and sociocultural dimensions of its institutionalization within the European social space. The content of the idea of holistic education of the individual is analyzed. Comparing and aligning the findings and opinions from the sources under consideration allowed emphasizing that the pedagogical ideal of this concept places exceptional importance on such personal criteria as flexibility and adaptability, emotional resilience and support, systemic and critical thinking, collaboration and networking, creativity and innovativeness. The components of the contemporary understanding of the goals of holistic education are outlined.

Keywords: holistic education; humanism; Early Modern Period; holism

INTRODUCTION

A systematic analysis of contemporary society reveals the active spread of trends conceptualized by scholars within the philosophy of the BANI-world. This framework refers to such postmodern attributes as "brittle", "anxious", "nonlinear", and "incomprehensible", which define the complexity of both professional activity and the contradictions in personal development in the contemporary era (Halil et al., 2025). In light of this, a new societal demand emerges for education — the formation of a holistic personality capable of effectively functioning in the context of an unstable, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible world.

Miseliunaite et al. (2022) in their systematic study pose an ultimate question whether holistic education can address global issues. Large-scale quantitative and comparative studies demonstrating the advantages of holistic education, its influence on societal and personal development, and the training of teachers to become holistic educators are lacking, according to their study. Research examining how holistic education affects environmental awareness in comparison to regular education is lacking. Meanwhile, the modern world requires a renewed concept of holistic education for individuals. Within the content of its educational ideal, certain personal criteria gain exceptional importance: flexibility and adaptability, which involve the ability to dynamically adjust one's professional activities to social, technological, psychological, and other changes; emotional resilience and support, which enable the creation of a safe working environment, emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence, mental health, empathy, and the ability to listen and provide support during moments of anxiety; systemic and critical thinking, which helps to navigate complex and incomprehensible situations, encourages asking meaningful questions rather than merely seeking the "right" answers, and develops skills in analysis, interpretation, and forecasting; collaboration and networking, which direct individuals to work not in isolation but within ecosystems, motivating and encouraging joint work, project-based activities, idea exchange, and the establishment of horizontal communication channels; creativity and innovation, which foster openness to experimentation, new formats, and unconventional solutions; global vision and local action, which cultivate awareness of global challenges (such as ecology, wars, migration) while simultaneously respecting local context, culture, language, and traditions.

The theoretical-methodological and historical-pedagogical analysis of the concept of holistic education for individuals has been the subject of scientific studies by various scholars. In their research, scholars analyzed the content of humanistic education, focusing on the historical and civilizational dynamics of its development and exploring the essence of the Renaissance educational paradigm (Miller, 2002). Additionally, some researchers who have explored the idea of holistic education for individuals include E. Clark, R. Martin, J. Miller, R. Miller, R. Nava, D. Phillips, C. Flake, S. Forbes, A. Harris, and others. These scholars analyzed the humanistic content of the concept of holistic education, paying particular attention to its components. At the same time, it is essential to analyze the development of the idea of holistic education in the Early Modern period, highlighting its value and institutional aspects.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the ideological origins and content of the concept of holistic education for individuals, as well as to examine the historical-pedagogical, legal, and sociocultural dimensions of its institutionalization in the European social space during the Early Modern period.

The study is based on a comprehensive use of theoretical and specialized research methods. The methodology for studying the concept of holistic education encompasses a wide range of approaches, as the concept is interdisciplinary and philosophical-pedagogical in nature. The idea of holistic education involves analyzing the educational process of personality formation across various dimensions — intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social, and physical. It is essential to analyze scientific concepts, synthesize ideas on personal development within different educational traditions, conduct comparative analyses of different educational models (traditional, alternative, transformational), and compare approaches to personality development across cultures and educational systems.

Holistic education' conceptual essence

According to Mahmoudi et al. (2012), holistic education includes a diverse set of philosophical views and pedagogical techniques. It focuses on totality and tries not to leave out any important components of the human experience. It is a diverse and inclusive movement whose central tenet is that educational experiences create a less materialistic and more spiritual worldview, as well as more dynamic and comprehensive perspectives on reality. In contemporary times, the concept of holistic education serves as an effective response to the challenges of the BANI world, where instability, complexity, chaos, and information overload demand emotional flexibility and moral maturity (awareness of emotions, acceptance, reflexivity, value orientation), systemic thinking (wholeness, contextuality, dynamics of change), resilience and adaptability (cognitive flexibility, tolerance for uncertainty, emotional stability, initiative, self-directed learning), as well as the capacity for empathy and responsibility (emotional and cognitive empathy, readiness to support and assist) (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

Johnson (2023) emphasizes that “holistic learning theory is more than a philosophy”. According to the author, holistic education is a philosophy of education, but it is also a strong theory of learning that should be considered alongside other theories of learning. This article discusses holistic education as an educational theory.

Saw (2013) considers a very framework of holistic education. The author contends that a holistic approach to educating students seeks to open the mind, nurture the spirit, and awaken the heart. The key principles of holistic education are a synergistic relationship between the various developmental areas, which all work together to improve the effectiveness of each aspect. The ultimate goal of holistic education is to assist students in achieving self-actualization, as described in Maslow's hierarchy. The curriculum is designed so that each kid understands what they need to learn, and it includes activities that teach pupils values, relationships, and the essence of beauty. Transformative, Connecting, Flexible Pacing, Transdisciplinary Inquiry, Meaningfulness, and Community are ways for helping students determine what is relevant to them. Teachers encourage cooperation rather than competition to create a sense of community at school, and students strive to understand themselves and their relationships with one another.

Pinto (2017) discusses the foundation and ideas of holistic education. He underlines that the notion of holistic education encompasses a variety of influences from philosophy, psychology, pedagogy, physics, and religious traditions. A prevalent assumption among the bodies of knowledge from many disciplines is “wholeness”, which means that everything is made up of interrelated and nested whole systems. Such an idea suggests that education should develop the full person, including their physical, emotional, cerebral, and spiritual qualities, as well as nurture excellent interactions at many levels: people, communities, society, planet, and cosmos. According to Pinto (2017), the primary goal of education is self-transformation, or the ongoing pursuit of growth and development via nurturing human potential. Its distinguishing qualities include an assumption of interconnectedness between all things, a celebration of plurality and choice, a stress on relationship quality, the fundamental role of experience and engagement, and a concern for human spirituality.

Miseliunaite's (2022) systematic review article defines holistic education as a type of education that focuses on whole-person development, with an emphasis on humanistic and post-humanistic ideas of environmental education and the interconnectedness of all living and non-living ecosystems on the planet. According to this description, all identified elements of holistic education were classified into three categories: (1) human completeness, (2) humanistic education, and (3) posthumanistic education (see Figure 1).

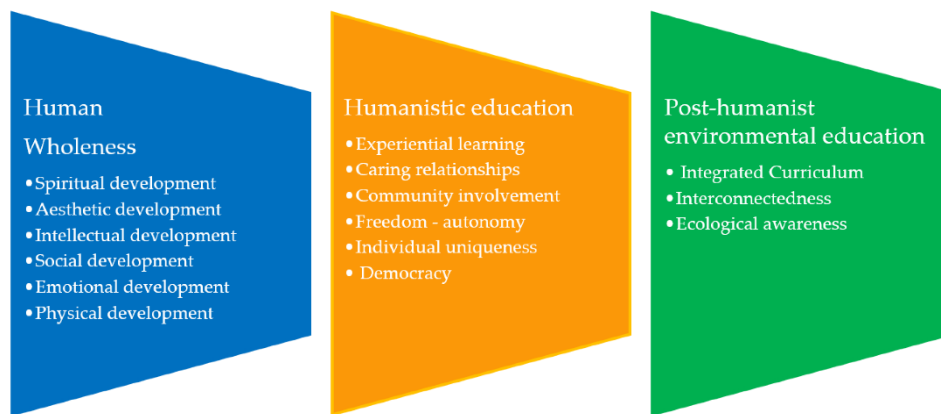


Fig. 1. Holistic education features (Miseliunaite et al., 2022)

Lahon (2016) studies the significance of holistic education in ensuring students' optimal developmental outcomes. According to the author, the major goal of holistic education is to nurture the inherent potential for human growth. Education from a holistic perspective is concerned with the full development of each student's physical, intellectual, social, emotional, artistic, and spiritual potential. It not only prepares children for academic achievement, but also allows them to learn about themselves, healthy relationships, societal duties, and humanitarian ideals such as compassion, cooperation, and peace. Holistic education has the potential to guide pupils into new areas of thought, widen their personal and critical thinking skills, and foster a respect for the world around them. Holistic education is a strategy that can address the requirements of all sorts of learners while also preparing future citizens to make the world a better place. Holistic education guides students toward optimal growth with a global conscience, a vision of peace, compassion, and intellect that is required for a better society (Lahon, 2016).

Specifics of competency approach in holistic education

Yuk Chan (2024) emphasize that holistic education focuses on the development of a diverse set of linked capabilities that include a person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and creative components. These capabilities include critical thinking, emotional intelligence, communication skills, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and social skills, among others. They are not discrete talents, but rather integrated components of the full person, which contribute to lifelong learning and well-being.

Lahn and Nore (2019) conducted research in the Norwegian context, focusing on holistic professional competence in vocational education and training. The writers emphasize comprehensive professional competencies as multifaceted. They argue that test motivation, learning environment, and vocational identity - a hierarchical log-linear analysis of the Norwegian material shows that both the learning assistance of the firms and the training offices contributed considerably to performance levels.

Mkulu (2020) examines the importance of holistic education in preparing university students for industrial growth in Tanzania. The study used mixed techniques, convergent parallel research methodologies designs, which included both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The data gathering instruments included a questionnaire, an in-depth interview guide, and observation. The results showed that the majority of Tanzanian graduates were preparing for white collar jobs, but they lacked the ability to translate theoretical knowledge to the workplace, which is required. Thus, the study recommended that educational curricula be reviewed to meet the needs of the people, and that intensive mentoring programs be launched by establishing links with other industry investors, alumni, professional, and business professions so that university students can gain knowledge and skills for industrial development.

Miller (2018), in the "International Handbook of Holistic Education", writes that the components outlined form the competency block of a holistic education for the individual. Emotional flexibility can be defined as the ability to be aware of, accept, and manage emotions while adapting to changing circumstances without losing inner balance. Systems thinking is the ability to view the world as an interconnected network of elements, understanding interdependencies, influences, and long-term consequences of decisions. Adaptability is seen as the ability of a person to quickly and effectively adjust to new circumstances, changes, or stressful situations, maintaining efficiency, balance, and productivity. In contrast, empathy allows one to understand and feel the emotional state of another person, to view the situation from their perspective, without judgment, with openness and inner acceptance. In the document by Asia-Europe Foundation (2023), it is claimed that that holistic education is aimed at ensuring the comprehensive and harmonious development of the individual, fostering the ability to interact effectively and fully with society, and ensuring self-realization. Holistic education is a process of personality formation that focuses not only on academic success but on the development of a person as a multidimensional individual who interacts in a global world. Holistic education serves as both a philosophy and a practice of learning, oriented towards the development of all aspects of a person's personality: intellectual, emotional, social, moral, spiritual, and physical. Within its philosophy, the individual is positioned as a unified, unique whole, and it is recognized that true learning must occur at all levels of human existence, not just in the realm of intellectual activity.

The concept of holistic education of the individual, in the focus of pedagogical care, defines the following spheres: knowledge (cognitive sphere); values and ethics (spiritual sphere); feelings and experience (emotional sphere); interaction with others (social sphere); action and physicality (practical and physical spheres). Each of these components is included in the interactive content of education, which ensures the full and harmonious development of different aspects of the personality. The modern educational system involves the use of logic, critical thinking, and well-founded knowledge, with the content of education built on scientifically proven principles. The key goal of modern education is centered around developing the ability to analyze information, ask questions, and make logical conclusions (Yanmei et al., 2023).

The roots and origin of holistic education paradigm

Holistic education, according to Florencio-Wain (2021), is an inclusive and diverse movement that began in the middle of the 1980s in opposition to the mainstream educational paradigm that was then in vogue. It is an educational paradigm that combines spiritual philosophical concepts with the idealistic notions of humanistic education. It is predicated on the idea of holism, which holds that the cosmos is composed of cohesive wholes that are not equal to the sum of their individual components. Isolating variables to study little areas of reality can never allow one to understand the entire. The cosmos cannot be dissected like a mechanical clock in order for science to comprehend and explain how it functions. The greatest way to understand any entity - be it a human, the cosmos, sheep, a school, a classroom, a curriculum, an idea, or a subject matter - is to look at the rules that dictate how the system behaves. Theories of holism serve as the foundation for holistic education.

Preston (2012) adds that the general philosophy of holism is the source of the idea of holistic education. She notes that Smuts (1926/1987) originally used the term “holism” to refer to the natural mechanics of the world in his epic work “Holism in Evolution”. Preston (2012) goes on to say that Smuts' concept of holism is the basis for many hybrid expressions found in contemporary writing. Specifically, academics and other educational leaders frequently use the terms “holistic learning” and “holistic education” in a range of contexts. One typical feature of holistic learning in schools and other formal educational settings is the delivery of instruction in which clearly defined, specialized subject matter (such as English, arithmetic, art, biology, etc.) becomes hazy. As an alternative, subject-specific information is converted into experiences that are multidisciplinary, interdependent, intersected, integrated, and linked. A fundamental tenet of holistic learning is that information is efficiently learned when its component pieces work in concert with one another.

Akmence et al. (2015) stress that from a holistic perspective, true learning is said to have occurred when educational experiences elicit a transformation of consciousness that leads to a greater understanding of and care for self, others, and the community (world and local). Learning can thus be expressed in terms of personal transformation as it relates to the expansion of consciousness. This is a type of learning that can be described but not always quantified. Consciousness here is not some mystical, new-age entity of which to be afraid; rather it is simply what we are aware of, both internally and externally. We can transform our selves and ultimately the world around us by transforming consciousness. This can occur externally by acquiring new knowledge, having authentic experiences, and learning skills that are used to act upon the world. Consciousness can be transformed internally by what we choose to give our attention to.

Miller (2002) notes that the birth of the modern concept of holistic education of the individual dates back to Ancient times. From the ancient “καλοκάγαθία”, through the Renaissance “pietas litterata” and the modern “cura personalis”, to the postmodern “holistic education” – this is a list of the key bifurcation points in the civilizational development of the idea of holistic education. Throughout historical development, the internal contexts and practices of implementing the idea of holistic education have changed, and the essential characteristics of the ideal of a holistic personality have undergone significant transformations (what was considered beautiful in one era could be viewed as mundane in another). However, the corresponding humanistic educational philosophy has only theoretically enriched itself, gaining new, well-founded, and motivated connotations.

Grynova et al. (2024) note that the key era for the ideological formation and institutionalization of holistic education of the individual was the early Modern period. The ideas of holistic education of the individual, proposed by Renaissance humanists at the time, allowed for the consolidation of the educational process, shifting the prevailing spiritual-religious priorities of the Middle Ages toward a harmonious integration of intellectual, spiritual-moral, physical, social, and aesthetic education. The humanistic idea of holistic education of the individual was successfully “adopted” and implemented in the educational practices of Protestant and Jesuit education, whose institutionalization fundamentally transformed the educational landscape of European countries and laid the foundations for modern education.

Yakovenko (1997) emphasizes that renaissance humanists made a successful attempt to change the vision of medieval education. In contrast to the medieval educational paradigm, the idea of holistic education of the individual and its comprehensive and harmonious development was proposed. Humanists, without completely breaking from the medieval moral-religious priorities, substantiated a pan-European program of *pietas litterata* (“educated piety”), which became the foundation of the early modern idea of holistic education of the individual. At the core of this program were three main “competencies”: knowledge of Latin, which at the time was equated with education, active piety, and the ability to behave properly in all situations. Humanists constructed a pedagogical ideal that harmoniously combined rationality and virtue, with eloquence being identified as its external attribute. The pedagogical maxim “sapientem et eloquentem pietatem” (“learned and eloquent piety”) was formed. Intellectuality

and morality were the two components of the contemporary understanding of the holistic development of the individual. Their exceptional pedagogical significance was debated by humanists, while the reformers of education at the time – Protestants and Jesuits – actively implemented the idea of holistic education of the individual into the educational processes of early modern gymnasiums and colleges. Antoniuk (2014) writes that the content of the pedagogical program *pietas litterata* was aimed at shaping *perfectio hominis* (“the perfect individual”), who would successfully develop both the ethical potential, the values of piety and virtue, and pay sufficient attention to the development of intellectual abilities and the improvement of physical strength.

The resource potential of the early modern concept of holistic education of the individual was significantly undermined by the fact that it focused on constructing a comprehensive approach to the organizational and pedagogical dimension of education. While in medieval pedagogy the educational process was mostly limited to dogmatic teaching and formal, reproductive assimilation of material, in institutions of education founded by Protestants and Jesuits, the organizational and pedagogical support for teaching and upbringing was significantly expanded. Shevchenko (2013), studying the educational process in Latin schools, noted that the paths to achieving the educational ideal – “*sapientem et eloquentem pietatem*” – could be described through the concepts of “*docere*” (“to teach”), “*movere*” (“to motivate”), and “*delectare*” (“to entertain”).

Paran'ko (2008) emphasizes that it is important to note that the process of implementing the idea of holistic education of the individual was outlined in the normative-legal documents of the time. In the Jesuit order, which was the leader of the contemporary educational reform, institutional and normative documents were prepared, including the *Formulae* of the Society of Jesus, the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus, and the *Ratio Studiorum* statute, in which the educational track occupied a central place. These documents emphasized the key mission of the Jesuit order – the organization of education and upbringing of the youth of the time, “... making special efforts for the progress of souls in Christian life and knowledge... especially through the education of children” (The *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus and Their Supplementary Norms, 1996).

In the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus (1996) (*Constitutiones Societatis Iesu*), the values and organizational-pedagogical foundations of the order's schooling were outlined. The document defined the mission and pedagogical identity of the Jesuits, presented the spiritual-pedagogical conditions for the initial education of new members of the society, as well as the structure, methods, and forms of teaching and upbringing. A separate part of the document was dedicated to justifying the pedagogical ideal, the system of virtues, and Christian perfection. An important place in this group of sources is also occupied by the order's document titled *The First and General Examination to be Given to All Those Applying for Admission to the Society of Jesus* (*Examen Generalis*). In it, the division of Jesuit education into care for the order's (*Sholastici S.I.*) and secular (*Sholares Externi*) youth was defined, pedagogical features of the entrance examinations (probation) were outlined, and the way of life and structure in the order's schools were presented.

Thus, the early modern dimension of holistic education of the individual harmoniously combined humanist and Christian pedagogical ideals, laying the foundations for modern European education. A successful attempt was made to reconcile rational knowledge with religious morality, which enabled a successful response to the demands of the new European society.

Contemporary implications of holistic education

In pedagogical theory, among the key components of the institutionalization of holistic education of the individual, the following are identified:

- intellectual development, which involves the formation of cognitive functions, imagination, creativity, the ability to engage in systems thinking, analysis, synthesis, and analytical problem-solving through the involvement of learners in project-based activities, research learning, interactive methods, etc. Intellectual development includes mastering a wide range of general theoretical and professional knowledge and skills, forming the ability to think critically, analyze information, assess its credibility, recognize manipulation, and draw well-founded conclusions, as well as developing self-learning and self-management skills (The Brookings Institution, 2022);
- physical health, which focuses on integrating physical exercises, sports activities, and competitions into the educational process, promotes an active lifestyle and engagement in sports, adherence to proper nutrition, work and rest routines, and an awareness of the value of health as a key condition for the holistic development of the individual. This, in turn, influences intellectual activity, emotional well-being, and social engagement (Weiss, 2011);
- emotional intelligence, which enables individuals to clearly recognize and understand their own emotions, anticipate their impact on behavior, develop self-regulation, and control emotions, avoid impulsivity and excessive emotionality, demonstrate empathy, and understand the emotions and experiences of others. It also involves having motivation that helps achieve goals in complex and critical situations, work effectively, and resolve conflicts. The task of developing emotional intelligence and empathy involves integrating art therapy, discussions about feelings, and attentive consideration of the spiritual world of learners into the educational process (Mahmoudi et al., 2012);
- social skills, aimed at developing communicative qualities, the ability to work in a team, implement leadership and partnership, and effectively interact with others. These skills include building relationships, collaborating, adapting to the social environment, and realizing the potential of qualities such as sociability, empathy, the ability to collectively set and achieve goals, resolving disputes peacefully, defending one's position, and more (Flake, 1993);

– spiritual and moral development, which involves the formation of values and life principles, self-awareness, and personal growth, respect for culture, traditions, and nature, ecological thinking, and a values-based attitude toward the world.

CONCLUSION

In the early modern period, the idea of holistic education of the individual was constructed within various secular and religious cultural-philosophical systems. Its theoretical and conceptual foundations, being grounded in the ancient educational ideal of *καλοκάγαθία*, were practically enriched by the Renaissance paradigm of *pietas litterata* and ultimately formed in the postmodern concept of holistic education. The early modern notion of holistic education of the individual was based on the pan-European program *pietas litterata* (“educated piety”) and established the pedagogical ideal of *perfectio hominis* (“the perfect individual”), which encompassed knowledge of Latin, active piety, and the ability to behave appropriately in all situations. The content of holistic education was shaped by the particularities of this pedagogical concept, which evolved through the complex struggle between medieval dogmatism and the Renaissance humanistic vision of the modern individual.

At present time, holistic education is viewed as an innovative approach aimed not only at the transmission of knowledge but also at the harmonious development of all aspects of the individual: intellectual (thinking, analysis, creativity), emotional (self-awareness, empathy, emotional literacy), moral (values, conscience, ethics), spiritual (search for meaning, personal integrity), physical (health, bodily awareness), and social (communication, collaboration, civic engagement).

The development and institutionalization of holistic education in the European cultural space holds significant sociocultural value, determined by its exceptional pedagogical and human-constructive potential in shaping a well-rounded, conscious, emotionally mature, and socially responsible individual, capable of living and acting in a complex, multifaceted, rapidly changing world. Holistic education helps organize the chaos of modernity, preserve the inner world, establish connections, and ensures social stability and cultural enrichment of society.

Holistic education in postmodern society emerges as a response to the challenges of fragmentation, relativism, and the crisis of meaning. Postmodernism is characterized by the multiplicity of truths, the blurring of traditional hierarchies of knowledge, and the fleeting nature of cultural markers. In this context, holistic education seeks to restore harmony in the development of the individual, not limiting learning to intellectual or professional preparation alone, but integrating emotional, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. In conditions of postmodern uncertainty, holistic education fosters the formation of an individual capable of independently seeking meaning, constructing their own identity, and responsibly interacting with the world. The philosophy of holistic education enables the nurturing of a person who not only possesses knowledge but also understands themselves, others, culture, and nature as an interconnected whole. This approach helps avoid depersonalization and alienation, which are characteristic of the technologized information society. In holistic education, interdisciplinarity, emotional intelligence, reflection, and dialogue acquire special significance. The educational process in the postmodern world must be open, dynamic, and co-creative, focused not only on the acquisition of knowledge but also on the formation of life competencies, flexibility, empathy, and the ability to live in a multicultural environment. Holistic education in postmodern society fulfills a humanistic and unifying mission. It contributes to the development of a well-rounded individual capable of thinking critically, acting ethically, empathizing, and taking responsibility for both collective and personal futures.

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