



Integrative Pedagogies for Cultivating Wholeness in the 21st Century Child

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Abstract

In an age marked by rapid technological change, social fragmentation, and cognitive overload, conventional models of education often fall short of nurturing the full spectrum of human potential in children. This paper explored the concept of integrative pedagogies as a framework for cultivating wholeness in the 21st-century learner, an approach that weaves together cognitive, emotional, ethical, creative, and social dimensions of child development. Leveraging on the interdisciplinary matrix across education, psychology, philosophy, and indigenous knowledge systems, the study employed a literature-based methodology to interrogate the fragmented nature of modern schooling and proposed a more holistic, child-centred alternative fitting for the 21st century child amidst technological advancements and innovations.

Keywords: Holistic Education, Child-Centred Learning, 21st Century Skills, Emotional and Social Development, Multidisciplinary Teaching Approaches

Introduction

The education of children in the twenty-first century unfolds in a manner defined by rapid technological change with shifting social structures, and deepening uncertainties about the future. Traditional models of schooling, long built around the transmission of academic knowledge and measurable outcomes, appear insufficient to prepare learners for these realities. UNESCO (2021 p.12) emphasises this concern in its global report on the future of education, arguing that “education is at a crossroads” and that existing approaches are no longer adequate to address the complexity of life in contemporary societies. This declaration points to the inadequacy of fragmented educational practices that prioritise cognitive achievement while overlooking the emotional, ethical, and social aspects of development. For the twenty-first-century child, wholeness is not a luxury but a necessity as schools that fail to address the full spectrum of human capacities risk producing graduates who are academically capable yet socially disoriented, emotionally fragile, or ethically immoral.

The notion of wholeness becomes particularly pressing when considered alongside the global emphasis on skills for the future. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020 p.34) curate these needs within its learning framework for 2030, with the point that “cognitive and non-cognitive skills cannot be separated if learners are to thrive in an uncertain future”. Here, the recognition is clear that success in the twenty-first century is not limited to literacy, numeracy, or technological expertise. Rather, it involves an integration of academic knowledge with social and emotional competencies such as empathy, creativity, and collaboration. The OECD’s analysis captures the danger of treating learning as an isolated cognitive exercise. When schools focus only on what can be tested and quantified, they overlook the softer but equally critical skills that children require to navigate the challenges of global citizenship.

The argument that education has become overly dominated by measurable outcomes is further corroborated by Biesta (2020) who critiques the way contemporary schooling has been captured by the language of learning outcomes. This tends to narrow education to a utilitarian function. According to Biesta (2020 p.54), “the language of learning has become so dominant that other educational purposes, such as socialisation and subjectification, have been pushed to the margins”. His concern is not with learning itself but with how it is conceptualised in schooling. Centering only on what can be measured, schools neglect the deeper work of helping children grow into ethical and responsible persons who can live meaningfully with others. Where examination performance often defines the value of a student, Biesta’s critique reminds us that integrative pedagogies must reclaim broader purposes as education should be about nurturing persons in their fullness, not just producing test scores.

While critiques of fragmented education are necessary, there is also a need to articulate alternatives. Zhao (2021) offers one such perspective in his vision of “learners without borders” arguing that education should create multiple pathways that allow students to connect their personal interests with wider social realities. He notes that “learners without borders” are those who “do not see mathematics, science, arts, and humanities as separate territories but as resources to be drawn upon in making meaning” (p. 18). This approach directly challenges rigid curricular frameworks that isolate subjects and limit creativity. Where schooling often follows rigid divisions between science, arts, and vocational tracks, Zhao’s insight suggests the possibility of pedagogies that encourage cross-disciplinary exploration. Integrative pedagogies thus become a way of aligning learning with the wholeness of human experience, enabling students to approach problems not from one perspective but through interconnected lenses.

To this end, the ethical and emotional dimensions of wholeness are equally central and Noddings (2020 p.42), in her ethic of care, argues that “to educate a child without nurturing their capacity for care is to ignore the essence of humanity” (p. 42). Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, and Osher (2021) argue that social and emotional learning (SEL) is not peripheral but central to effective education. UNESCO (2021) sets the global stage by calling for a new social contract for education that addresses fragmentation. OECD (2020) emphasises the inseparability of cognitive and non-cognitive skills for thriving in the future. Biesta (2020) critiques the overemphasis on learning outcomes, while Zhao (2021) advocates for learners who can cross disciplinary borders to make meaning. Noddings (2020) brings in the ethic of care, reminding educators that relationships and compassion are integral to wholeness. Again, Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2021) provide empirical evidence from the science of learning, showing how integration of social and emotional learning enhances overall success. Together, these form a coherent argument that wholeness is both a philosophical necessity and a practical strategy for educating the twenty-first-century child as shall be seen.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Examine integrative pedagogies as a framework for cultivating wholeness in the twenty-first century child.
- ii. Foreground the teacher’s inner life as central to child wholeness
- iii. Restore imagination and creativity as central to learning
- iv. Cultivate critical consciousness and ethical awareness
- v. Align education with global frameworks for holistic development
- vi. Propose child-centred alternatives to fragmented schooling

Research Questions

- i. How can integrative pedagogies be employed to promote holistic development in the 21st-century child?
- ii. In what ways does the teacher’s inner life influence the cultivation of child wholeness in contemporary education?
- iii. How can imagination and creativity be restored as core components of effective learning processes?
- iv. What role does critical consciousness and ethical awareness play in fostering wholeness in school-aged children?
- v. How can global educational frameworks be aligned with child-centred alternatives to address the limitations of fragmented schooling?

Statement of the Problem

While education has historically been entrusted with preparing children to participate meaningfully in society, its structures often remain bound to outdated paradigms that no longer correspond to the complexities of the twenty first century. The pressure of rapid technological change, shifting labour markets, and rising cultural fragmentation has exposed the inadequacy of systems that prioritise narrow academic performance at the expense of nurturing whole persons. In many contexts, schooling remains heavily fragmented, privileging test scores and rote memorisation while neglecting the cognitive, emotional, ethical, and social integration necessary for genuine flourishing. The problem is therefore not simply one of poor

performance, but of a deeper misalignment between what children need to thrive in a rapidly changing world and what schools currently provide

In line with this, Biesta (2020 p.31) observes that “the language of learning has colonised education”, reducing teaching to the technical transfer of information and stripping it of its existential and ethical dimensions. This narrow vision results in children being trained for examinations rather than nurtured into thoughtful, creative, and responsible citizens. In systems where high stakes testing dominates, the child is often seen not as a holistic learner but as a statistic in national development indices. Such a mechanical conception of education leaves little room for imagination, empathy, or moral responsibility. The outcome is individuals who may excel at test taking but lack the capacities to navigate complexity or build meaningful human relationships. The problem of fragmentation is not merely pedagogical but also ontological, as it undermines the formation of the whole person.

The OECD (2020) stresses that education systems must prepare learners with transformative competencies that enable them to shape sustainable futures. These competencies, which include creating new value, reconciling differences, and taking responsibility, cannot be cultivated through traditional rote centred schooling. However, in many countries, teaching remains oriented toward narrowly defined outcomes in literacy and numeracy without connecting them to broader developmental capacities. This mismatch between global expectations and local practice intensifies the problem, as children emerge from schooling without the integrative skills required for survival and flourishing in an uncertain future.

Of note is the psychological and emotional strain placed on children by systems that prioritise competition over wellbeing. Zhao (2021) argued against education models that treat students as products of an assembly line, designed to meet economic goals rather than personal fulfilment from the standpoint that an education that aims at uniformity risks killing creativity and diversity. In most climes, this is reflected in the heavy curriculum loads and emphasis on standardised examinations, which often leave little space for learners to pursue their own curiosities or develop intrinsic motivation. The result is a widespread disengagement where students attend school not out of joy or curiosity but as a compulsory routine.

From a child rights perspective, UNICEF (2021) emphasises that every child has the right to education that nurtures not only academic learning but also wellbeing, creativity, and social connection. Modern schooling creates rigid barriers between subjects, treating science, the arts, and moral education as isolated storage bank. This undermines the ability of learners to draw connections across fields in order to solve complex, real world problems. The influence of globalisation and technological advancement further complicates the problem. Children are increasingly exposed to digital environments that fragment attention and accelerate information overload. Modern schooling in its current form fails to nurture the wholeness of children. By privileging narrow academic outcomes over integrative growth, schools produce learners who are ill equipped for the ethical, creative, and social demands of contemporary society.

Literature Review

The idea of wholeness in education is not new, but its urgency has increased in the twenty first century. Historically, philosophical traditions have emphasised the need for education to cultivate the whole person rather than simply transmit information. John Dewey, for instance, argued that education must connect knowledge with lived experience, enabling children to integrate learning with their participation in community life. In contemporary

discourse, Biesta (2020) insists that the reduction of education to learning outcomes undermines its broader ethical and social purposes. He explains that education should aim at subjectification, the formation of individuals capable of responsibility and judgment, alongside qualification and socialisation

From the psychological perspective, holistic growth has long been associated with developmental theories that move beyond cognitive maturation alone. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences remains an important reference, proposing that human potential spans linguistic, logical, musical, bodily, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions. Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2019) have shown that learning environments that attend to social and emotional dimensions produce more resilient and motivated learners, making the point that intellectual achievement cannot be divorced from emotional and ethical development. This reflects an emerging consensus that fragmented approaches to learning that prioritise abstract cognition are insufficient for the realities of the twenty first century child.

Zhao (2021) has argued against what he calls the assembly line mentality of modern schooling, where children are treated as products to be standardised rather than individuals to be nurtured. He opined that such systems privilege uniformity at the expense of creativity and diversity. Similarly, Sahlberg (2021) notes how high stakes testing has narrowed curricula globally, reducing learning to measurable outputs while sidelining creativity, critical thinking, and wellbeing. The overemphasis on standardisation has led to a situation where children may master test content but emerge alienated from their own curiosity and disconnected from the deeper purposes of learning. This problem is not restricted to Western societies but has global manifestations, where examination-oriented education dominates policy and practice.

At the international policy level, the OECD's *Learning Compass 2030* framework (2020) has sought to reimagine the aims of education for the future. The framework identifies transformative competencies such as creating new value, reconciling tensions, and taking responsibility as essential for twenty first century learners. These competencies reflect an integrative understanding of human development that transcends narrow knowledge acquisition. They acknowledge that the child must not only be literate and numerate but also capable of ethical reasoning, collaborative problem solving, and sustainable living. Similarly, UNESCO's (2015) report on *Rethinking Education* calls for a humanistic vision of learning that integrates cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions. The emphasis is on the formation of whole persons who can contribute meaningfully to societies shaped by complexity and uncertainty.

In terms of pedagogical models, integrative and holistic approaches have taken various forms across spaces. Montessori education, for example, emphasises child centred learning that nurtures independence, creativity, and responsibility. Reggio Emilia pedagogy, originating in Italy, focusses on children's expressive capacities and situates learning in collaborative, project-based exploration. Steiner or Waldorf education integrates artistic, practical, and intellectual learning to cultivate balanced development. Miller and Nigh (2017) argue that these models, while different in method, share a commitment to wholeness by recognising that education must engage the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions of the child. These alternative models illustrate the possibilities of integrative pedagogy, though their adaptation to different cultural and economic contexts remains a challenge.

Within African educational thought, indigenous knowledge systems have long embodied integrative approaches to child development. Scholars such as Dei (2018) emphasise that African Indigenous education is holistic, grounded in community life, and attentive to the

spiritual, moral, and practical dimensions of learning. Children learn not only through formal instruction but through participation in rituals, storytelling, farming, and communal responsibilities. This integrative vision contrasts sharply with the colonial legacy of formal schooling, which introduced fragmented and book centred approaches. Wa Thiong'o (1986) has argued in his critique of colonial education, that such systems disconnected learners from their cultural roots and alienated them from community life.

The question of child development in the twenty first century extends beyond pedagogy into broader social and psychological dynamics. The contemporary child faces unique challenges of digital distraction, environmental uncertainty, and social fragmentation. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) have shown how the digital environment profoundly shapes childhood, offering both opportunities for creativity and risks of isolation and overload. Schools that ignore this reality fail to equip children with the reflective and ethical capacities needed to navigate digital worlds responsibly. At the same time, the global mental health crisis among children underscores the urgency of holistic education. UNICEF's (2021) *State of the World's Children 2021* report captures a rising level of anxiety, depression, and stress among children, often heightened by educational pressures that neglect wellbeing. Education that does not integrate mental and emotional health is therefore complicit in sustaining environments that harm rather than nurture.

Robinson (2011) argued that schools kill creativity by privileging standardised conformity over divergent thinking. In several contexts, this is visible in the heavy emphasis on rote learning and exam preparation, which leaves little space for imaginative exploration. This is despite the fact that creativity is increasingly recognised as essential for innovation, adaptability, and personal fulfilment. Similarly, ethical formation cannot be seen as secondary to cognitive development. Noddings (2013) aver that the ethics of care should be central to education, positioning relationships and empathy at the heart of pedagogy. Wholeness in education would thus entail cultivating children who can think creatively and act responsibly in relation to others.

Empirical studies of holistic approaches in practice offer evidence of their benefits as Ainsworth and Eaton (2010) found that schools that integrated social emotional learning frameworks reported significant improvements in academic achievement and reductions in behavioural problems. Similarly, Mahoney *et al.* (2021) reviewed decades of research on social emotional learning and concluded that programs which attend to emotional and social capacities yield long term benefits for both academic and life outcomes. These findings prove that integrative pedagogies are not only philosophically appealing but practically effective in addressing the needs of children in contemporary societies.

Okoroafor and Nwogbo (2015) observe that Nigerian teachers often struggle to move beyond exam-oriented methods, partly because of systemic pressures and partly because their own training has been disjointed. On the other hand, Nigeria's rich cultural heritage provides fertile ground for integrative approaches. Storytelling traditions, communal learning, and value-based education rooted in indigenous practices can serve as powerful resources for cultivating wholeness. Integrative pedagogy in Nigeria would therefore need to adapt global insights to local realities, combining contemporary holistic models with indigenous wisdom.

At the intersection of global and local discourses lies the challenge of reimagining the purpose of education itself. Biesta (2015 p.76) insists that the key question is not simply how to make education more effective, but "what education is for". This is crucial in situations where education is too often reduced to economic utility. For Nigeria and other African

societies, the danger is that schooling becomes primarily a vehicle for labour market preparation, ignoring its broader ethical and cultural functions. An integrative pedagogy that cultivates wholeness thus requires a fundamental reorientation, where the purpose of education is seen as forming persons who can live well with themselves, with others, and with the environment. For Palmer (2018 p.10), “we teach who we are”, pointing to the deep connection between a teacher’s sense of identity and the climate of learning they create.

Eisner (2019 p.94) insists that “imagination is the source of possibility”, reminding educators that learning should not only transmit established knowledge but also expand the horizons of what children can envision. When the arts and creativity are treated as optional rather than essential, learners are denied opportunities to cultivate the very skills needed to navigate an unpredictable century with innovation and expressive freedom. This study, therefore, seeks to show how integrative pedagogies can reframe the arts as vital to the intellectual and emotional growth of children. Beyond cognition and creativity, the study also pursues the goal of fostering ethical responsibility and social awareness through integrative pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

This examination of holistic pedagogies for the twenty-first-century child is not possible without placing the discussion within accepted theoretical frameworks that explain the many facets of human learning. Theories of learning, psychology, and cultural knowledge provide intellectual foundations for understanding how children develop as whole human beings and how schools can either sever or promote wholeness. Six salient frameworks for understanding this are: constructivism, multiple intelligences, ecological systems theory, critical pedagogy, indigenous knowledge systems. Biesta's account of the three functions of education are to provide a grounding for a comprehensive platform for wholistic approaches. These theories are not presented as disjunct threads but as interrelated lenses that together heighten understanding of holistic learning.

Constructivism provides an underpinning for a reconceptualization of pedagogy. Derived from Piaget and Vygotsky, constructivism argues that knowledge is not imparted passively from teacher to learner but actively constructed through interaction with the environment and other beings. Piaget (1972 p.20) implored that "to understand is to invent", and thus placed heavy emphasis upon active construction of meaning by the learner through acts of assimilation and accommodation. Vygotsky (1978a) went one further by emphasising the interpersonal and cultural dimensions of learning, best epitomized in his construct of the zone of proximal development. Here, children develop not only through individual endeavour but through the support of cultural activity. Constructivism thus aligns with integrative pedagogy by refusing static models of rote learning and calling for learning to be active and learner centered and build critical thought and creativity.

Another framework is the theory of multiple intelligences by Gardner, which actually expands the scope of human potential. Gardner (2011) contested the exclusive prominence of linguistic and logical mathematical competencies in schools and instead found at least eight different intelligences, such as musical, bodily kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal talents. He posited that human cognitive competence is better described in terms of a set of abilities, talents, or mental skills, each of which has inherent merit. This model undergirds the conception of wholeness since it recognizes that each child has strengths that may be missed by traditional schooling. An integrative pedagogy based on multiple intelligences would thus attempt to craft learning experiences that respect diversity, enabling a

child gifted in artistic, interpersonal, or kinesthetic talents to thrive alongside those gifted in traditional school subjects.

Ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner extends the examination further into wider social contexts that influence child growth. Bronfenbrenner (2005) pointed out that a child's development happens within nested systems from the microsystem of family and classroom through macrosystem of culture and community values. He contended that development never takes place in isolation but is always embedded and expressed through a particular set of social structures. This ecological perspective is essential for integrative pedagogy because it prompts educators that developing wholeness is not only engaging the individual child but also families, community, and cultural heritage. Critical pedagogy, as founded by Paulo Freire and later by teachers such as Bell Hooks, offers yet another influential model that gives priority to the ethical and emancipatory emphasis of learning. Freire (1970) criticized the "banking model" of schooling, in that the learner is considered an empty receptor into whom teachers insinuate facts. Rather, Freire argued for a dialogical method of pedagogy, whereby teachers and learners engage in mutually constructed problem posing that establishes a sense of a critical consciousness.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a literature-based approach that synthesizes knowledge from education, psychology, philosophy, and indigenous knowledge in order to account for the fragmented nature of schooling in the twenty first century and extending integrative pedagogies for fostering wholeness in the twenty first century child. The qualitative and interpretive design recognizes that issues of pedagogy and childhood development are better comprehended in relation to meaning making rather than measurement. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated that qualitative research is attentive to the interpretation of experience and the construction of meaning, and this makes it a fitting orientation for a study that intends at theorising wholeness in education.

Data Sources and Selection

The literature corpus reviewed was intentionally selected to encompass founding and new works. Works like Piaget's Psychology and Pedagogy (1972), Vygotsky's Mind in Society (1978), and Gardner's Frames of Mind (2011) were considered due to their timelessness in contributions regarding the theory of child development. Recent views from authors like Biesta (2020), Hooks (1994), and Dei (2010) provided recent insights regarding holistic and critically oriented pedagogy. Databases like JSTOR, Taylor and Francis Online, and Google Scholar were used to find sources by employing descriptors like "integrative pedagogy," "holistic education," and "child development and wholeness." Gray (2018) described that systematic use of peer reviewed material sustains credibility and rigour in literature-based research. Only scholarly sources were considered for inclusion to meet reliability.

Analytical Strategy

The study adopted thematic synthesis as its main analytic technique. Having collected relevant works, close reading was performed for identification of themes related to wholeness and fragmentation, child-centered education, and integrative practices. They were analysed

cross- discipline for identification of points of convergence and divergence. Thomas and Harden (2008 p.4) described thematic synthesis as a technique that "facilitates the generation of analytical themes that go beyond the findings of individual studies", and this fits well with the present intention of moving from descriptive summary toward conceptual innovation. Interpreting texts more than once from more than one tradition, the study constructed a theoretical system capable of speaking to the prevailing Sub-Saharan and world education realities.

Scope and Limitations

This is a conceptual piece that makes no new empirical contributions by way of fieldwork, observation of classes, or experiments. The deliberate choice of a literature-based approach was guided by a wish to theorise integrative pedagogy rather than explain its outcomes. The latter, however, generates some constraints. Cooper (2010) warned that literature-based research has a pitfall of overgeneralising sources that are not critically appraised. To pre-empt this, the study questioned not only what the sources report but also the assumptions and contexts that guided them. Although a dearth of empirical findings constrains claims for direct use, strengths are in theoretical contribution and its potential use for future applied work.

Reflexivity and Ethics

This discourse is characterized by examination-oriented curricula, scarcity of resources, and the abandonment of indigenous knowledge systems. Recognition of this positionality secures conclusions that are informed by local experiences yet amenable to broader use. Creswell and Poth (2018) reaffirmed that reflexivity contributed transparency to qualitative investigations by bringing into visibility the effect of the researcher's perspective. There are also questions of ethical note in relation to correct representation of authors' positions and due recognition of intellectual inputs. Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2016) characterized these conventions as core for the ethics of writing academically.

Interdisciplinary Orientation

The interweaving of indigenous knowledge such as sociology, philosophy, and psychology makes the study models the holistic approach it promotes. Klein (2017 p.16) defined interdisciplinarity as the effort to solve problems "too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline". Wholeness as a problem for the twenty-first century child surely needs such encompassing, integrative solution. Moreover, a hermeneutic sensibility informed the process of interpreting, acknowledging that meaning arises dialogically in the meeting of reader and text. Gadamer (2004) aver that knowledge is informed by this dynamic interchange rather than by determinate conclusions. This hermeneutic dimension allowed the study to set the classic theories of education into dialogue with the contemporary quandaries and develop new insights that move beyond discipline and cultural borders.

Findings and Discussion

The pursuit of wholeness in the education of the twenty first century child requires both theoretical depth and practical reorientation. The recurring theme is the inadequacy of traditional schooling models that raises measurable cognitive outcomes while neglecting emotional, ethical, creative, and communal aspects of learning. Dewey's (1938, p. 35) reflections on experience in education are instructive here. Arguing that, "every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects the quality of subsequent experiences". Prioritising examinations and rigid knowledge transmission and conventional schooling shapes children in ways that limit their capacity for integrated growth. Pedagogy therefore must be treated not as a neutral technique but as a practice with deep moral and developmental consequences.

This interpretation also connects to the ethical perspectives of Freire (1970, p. 34) who emphasised that "education either functions as an instrument...to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system or it becomes the practice of freedom". This shows that integrative pedagogies not only enhance children's cognitive and creative abilities but also position education as a liberatory act. When schools cultivate wholeness, they resist the reduction of children to test scores and instead affirm their humanity. This makes the point that the search for integrative models is not merely technical but also political, involving the struggle for spaces where children can flourish as whole beings.

Integrative pedagogies resonate with multiple intelligences theory and Gardner (2011) observed that human intelligence cannot be confined to a single domain, since children express understanding in linguistic, logical, spatial, bodily, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal forms. This confirmed that integrative pedagogies align with this diversity by offering learning contexts that engage multiple forms of intelligence. However, there is the tension between this diversity and standardised curricula. Systems built around narrow definitions of intelligence will always resist integration because they rely on uniformity for assessment and comparison. This tension exposes why holistic education requires systemic reforms and not just classroom-level innovations.

There is the aspect of the cultural grounding of integrative education where Dei (2010) argued that African schooling practices have often been detached from local cultural realities, creating dissonance for learners who live in communities where knowledge is relational and experiential. The findings showed that indigenous knowledge traditions offer significant resources for cultivating wholeness, particularly in situations where children grow up in collectivist environments. Wa Thiong'o (1986) made the point that, "the choice of language and the use to which language is put" reflect a deeper politics of identity and belonging. This squares with the view that integrative pedagogies must be context-sensitive, recognising the role of culture, language, and community in shaping children's sense of wholeness. Without this, integrative efforts would only become abstract imports that do not resonate with learners' lived realities.

A further interpretation concerns the ethical dimension of care and Noddings (2013 p.14) insisted that "the student is infinitely more important than the subject matter". This speaks directly to the point that integrative pedagogies attend to children as full persons rather than as vessels of content. The discussion here recognises that caring relationships are central to wholeness, for they create the trust and safety needed for children to develop emotionally, socially, and ethically. Where such care is absent, children may succeed in examinations but

struggle in life. This also confirmed that integrative pedagogies have practical success when implemented thoughtfully.

Miller (2019) documented holistic education models that blend intellectual, artistic, and spiritual development, leading to improved student engagement and well-being. This is interpreted as evidence that integrative education is not merely aspirational but realistic, even in environments dominated by mainstream schooling. Though, Biesta (2020) opined that, education in modern systems has been reduced to “learnification,” where focus is placed on the production of measurable outcomes rather than the richness of learning. This raises a serious challenge which has to do with whether integrative pedagogies thrive in environments where depth is valued, but struggle in systems obsessed with efficiency and outputs.

From the angle of developmental psychology, Bronfenbrenner (2005) stressed that children develop within nested ecological systems, from family and peers to institutions and wider society. This confirmed that integrative pedagogies cannot be confined to classroom practices alone but must involve collaboration across these ecological layers. Families, communities, schools, and policies together shape the possibilities of cultivating wholeness. It is affirmed then that integrative education is a systemic pursuit, not merely a pedagogical method. The reviewed literature also showed the importance of play and autonomy. Gray (2013) argued that play-based learning supports creativity, resilience, and adaptability. This aligned with this view which shows that when children are granted space for curiosity and self-directed exploration, they experience wholeness more naturally. This interprets integrative pedagogy not simply as integration of subjects but as the creation of learning environments where exploration and agency are central. This is particularly important for children navigating the uncertainties of the digital age.

There is also a structural tension between aspiration and implementation so that while integrative pedagogies offer compelling models, systemic barriers such as standardisation, rigid examinations, and policy situation remains. Hooks (1994 p.13) suggested that “to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin”. This statement captures the urgency of aligning systems with the values of care and wholeness. Without systemic transformation, integrative pedagogies would remain marginal innovations rather than the foundation of education for the twenty first century child.

From the forgoing, there is an invitation to reimagine education beyond the technical and the measurable. Integrative pedagogies affirm the wholeness of children by weaving together their cognitive, emotional, creative, ethical, and cultural lives. They challenge the dominant narrative of fragmentation and instead promote connectedness, care, and liberation. The theoretical perspectives of Dewey, Freire, Gardner, Bronfenbrenner, Noddings, and others provide the intellectual foundation for this interpretation, while indigenous knowledge traditions provide the cultural grounding. The discussion thus concludes that cultivating wholeness is not optional but necessary if education is to meet the demands of a rapidly changing and uncertain world.

Conclusion

The exploration of integrative pedagogies in this study has shown that the twenty first century child requires more than fragmented forms of learning if education is to remain relevant. The findings and discussion consistently revealed that conventional models of schooling, with their narrow focus on cognitive outcomes and examinations, cannot adequately address the complexity of human development in an era marked by technological acceleration and social fragmentation. The evidence from theorists, psychologists, and educational philosophers' points to the fact that the pursuit of wholeness must be central if children are to grow into balanced and responsible individuals.

At the heart of this is the recognition that integrative pedagogies are not merely supplementary approaches but rather necessary transformations. Dewey's philosophy of experience demonstrated that learning is shaped by the totality of interactions a child undergoes, while Freire reminded us that education is either liberatory or oppressive depending on how it is practised. The findings reinforced that when schools integrate cognitive, emotional, ethical, cultural, and creative dimensions, children thrive not just academically but also socially and personally. This means that integrative pedagogy is not a luxury but a demand of our time.

The study also affirms that context matters deeply just as Dei and Wa Thiong'o emphasised that an educational system detached from its cultural roots risks alienating learners. For children in developing societies, where community and identity are inseparable from knowledge, integrative pedagogies must respect indigenous knowledge traditions and languages. At the same time, the work of Gardner and Bronfenbrenner shows that children's multiple intelligences and ecological contexts must be acknowledged if education is to support holistic growth. These insights collectively point to an understanding that cultivating wholeness is as much about reconnecting with cultural wisdom as it is about rethinking pedagogy in global modernity.

Also, integrative pedagogies face systemic barriers that cannot be ignored. Standardisation, rigid assessment structures, and policy instability continue to reinforce fragmentation, making holistic practices difficult to sustain. However, the examples of care-driven approaches discussed by Noddings, along with holistic education models presented by Miller and others, indicate that transformation is possible. What remains is the collective will of educators, policymakers, and communities to reorient schooling toward wholeness. This study therefore concludes that cultivating wholeness in the twenty first century child requires an educational paradigm-shift that embraces integrative pedagogies. It is a call to move beyond reductionist views of learning and to envision classrooms, schools, and systems as spaces where children are nurtured in their full humanity.

Recommendations

The insights from this study suggest that achieving wholeness in the twenty first century child requires deliberate steps at multiple levels of the education system.

- i. The first recommendation is that teacher education programmes should be restructured to accommodate integrative pedagogies as a central component. Teachers remain the most critical agents of transformation, yet many are themselves products of fragmented educational models. Preparing teachers to integrate cognitive, emotional, creative, and ethical

dimensions in their practice will demand not only curriculum reforms in colleges of education but also ongoing professional development initiatives that expose them to holistic strategies and indigenous pedagogical wisdom.

- ii. Another is the reform of assessment systems that currently privilege rote memorisation and high stakes examinations. Such practices reduce education to test scores and hinder the cultivation of creativity, ethical reasoning, and emotional intelligence. Policymakers should therefore introduce assessment models that capture multiple dimensions of learning, including collaborative projects, reflective essays, artistic expression, and community engagement.
- iii. A further recommendation is the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into formal curricula. As this study has shown, wholeness cannot be achieved when children are disconnected from their cultural roots. Spaces should be made for local histories, languages, ecological knowledge, and moral philosophies to coexist with global scientific and technological learning.
- iv. In addition, greater collaboration between schools, families, and communities is recommended. The ecological systems perspective reminds us that a child's development is shaped by multiple contexts. Programmes that bridge the gap between school and home, such as community service projects, cultural festivals, and parental involvement in classroom learning, can help children experience education as an interconnected process rather than an isolated event. Such collaboration also ensures that wholeness is cultivated not only within the school walls but across the broader social environment in which the child lives.
- v. Finally, policymakers and education stakeholders should provide adequate resources and supportive infrastructure for holistic learning. This includes safe learning environments, spaces for creative expression, access to technology, and support for inclusive practices that address the needs of all children.



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