

## HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL SPACE IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

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**Abstract:** The article presents a historical-pedagogical analysis of the content and development of the humanistic idea of holistic education in the European socio-cultural space during the Early Modern Period. It traces the value-based interpretations of the idea of holistic education within both secular (Renaissance humanism) and religious (Christian humanism) worldviews of the early modern era. The study reveals that the concept of holistic education was formulated within the philosophical and cultural discourse of Renaissance humanism. It is noted that the Renaissance ideal of holistic education was based on three key components: first, the virtues of broad erudition, intellectual culture, and the art of rhetoric; second, moral principles focused on the ideals of goodness, virtue, modesty, and personal inner culture, as well as Christian priorities of love and compassion; third, the recognition of the individual as the highest value, grounded in the dignity and rights of the person, and the idea of comprehensive and harmonious development of one's abilities and talents. This also includes the Renaissance virtues of active engagement, initiative, industriousness, persistence, and the appreciation of physical beauty and courage. It is shown that the institutionalization of the idea of holistic education was carried out through the educational activities of Protestant gymnasiums, Jesuit colleges, brotherhood schools, and other educational institutions founded in the context of Protestant Reformation, Catholic Reformation, and religious reforms in the East Slavic lands. The article outlines the civilizational and human-creative significance of the concept of holistic education for the formation of modern European civilization.

**Keywords:** holistic education, humanism, Early Modern Period, Renaissance humanism, Protestant humanism, post-Tridentine humanism, East Slavic (Orthodox) humanism, comprehensive and harmonious personal development.

### 1 Introduction

The formation of the value-based foundations of modern European civilization was largely shaped by the worldview shifts experienced by European countries during the Early Modern Period. The 16th century marked a time of complex and, at times, contradictory synthesis between Renaissance humanism and various religious systems, primarily the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Reform. Alongside the search for answers to the contemporary challenges regarding the structure of the universe, the essence of existence, and the place and role of humans in the world, education and upbringing took a prominent place in the cultural-humanitarian discourse. The new era required a new kind of individual, the one capable of successfully and effectively contributing to the development of a new political-legal, socio-economic, and spiritual-cultural order.

One of the key pedagogical ideas that played a significant role in institutionalizing the modern educational paradigm was the humanistic concept of holistic education. By reviving the ancient notion of a well-rounded individual based on the principle of "καλοκάγαθία" (kalokagathia), Renaissance thinkers, religious leaders, educators, and philosophers gradually developed a modern understanding of holistic education. Its educational philosophy was founded on humanistic culture and anthropocentrism - first Christian (religious) and later Renaissance (secular) humanism.

Despite the ideological differences among the major worldview systems of the time - Renaissance, Reformation, Catholic (post-Tridentine), and East Slavic (Orthodox) - a common ideological trajectory emerged - humanism. This humanism underwent numerous transformations, the culmination of which was the implementation of the idea of holistic education into broad socio-cultural practice.

### 2 Materials and Methods

The theoretical and practical origins of the holistic education concept undoubtedly date back to Antiquity, with its scientific and theoretical enrichment taking place throughout the entire course of civilizational progress. Thus, it is quite natural that a rich thematic narrative exists regarding the issues of holistic education, encompassing historical-pedagogical, educational-philosophical, and cultural perspectives. The main vectors of historical-pedagogical analysis of holistic education were laid down in the fundamental works of V. Andrushchenko, I. Bekh, H. Vasianovych, L. Vakhovskyi, S. Honcharenko, B. Hod, M. Hrynova, N. Hupan, N. Dichek, M. Yevtukh, V. Ilchenko, S. Klepko, O. Kozlova, O. Lavrinenko, N. Nychkalo, A. Sbrueva, S. Sysoieva, O. Sukhomlynskyi, Ye. Khyrkov, and other scholars who examined pedagogical dimensions of the development of modern European civilization. Among numerous scholars, particular attention should be given to such researchers as E. Clark, R. Martin, J. Miller, R. Miller, R. Nava, D. Phillips, C. Flake, S. Forbes, A. Harris, and others. The studies of these scholars present a modern understanding of the aims and content of holistic education, offer various approaches to analyzing its principles and conceptual foundations, and outline promising paths for implementing the key ideas and philosophy of holistic education.

The aim of this article is to analyze the content and development features of the humanistic idea of holistic education in the European socio-cultural space during the Early Modern period, and to outline its civilizational and humanistic significance for the construction of modern European civilization.

### 2 Methods

The historical-pedagogical study of the development of holistic education idea within European secular and religious worldview systems during the Early Modern period is based on a comprehensive set of methods, both general-theoretical and specialized. Alongside the use of description, analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, systematization, explanation, comparison, and interpretation, special methods, such as the method of historical-pedagogical comparative studies and the terminological method, play an important role. The methodology of historical-pedagogical comparative studies serves as the structural guideline for the research, which is a systematic comparison of pedagogical approaches to understanding the humanistic idea of holistic education and the ways of its implementation in various contemporary secular and religious cultural-philosophical systems: the European Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Reform, the philosophy of rationalism, and Ruthenian-Ukrainian philosophical thought. This comparative-contrastive approach provides the necessary conditions to reveal the specific interpretations of the idea of holistic education, to understand its nature and civilizational significance, and to describe the changes experienced by the humanistic paradigm of education in various secular and religious worldview systems of the Early Modern period.

### 3 Results and Discussion

It has been previously noted that the origins of the idea of holistic education for the individual can be traced back to ancient civilization, whose creators proposed the ideal of kalokagathia and defined humans as the measure of all things. At the same time, the modern interpretation of the concept of holistic education for the individual was first formulated by Europeans during the Early Modern period (late 15th – mid-17th century). During this time, Europe underwent significant sociocultural changes, driven by modern secular and religious cultural-philosophical systems, including the Renaissance, rationalist philosophy, the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Revival, and in the East Slavic lands, the reformed Orthodox tradition [10]. Namely within these worldview systems, the idea of

holistic education was not only constructed and theoretically substantiated but also vigorously pursued for implementation among broad segments of Early Modern society [3].

The idea of holistic education proposed by humanists in the Early Modern period was characterized by its internal unity and systematic implementation. Despite its various interpretations, contemporary thinkers provided its systematic characteristics, which have been analyzed through the following vectors: 1) teleological (goals and objectives), axiological, and meaningful foundations of contemporary philosophical teachings regarding the pedagogical ideal of holistic education; 2) content and methodological aspects of implementing the idea of holistic education in the European educational space of the Early Modern period; 3) organizational-pedagogical foundations for implementing the idea of holistic education, and the practice of reforming the European educational space during the Early Modern period; 4) reinterpretation of Early Modern notions of holistic education in the innovative development of human capital and the enhancement of the modern educational space [5].

In Early Modern European society, the idea of holistic education developed and was enriched within several secular and religious worldview systems, whose leaders not only provided philosophical-pedagogical justifications for holistic education but also made significant efforts to institutionalize it.

### **Renaissance Humanism**

The value-based and semantic foundations of the idea of holistic education were developed within the philosophical and cultural discourse that historical-pedagogical thought identifies as Renaissance humanism. The Renaissance-humanist educational system was the first to form among all the educational paradigms of the Early Modern period, as its origins can be traced to the European Renaissance of the mid-14th century. In Renaissance humanism, the understanding of the idea of holistic education was based on a triadic interpretation of humanism:

First, the content of humanistic pursuits became a broad literary, intellectual, and artistic movement, whose external manifestation was a fascination with the literature, educational traditions, and art of classical antiquity. As a result, corresponding pedagogical ideas from antiquity were regarded as foundational elements of general spiritual education, with the priority given to virtues such as high erudition, intellectual culture, refined taste, the art of eloquence, public speaking, and debate. The code of exemplary virtuous behavior became particularly important in this context.

Second, by considering humanism as a broad aspiration toward humanity and a worldview that acknowledges the individual's right to benevolence and the alleviation of suffering associated with the contradictions of human nature and life's finitude, Renaissance humanists proclaimed goodness, virtue, modesty, respect for elders, inner culture, and the Christian ideals of love and compassion as key educational values.

Third, understanding humanism as a worldview principle based on the belief in the individual as the highest value, recognizing human dignity and rights, and the idea of the comprehensive and harmonious development of individual's abilities and talents, individualism became a central component of the ideal of holistic education. Among Renaissance virtues, active human engagement, initiative, concern, industriousness, and persistence gained prominence. Talent and human abilities acquired new evaluative significance, and society began to focus on physical beauty and strength. There emerged an interest in proper recognition and social reward for inspired labor [2].

Thus, the central idea of the Renaissance-humanist interpretation of holistic education was humanism, with the educational ideal being the comprehensive and harmonious development of the individual. The anthropocentrism of Renaissance humanism allowed for the first rehabilitation of the individual, reviving ancient notions of humanity as the center of the world and the

measure of all things. As European Renaissance scholar B. Hod noted, "The new and progressive educational ideal was a reasonable, educated, cultured, and harmoniously developed individual, active and engaged in earthly life, adapted to living in society. The significance of purposeful education (essentially decisive) for social progress was recognized" [6].

### **Protestant Humanism**

The Reformation educational system was established within the context of European Reformation. The teachings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli initiated spiritual renewal and gradually broke the dominance of the Catholic Church and its monopoly on spirituality. A corresponding new educational doctrine emerged, grounded in a synthesis of classical antiquity and Christian rationalism. Contemporary scholar P. Kotliarov noted that the core idea of the Protestant educational system was "the combination of fundamental Christian values with secular scholarship", and the main content of the educational Reformation was "the creation of a coherent educational system that organically connected acquired knowledge and provided for a progressive movement from elementary to advanced learning" [8]. Within the Reformation, the idea was substantiated that the acquisition of knowledge and education is the primary path to knowing God, making the establishment of educational institutions one of the key tasks of the reformers.

A valuable aspect of Protestant humanism's educational philosophy was its foundation on the concept of "perfect person" (*perfectio hominis*). This approach motivated the reformers to focus on the necessity of holistic education and the development of the individual, emphasizing the need to harmonize religious education, as the priority of that time, with the development of other aspects of the person. The humanist philosophy was significantly shaped by the pedagogical views of Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, under the considerable influence of the prominent humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam, with whom the young reformers corresponded. The reformers were guided by the value-based foundations of Erasmus's maxim of "educated piety" (*pietas litterata*), which centered on three virtues: knowledge of Latin, active piety, and the ability to behave properly in all circumstances [1].

The reformers' holistic pedagogical approach to the education of individual was reflected in their understanding of the importance of comprehensive development of a person - intellectual, familial, moral, physical, aesthetic, and civic. The novelty of the religious-pedagogical approach of the founders of Protestantism lay in their emphasis on the social role of education and the proclamation of the need for a radical reform of late medieval educational practices. Moreover, their educational philosophy was based, as it was mentioned above, on the concept of "perfect person" (*perfectio hominis*), which aligned with the humanist idea of "educated piety" (*pietas litterata*), grounded in the three above mentioned virtues. The pedagogical ideas of the Reformation leaders were based on two key values: "piety and erudition" (*pietas et eruditio*) and "liberal erudition" (*liberali eruditione*), which provided realistic opportunities for building a renewed educational system founded on humanist philosophy [1].

### **Post-Tridentine (Catholic) Humanism**

In contrast, the reformed Catholic educational system emerged within the framework of the Catholic Reformation, which on the one hand aimed to counter the Protestant Reformation, and on the other, facilitated a deep internal reform of the Catholic Church. This renewal enabled the Church to significantly modernize and adopt new approaches to spiritual service that were in line with historical realities. While the Reformation initiated educational reforms, the Catholic Church, along with the Jesuit order it established, was able to extend these reforms further, securing its role as the "school order". The Jesuits, significantly transforming humanist teachings, made the idea of "educated piety" the foundation of a new educational system and

developed a broad youth policy, attracting young people to their educational institutions across many European countries [9].

Following the humanists, the Jesuits institutionalized the pan-European Renaissance program of “educated piety” (*pietas litterata*) in their colleges. This educational ideal was based on three above mentioned virtues: knowledge of Latin, which at the time was equated with education, active piety, and the ability to conduct oneself properly in all situations. The Renaissance program demanded high moral standards and proper education from individuals, urging them to develop their abilities and talents through the effort of will, intense work, and dedication. The cultivation of these virtues was declared by the Jesuits as the fundamental priorities of their efforts to shape the young generation of Europe [11].

In addition to fostering Renaissance-humanist virtues such as erudition, high education, intellectual culture, and professionalism, the Jesuits also considered the cultivation of virtuous customs an important component of youth policy. These virtues enhanced and refined individuals, promoting dignified and proper behavior, and instilling the norms of Christian morality.

Particular attention should be given to the Jesuit pedagogical notion of the “good arts” (*bonae artes*). This concept intellectually standardized ideas of education and ethical upbringing, realized through the “humanistic studies” (*studia humanitatis*), which aimed to achieve Erasmus’s educational ideal of “educated piety” (*pietas litterata*). This also reflected the humanist ideal of uniting teaching and upbringing practices, emphasizing the moral-didactic aspects of education.

Therefore, it is not without reason that some scholars claim that Jesuit pedagogy, based on Ignatius Loyola’s idea of the holistic education of the individual, which includes intellectual and religious development as well as the maximization of one’s talents, aimed to form the complete person. Jesuit educational practices transformed Renaissance humanism from an elitist phenomenon into a mass movement, achieving the educational revolution envisioned and discussed by the intellectuals of the European Renaissance. The Jesuits pedagogically interpreted the Renaissance-humanist intellectual heritage, incorporating several semantic and conceptual elements of humanism into the development of virtues among their order’s youth. Understanding humanism as “imitation of the ancients” and as the revival of classical models of education, the Society of Jesus proclaimed as the core virtues of its youth policy: erudition, refined Latin language, intellectual culture, sophisticated taste, eloquence, mastery of scholarly discourse, public speaking, and virtuous conduct. From the Renaissance-humanist priorities of individualism, the Jesuit code of virtue was enriched with active piety, diligence, industriousness, creative zeal, initiative, decisiveness, care, rationality, and prudence. The Jesuits greatly valued talent and ability in young people, paying attention to the need for physical health and well-being as well. In the Jesuit educational priorities, humanism’s etymological interpretation as humanity corresponded to the tasks of cultivating virtues such as modesty, politeness, composure, tolerance, respect and attentiveness toward elders, kindness and love, ethics of partnership, and unity. Thus, in Ignatian youth initiatives, all conditions were created for the realization of Erasmus’s ideal of “educated piety”. By announcing in the 16th and 17th centuries their mission to instill the “good arts” in European youth, the Jesuits laid the foundation for the unity of educational and moral priorities, focusing on moral and ethical values in their care for the younger generation. It is therefore understandable that the development of this set of virtues placed the Jesuits at the forefront of early modern practices for nurturing the European youth of the time [4].

#### **East Slavic (Orthodox) Humanism**

The East Slavic lands, quite naturally, experienced the influence of all three European movements - Renaissance, Reformation, and Catholic Reformation. These challenges impacted not only religious life (the Kyiv Metropolis) but also education [12]. As a

result, a new and distinct educational system - the Rus’-Orthodox system - emerged. This system was founded on the European humanist tradition, synthesizing both Western (primarily Jesuit) and Eastern (local) pedagogical traditions. Western influences allowed the East Slavic lands to engage with early modern scholarship, humanist ideas, and new approaches to the organization of education and upbringing. A new educational system was formed that successfully combined Greek and Latin educational traditions. Undoubtedly, the educational model of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy became the exemplar, quickly establishing itself as a center of educational, spiritual, and cultural life in Ukraine at the time.

The Ukrainian educational-pedagogical tradition of the early modern era developed on a broad ideological and conceptual foundation. This foundation included the ideological heritage of the Greco-Byzantine world, local Orthodox-conservative tradition, Renaissance-humanist ideas, Protestant influences, the Unionist struggle, and the spread of Jesuit schooling. In each of these worldviews (whether secular or religious), the educational component was clearly expressed, and at times, it became a central idea. Consequently, within the framework of ideological and worldview interactions and mutual influences of these highly diverse systems, the worldview self-identification of Ukrainian society was gradually constructed, particularly in its educational and pedagogical dimensions.

The thoughts of Ukrainian historian Ya. Kalakura regarding the significance of sociocultural changes at the time, which opened up opportunities for renewing the mentality of Ukrainians, are interesting. This mentality, as Kalakura states, “... did not build a wall between the sacred and the secular, thus bringing religious and educational values closer to the individual .... and opened possibilities for the interaction of the old and the new” [7]. The ideas of the Renaissance, Reformation, Catholic Reform, and later the Enlightenment allowed for the formation of a new type of culture in Ukraine - a culture of openness. The Ukrainian mentality thus had the opportunity to “... settle into the European world, integrate into its space while simultaneously beautifying it and influencing the formation of Ukrainian society” [7].

The spread of humanist ideas of comprehensive and harmonious personal development in the Ukrainian early modern intellectual, educational, and pedagogical landscape not only integrated Ukrainian schooling into “innovative” humanist ideas but also successfully transformed its own educational system. This transformation effectively responded to the challenges of the time, skillfully structuring the pedagogical dynamics in accordance with the new social needs of the early bourgeois society.

#### **4 Conclusion**

As it can be seen, throughout the historical development of humanity, the idea of holistic education has always held a special place in upbringing. Its theoretical and conceptual foundations, initially grounded in the ancient educational ideal of *kalokagathia* (καλοκαγαθία), were further enriched by the Renaissance paradigm of *pietas litterata* and ultimately shaped in the postmodern concept of “holistic education”. The historical transformations that unfolded in the 16th century not only radically reformed socio-political life and re-evaluated values and cultural priorities, but also led to significant reforms in the field of education. The traditional religious scholastic model of education was not only thoroughly reconsidered, but new educational systems were built, with humanism and a belief in the transformative power of knowledge - and thus, education - becoming central themes.

The early modern educational systems developed in different ways, but their pedagogical strategies shared a common ‘denominator’: holistic education in its various meaningful dimensions. This included both the aspiration to ensure the comprehensive development of the individual and the focus on creating a well-rounded and progressive learning experience. The strategic and tactical approaches to organizing educational

spaces, formed during the early modern period, remain relevant today and require reinterpretation and new understanding.

Taking into account the historical and pedagogical approach allows for the construction of the modern concept of holistic education. Among the key priorities of holistic education, there are the principles of Educating for Human Development, Honoring Students as Individuals, The Central Role of Experience, Holistic Education, Freedom of Choice, Educating for a Participatory Democracy, Educating for Global Citizenship, Educating for Earth Literacy, and Spirituality and Education. These principles help structure contemporary education on the foundations of respect for each individual's uniqueness and the continuous, well-rounded development of all their potential capabilities.

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**Primary Paper Section: A**

**Secondary Paper Section: AM**