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## NEW HORIZONS IN EDUCATION THROUGH HOLISTIC APPROACH

A. Egemen AKMENÇE<sup>1</sup>, Burhan AKPINAR<sup>2</sup> and Ezgi AKMENÇE<sup>3</sup>

### **Abstract**

*The aim of this study is to analyze the concept of "holistic" and to discuss the positive reflection of this concept to education. By documentation analysis method, related literature has been scanned. A conclusion has been put forward and some suggestions have been offered to improve our current education system which is based on positivist approach. The reference source of positivist, modern, idealistic, essentialist and traditional education is behaviorism. A parallelism can be drawn between the insight which aims to improve the individual in mostly mental aspect and materialistic worldview. Intelligence is in the forefront for this approach which handles the individual with only materialistic aspect. However, human being is a whole consisting of both matter and sense. The only way to achieve perfection in education is to balance the factors including body, mind, soul, feelings and thoughts equally.*

**Keywords:** *holistic, holistic approach, holism in education*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the existence of human kind or the rise of the education in civilisations, trying to improve and enhance the education has been the main concern of societies. For education, which is basically divided in to two groups as modern and classical, many approaches have been offered. Traditional paradigms based on a classical education concept give importance to science teaching such as physics, chemistry and biology due to their contribution to the nations economically and to their military power. However, traditional approaches ignore the reality and society (Orion, 2007). Therefore modern paradigms which give importance to the change become prominent with their alternatives.

The fact that time is going on makes the change compulsory. Since the dawn of history, there have been changes in the lifestyle, belief, worldview and many other influences on people. One of these fields affected by the change is education. This changeable nature of education mainly depends on the needs of the people and reflects the impact of technology to our daily life. In that, many accepted approaches have disappeared owing to changing needs and losing their validity. Reforms to education are the main tool in helping prepare new generations for the future. It is our responsibly to the future generations.

Handled in general, it can be said that until the industrial revolution, education had an idealist character. In such kind of education which is based on transforming information, a person was an "object" who had to be adjusted for the good of all society. After the industrial revolution, instead of improving the person for the sake of society, education played a vital role to provide workforce and to train the person for nations. The effects of this positivist and modern idealist education went on till World War II. After a while, weakness and drawbacks of positivist and modern education were realised and with the help of humanism, people started to talk about educating the person not only mentally but also in other aspects by putting them at the center of education which is process-driven. Nevertheless, the effects of result-based and Positivist traditional education which perceived the person as an object have been seen for a very long time. This effect went on till 1980s in the West while it went on till 2000 in Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> Firat University, Educational Sciences Department, Graduate Student

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Dr. Firat University, Faculty of Education, Educational Sciences Department

<sup>3</sup> Inonu University, Educational Sciences Departement, Graduate Student, ezgiakmence@gmail.com

Palmer (1998) emphasized that modern education separated mind from heart, reality from emotions, theory from practice and training from learning. With industrialization, the most common symptom of this age on people is the gap. Since the turning of the 20th century, people who feel a deep gap in their life have started to complain about managing themselves and indecision. More and more they are turning into a mirror society who reflect other people's expectation (Kaygusuz, 2003:20)

The positivist belief that accepts person and mind as same things externalize emotions and soul in education. Results of externalization of the person who is the combination of body, mind, emotion and soul are inexplicable for person and society (Akpınar, 2013). The most remarkable example of this can be observed in industrialized societies which have designed their education on engineering, as a result of this process they face with a degenerated, morally and culturally collapsed new generation.

Besides having a body, humans have an unlimited soul and emotions which cannot be kept under control with matter. Therefore the support of Positivism which only serves for the matter aspect of a person will be insufficient. Moreover, it is not correct to accept the truth of science and research methodologies. The truth is, instead of ignoring positivism without questioning, when concerning mankind, to try to complete it with some other paradigms. Because collapsing the thoughts belonging to cosmos and person to find the truth and reality is not a suitable way. In other words, as in many situations, accepting an idea by ignoring all the others may limit our perception and thinking. In education both traditional and modern paradigms, which are known opposites, play important roles. Like traditional approach, in which focusing on results of teaching-learning process, is inconvenient, ignoring the results totally in modern approach is also objectionable. During the educating process, skipping any humanist aspect or neglecting it causes deficiency in the product. Focusing on only physical aspect of a person means ignoring his thinking ability which separates him from other creatures or focusing on just his mind and trying to fill it up means ignoring his emotion and feelings. Man is a whole consisting of all these factors and while educating him, all these factors should be taken into consideration. As it is seen, relying on only one approach, paradigm of philosophy in education is not correct. So it seems that having a harmony of both traditional and modern approaches and completing their deficient parts in themselves are more convenient. Holistic approach in education can be defined as "reasonable compromise" between traditional and modern paradigms. Education is a complex structure which cannot be understood by any theory, science and discipline individually. When varieties in learning are added to this process, it becomes impasse. Neither traditional nor modern methods can solve this puzzle on their own. Thus, it can be said that holistic point of view is not an option but a necessity.

Idea of holism which mainly depends on humanism and metaphysic affects philosophy, psychology and education and in literature, mental and scientific perspective, romantic choices, humanistic and other radical modern time atomic worldview have been added to description of holism (Akpınar, 2013). It is worth searching the reflection of holism on education. Its importance gains more value when it is thought about the problem in education in recent years. In this point of view, holistic approach intends to know the student with every aspect during the education process, so it provides the trainer to notice the student's features which are ignored, and the other purpose of the holistic education is to improve the students not only mentally but also with his all aspects. In this study, holistic approach has been tried to explain in cooperation with positivism, modernism, behavioral psychology, constructivism and cognitive psychology. In the study, holistic point of view means the balance between matter and spirit, subjective information and objective information, mind and emotion, individual and society, education process and training. Another purpose of this study is to analyze the holistic approach within the context of curriculum.

## WHAT IS HOLISM?

### a) Meaning of Holism

Holism originates from Greek word "holos" which means whole, all and total. Holism is a concept which expresses all the parts of a system. According to Schemmann, holism is not being interested in only one feature of a person but taking into consideration every features of him (Michael, 2008).

There is no definition of holism by using only one part of it. In science, holism means systematic thinking and comes from chaos and confusion. Initially; this concept appeared in medical literature and meant togetherness of matter and spirit. In economy, holistic theory is about how the innovative systems can always exist. Knowing 'how', knowing 'who', knowing 'what' and knowing 'why' are the parts of labor economics. In semantics, it is expressed that holism can only be understood when it is looked at the whole (Schemmann, 2008).

## b) Holism as a Concept

Holistic education paradigm is supported by the concepts of wholeness, togetherness and being engaged. Main claim about holism is that everything in the universe is engaged to each other and they are parts of the whole (Clark, 1991). It is about the mental, physical and social wholeness. This approach combines humanism and spiritual philosophy (Schreiner, 2006:1)

This concept can be studied under the epistemological dimension which is primarily used in training people. This concept is about the nature, principles, structure, sources, methods, validity, conditions, opportunity and restrictions of information (Büyükdüvenci, 1985). Dhankare (2012) puts forward that information is in the center of the curriculum and it is both the aim that should be gained and the way to the aim. There are different opinions about whether the information exists or not. Positivists and materialists think that information can only be gained through sense organs and should be confirmed by experiments however idealists think we keep the information from birth and it can be gained through mind's rules. In constructive approach which is the main theory of learning of postmodern education, information is not absolute and it can be formed in the mind (Akpınar, 2013). In epistemological concept, holism is trying to combine all these and it claims each of them has some supportable sides.

The concept of holism can be discussed under the dimension of human who is the target group of curriculum. There are two main styles about this. First opinion is that human is the object of curriculum. Philosophic base of this group is perennialism and essentialism and it depends on behaviorist psychologically. This point of view can be classified as traditional and depends on Positivism and Newton. Second human approach accepts him as a subject of curriculum. This approach, whose main philosophic base is progressivism, relies on constructivism and scientifically accepts quantum paradigm. Holistic approach can give a direction to education by thinking both subject human and object human together. Because man is neither individually isolated from societies (subjective knowledge), nor he is to stay under the shade of society (objective knowledge). Then again he is a holistic being. "Whole Person" is defined as the human with all strength and complexity as a part of society and multiple, connected being (UNESCO, 2002). Therefore, holistic approach both gives importance to the person as an individual free from society and regards him as the most important item to form a healthy society.

According to all these definitions, it can be said that holism depends on "the whole". The problem is what should be added in this whole. The holism in education is essential in view of perception of person because the real whole is seeing the whole picture of the life around us. Holism is like a puzzle which becomes meaningful when all the parts come together. With another surprising definition; holism is the job of an inspector who is trying to find the murderer by putting every piece of detail together.

## REFLECTION OF HOLISM TO THE EDUCATION

As in the all around the World studies to make education better have been going on. With the improvement in technology, these studies have gained momentum, nevertheless, they could not reach to perfection. Moreover some studies claim that technology has negative effect on learning and education. The most surprising examples of this are the Far East countries which occupy the top of the OECD reports and in these countries technological devices are not used in the classroom. Then, what is the secret of this success? The Pioneer of holistic education in Japan, Nakagava states that holistic education is not only about acquiring basic information and skills but also about improving the person in all aspects (physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual) and he claims that the ultimate goal of holistic education is self-transformation. Miller (1992) says that holistic education cannot be explained as a method or a technique, but as paradigms and principles which can be carried out in different ways. According to Buddhism, every creature is a part of a whole and ultimate goal is to realize this fact and criticize his selfness. This belief is called "Mandala". Systems theory also affects the holistic educators. Systems theory is a theoretic initiation to discover cosmic models of cosmic world. According to this theory, everything is engaged to each other (Akpınar, 2013). Such definitions can be observed in many religions and societies.

According to Miller (1997), holistic education is both personal freedom and social accountability. He says that the freedom of choosing their own fate, following their own interest and critical thinking about their society should be provided.

According to Miller (2007), holistic education has three principles;

- 1) Balance: I refer they have a balance between supplementary energies such as individual learning-group learning, analytic thinking-intuitive thinking, content-process and learning-evaluation.
- 2) Connection: It means the integration of school courses. Connection between courses and the real life should be provided.
- 3) Extent: It refers to paying attention to the difference among students such as learning skills and their learning approaches.

Holistic thinking has four pillars;

1- Learning how to learn

It is one of the most important matters which has been ignored by current education system. In contrast to our education which had depended on memorization until last reforms; this process starts with learning to questioning. It is not important to get an answer to the question. Learning to learn means enhancing paying attention, listening, perception, curiosity and creativity and other skills which this approach makes students gain are students' taking responsibility of their own learning, keeping themselves updated and knowing where to find correct information.

2- Learning to do

Today, the most important needs of industrial societies are raw material and man power. One of the purposes of holistic education is to provide well equipped man power. Learning to do is generally about learning an occupation. The skills which this approach makes students gain are learning the necessities of a job, being productive, ability to work as a team, using the information to solve the problems, producing high quality goods and services, and taking risks.

3- Learning to live together

Man is a part of a society and cannot be separated from it. However free they are, their freedom is limited by the others' freedom. The skills which this approach makes students gain are feeling the responsibility in a society, respecting others, cooperating with them, giving up prejudice and stereotypes.

4- Learning to be

The purpose is to discover the nature of human. It is about emotion and thought rather than physical structure. It means discovering our self being and reaching inner wisdom. Far East holistic understanding claims that the main purpose of education is transformation of self being (Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi & Liaghatdar, 2012).

Phil Gang (1993) tailors the following for holistic education as goals:

- To make young generation acquire a vision which supports holism of all living and non-living things and their connections.
- To make students discover the connection of different disciplines and synthesize them.
- To prepare students for the global 21<sup>st</sup> century which stresses common benefits?
- To improve their adaptation and moral values to build a global peace.

### **The Reflection of Holism to the Curriculum**

The origin of the curriculum traces back to the Latin language with the meaning of racetrack and today it means a guide to organize training-teaching activities. It is inevitable to be affected by different philosophical approaches during curriculum design process. Current curriculum is only a small part of the curriculum which we want to practice. In education it is difficult to apply all the thoughts in theory as in many other fields. Especially in Turkey, because of teachers' incompetencies, limitation of place and material and continual changes in education system, the practicability of the curriculum is very limited.

Not having students with same interests and skills hampers standardization of curriculum. Therefore, systems which are in use all around the world are not capable of meeting each students needs. Each psychological approach offers the best curriculum on its part. One of these approaches is holism. Holistic approach has a balance principle on human and information. Holistic curriculum can be regarded as a combination of idea of holistic education and whole person paradigm in a curriculum. The idea of body-mind, linear thinking-intuitive knowledge, person-society relationship (Miller, 2007) can be reflected to curriculum as holism.

A curriculum based on Holistic Approach should have these criteria;

- 1) Training should be based on students' daily life and the subjects should be related to each other as much as possible.
- 2) Learning should be constructed from concrete to abstract
- 3) Learning should be organized according to different students' skills.
- 4) Outside world should be integrated to learning activities.
- 5) Learning should focus on both mental and emotional perspectives (Orion, 2007).

Holistic curriculum design should give importance to the balance between subjective and objective information; reflect the wholeness of mind, body, emotions and spirit; interdisciplinarily integrate related sciences and disciplines into the education process. Besides these, there should be a balance between the process and the product. Although "holism" is not used directly, we come across holism in many different curriculum development and design models. One of the problem based curriculum design model, correlation design model can be given as an example. In correlation design model, a subject is taken into the center and all the other courses are carried out according to this center course.

Another concept that holism is penetrated into is the opportunity the universities offer students to do double major. These are the programs that students can apply from the beginning of the second year to the end of the

third year. The basic courses of both majors are taken primarily then, advanced courses are taken, and finally successful students can graduate with double certificates (Yök, 2010).

Recent years, one of the booming engineering departments at universities is mechatronic engineering. It can be thought that holism is an unrelated idea in positivist departments such as engineering. However recent studies stresses that students should be trained versatile rather than one-way. Because of this, Mechatronic engineering is a good alternative for those wanting to study engineering. Mecatronic engineering which was used in Japan first is the combination of machine, electronic, software and control engineering (<http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mekatronik>)

There are many schools based on holistic approach. Home-schools, free-democratic schools, open schools, Quaker /Friends schools, Krishnamutri schools, KPM schools (India), Waldorf schools, Montessori schools, Neo-humanist schools can be given as examples. For example Montessori schools, which were established in 1907, aim to train well-balanced, versatile, constructive researcher students through providing necessary physical and social facilities.

Faysal and others (2014) who studied on “whole person” express the reflection of holistic approach to the curriculum as; in holistic curriculum design which has an opinion of “flexible mid-way” in human and epistemological concepts, these steps should be followed; First of all, the main aim of the curriculum should be determined according to whole person paradigm. This main aim is vital in giving direction to the application of the curriculum. After that, how many main elements will be used/ which one will be prior to other in construction of the curriculum should be determined.

## CONCLUSION

Education science, a practical discipline, uses the finding of many other sciences and disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology. Therefore, education is very sensitive to the developments and improvements in these disciplines. Education science takes and transforms them to its own terms and uses them. One of these terms is “holism”. Although this term is mostly used in philosophy, trainers have started to pay attention to this term in recent years. Theoretical and practical deficiencies and wishing to reach a better place in education play important role in this struggle. Unfortunately, current education system which has tried many different approaches and models is far from the desired point regarding its effectiveness and productivity. Thus, education science is always open to the new ideas and beyond this openness it is needy, and so holistic approach can provide alternative ways to education science and its human shaping tool -curriculum. Because the main reason of not reaching the desired point in curriculum is regarding the individual as a simple and one-sided creature. Although they are not called directly as holistic approach, many recent multiple and holistic ideas have been put forward. Moreover, not only to solve educational problems but also to have a peaceful world, nations must equip their children with moral value, and positivist sensibility. In near past, balance between modernism and post modernism can be given as an example to this approach. On the other hand, holism is the main structure of both human and the universe. When we look at the universe, we can realize that everything in universe come from a single unit. This unit is sometimes called as cell and sometimes atom. The units grow and change by interacting each other. Each one is a must for the other. This situation is same for the most valuable creature in the universe, human. As the wholeness of every creature, humankind also consists of wholeness. As the tendency to evaluate the outside world in different perspective, we must evaluate the human with the same criterion. We must try to see and improve the whole.

In our country, which sets its hopes on education on its way to reconstruction, the education system must get out of the limitations such as “monotony”, “single point of view” to do its best. When historical progress has been observed, we see that dependence on single philosophy, psychological trend or theory is the primary element to restrict the effective application of educational sciences and curriculum. This dependence was reflected to Turkish education system as Newton based traditional curriculum that relied on idealism, realism, positivism and behaviorism and it aimed to train the individuals, whom it perceives as objects, only cognitively with objective knowledge for years.

We still pay for training individuals with single perspective and will pay for it unless we cannot internalize an approach aiming to improve one in all aspects like holistic approach. All over the world, especially in the Middle East, not people but guns talk. Impatience, violence and discussion in people could not be stopped. Although all these humanity speeches of modern world, in 20th century humankind have faced with self-conciousless, loneliness, worthlessness and destruction of human nature due to cruel rivalry conditions. Society makes people lose their own identity (Kaygusuz, 2003: 20). Consequently we have created a kind of person whose only aim is to produce and work. Unfortunately, today, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s statement “reaching modern nation’s level” has been misunderstood. Following and trying to reach modern nations whose only aim is

industrialization, money and power prepare the collapse of our new generation. Holistic educators refuse all these approaches which only focus on mental development and global economy. Holism states that we should see the student as a whole soul with its unlimited quality (Miller, 2006).

Therefore our aim should be to eliminate modern and positivist perspective of education which deals with mechanical training and by adding new ideas and approach, we should enrich the curriculum. It does not matter what it is called but it can be said that holistic school, education and curriculum is the most suitable ones for the nature of human. Doll (1993) adds that this approach encourages the trainer and students to question the truth, certainty, objectivity, usage of place and time. According to Doll diversity and variety help student be creative outside the school.

The features of a holistic curriculum can be listed as; curriculum can be shaped according to idealism, realism positivism, behaviorist and Newton's thoughts and also it should take into consideration pragmatism, constructivism and quantum. The objectives of the curriculum should not be decided at the beginning but it can be shaped during the process of learning. Content should be decided through taking into consideration both scientific and non-scientific aspects in addition to subject person rather than only object person. By making the activities and evaluation criteria multiple, the balance between process and result can be provided in holistic curriculum. The probability of holistic education's improving person with his all aspects such as body, mind, emotions and soul is higher than traditional and one-way methods.

Furthermore, with holistic curriculum and holistic thought, person can be motivated to live together in peace. There is only one true and one way in the source of fights. Not rejecting any of these truth and way and making them vary may help the social peace. This contribution can be increased through the balance between matter and sense. Because growing peace in the heart and mind of a person is the starting point of searching for truth. Peace culture can be obtained by a holistic curriculum which combines moral values such as patience, being multi cultural, international understanding, human rights, democracy and being against violence (Unesco, 2002).

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