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Commentary

Tackling Tradition in Education

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What do we mean by tradition in education? Why is the idea a travesty of reality? Is this important? With 60%+ of students worldwide not reaching the required educational standards to cope with life, it is time to review policies and practices. Problems in achieving this, due to reliance on tradition and culture, are defined within the context of the history of education and a society changing more rapidly than ever before. We make mistakes, exaggerate, skew, and suppress truths not in our interests to maintain a comfortable status quo. The article clarifies these ideas and explains why there is an urgent need for change if we want world peace and progress.

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personal, practical knowledge application, assessed in personal portfolio records.

1. Introduction: Traditional vs. Progressive Education

Passive Traditional Approach

As I write this, an invitation has popped into my mailbox about a seminar: “*Education: A Flawed Process*”, indicating that the traditional approach is not effective for the modern world. What is the “traditional approach”? Why is it questioned? This mode has teachers controlling a class of students and taking responsibility for the learning. Duties and powers set down by the government have educators as student instructors, controlling how to teach. Students attend school/college to gain knowledge. Transmitting information is the teaching aim, viewed as successful if test results reach national standards. Traditional education takes place in classrooms with students sitting at desks in front of a teacher and mastering content by repetition and practice. This happens at all learning levels, known as the passive, traditional method, encouraging fact-based learning for exam triumphs.

Active Progressive Approach

Differentiating *traditional*, *passive* versus *progressive*, *active* education is that the latter puts students at the centre of learning. Reformers like John Dewey, the American philosopher and psychologist, argued for active education (1859–1952). He drew on philosophers John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, suggesting hands-on, experiential learning applies knowledge more effectively. It focuses less on job preparation and more on student interests, natural abilities, thinking, and communication. The aim is lifelong learners, engaging with new ideas to solve problems.

Traditional education tends to be prescriptive with a “one-size-fits-all” approach geared to national and international comparison tests. In contrast, the progressive method, as in the Forest, Montessori, and Waldorf schools, promotes active learning, giving students more control and chances for communication and collaboration in projects. Progressive schools offer *inspirational learning*, encouraging holistic (*rounded*) growth through activities inside and outside classes. Less focus is on testing and more on

2. What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Traditional and Progressive Approaches?

Today’s classes show great diversity in ability, interests, backgrounds, and ethnic cultures, requiring various learning approaches. Traditional education is an established mode, developed in monocultures, with educators finding it easier to implement a familiar curricula structure of coursework and assessment. Students sit at desks facing the teacher, who delivers content in a lecture style. Consistency across levels encourages rigid order and organisation. The downside is that it produces compliancy, eliminates individuality and experimentation, and stifles creativity. Students are machines and fed facts which often they cannot apply in reality (Sage & Matteucci, 2022).

Progressive education benefits include that teachers recognise and value creativity, interests, and differing student abilities. They do not just teach prescriptive facts and expect students to memorise them for perfect test scores. Students engage actively through projects, experiments, and peer partnerships, pursuing topics of interest to develop personal and practical abilities. This enables them to reflect and refine ideas and evaluate real issues. Students have personalised input, with experiences targeting holistic growth. Personal and practical attributes are what employers value most and note are lacking in employees (Winterbotham, 2020). Thus, the progressive teacher is a mentor and facilitator rather than a knowledge transmitter – demanding more competencies for this flexible approach. UK training changes mean that people can enter teaching with a subject degree to be then monitored against national standards. Many new teachers lack a background in psychology, sociology, and the history of learning, along with pedagogic theories learnt from full-time courses. A third leave within 5 years, feeling unprepared for diversity (UK Office for National Statistics, ONS, 2022).

Thus, it is a distortion that traditional education should still be promoted in diverse communities, as it is unsuitable for many students and increases special educational needs. However, institutions are mainly interested in creating obedient, subservient learners for exam success. UK policy requires regular

Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) and national examinations at ages 16 and 18. Quality assurance (QA) systems are a significant education development since the 1980s, but Van Vught & Westerheijden (1994) noted adverse effects from continual cost pressures. Despite growth and sophistication, little is known of the impact (OECD, 2008). Scepticism is expressed in QA studies (Christensen, 2010; Ewell, 2010). Bias towards available data on inputs and research excellence in universities may not provide an accurate measure of teaching and learning quality (Dill & So, 2005; Astin & Lee, 2003). Student self-reports on learning are poorly correlated with objective measures, questioning their use for education quality (Bowman, 2010). Higher Education now often follows a business model, with staff appointed not always for academic excellence but for the ability to bring in foreign students.

“Universities are now bonafide businesses and degree factories, whose business models rely on a growing influx of full fee-paying international students in order to maximise revenue. Nearly all of these international students come from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)” (Leith van Onselen, Chief Economist at the MB Fund & MB Super, 2019).

This has brought about dumbed-down standards, with UK inclusive grading allowing incorrect spelling and grammar to assist students with limited English. UK work applications often show linguistic mistakes and read incoherently. Professional Doctorates marked recently fail to follow reliability and validity principles. Although research degrees, they do not produce statistically significant studies. Online questionnaires are favoured designs (*known as unreliable*) with ambiguous questions. Matched studies seem no longer a pass requirement. High-level expertise is needed now as machines implement basic operations. While accepting subject pass rates of 50% (*or less*), there is demand for higher accuracy today. What accuracy rate do you want from your airline pilot, bus driver, dentist, doctor, or mechanic? More exactness is required than the system accepts. Fortunately, there is pressure for personalised learning, preparing students using practitioner models to international standards. The focus is on competencies, not test scores, remaining on content until mastered, in relevant, real contexts, rather than studying abstract themes prescriptively. The current system is called “Swiss Cheese Learning” (*cheese with holes*), used by Reason & Hobbs (2003) to define gaps. If a student gains a 75% level, we praise them, but what about the 25% they may not know? Curricula build on previously transmitted knowledge, so a lack of a foundation compounds as learners move through the system, with some facing failure and loss of confidence. There are too many ‘holes in the cheese’ for applying knowledge effectively. A 50% (*or less*) pass indicates much learning is questionable, but satisfactory for progression or qualification.

Traditional education means completing set assignments and exams with little individuality. Passing prescribed tests does not guarantee that students can apply learning in reality. Currently, 150 American schools have negotiated portfolios of evidence to universities and employers rather than Grade Point Averages (GPA), showing personal, practical, and academic feats more clearly than arbitrary tests. Project-based learning occurs in some instances, demonstrating knowledge, transferable, and individual abilities as in Italian Educational Robotics programmes (Sage & Matteucci, 2022). *‘Since learning is so nuanced, so should be the*

means in which we assess it’ (Sackstein, 2015, p. 10). Education must centre on life competencies and how to be contributing citizens, based on individual talents and desires, focusing on communication, thinking, and application of knowledge.

3. Why is Tradition Intransigent?

Tradition and culture are interrelated concepts developed over time. They tend to be unique to certain societies and normally emerge from local beliefs and circumstances, relating to many life areas. The main difference between culture and tradition is that the latter describes group beliefs and behaviours passed through generations. Culture is the shared features of the entire group accumulated throughout history. Thus, tradition is part of culture and identity, seeming immune to time and change. Through inherent obligation, dependence, security, or guilt carried, it resists scrutiny. Traditional education is not as imagined. UK universities were and still are finishing schools for an elite rather than leaders of knowledge, research, and practice (Scott, 2012). I have known students admitted with low grades, as it was family tradition to attend Oxbridge. Immune to change and scrutiny, universities become a force against evolution and redundancy. Traditions are comfortable but disastrous if resisting progress – causing our brains to dull. It is the easy, lazy response to suggestions for change. Blindly following the past means not thinking creatively and critically. Traditions bind people in a way that nothing else does and appear safe if there are risks in implementing new ideas. Traditions and customs perpetuate when transformation is indicated, showing a backwards mentality and obstacles to progress.

An example is a European project, “*Policy for Educator Evidence in Portfolios*” (PEEP), developing professionals for higher-level human knowledge and creative expertise now that machines implement routines. A practitioner doctorate (PD) was piloted, targeting participant work problems with solutions and impact recorded in an e-portfolio. Traditional PhDs and professional doctorates have limited influence on knowledge and practice, so a model based on research within work for greater influence on growth is advocated. The UK College of Teachers (TCOT) led the PEEP project. Variable professional qualification standards were noted, with few chances to achieve top Level 8 awards. A PD (Level 8) (2012-16) produced a portfolio: *a personal narrative, introducing a theme, literature review, and formal, non-formal, and informal work evidence, with development projects reflecting 4 internationally agreed professional principles*. In 2016, TCOT became a professional body, with a vice chancellor agreeing to continue the PD. However, when leaving his university in 2020, new staff discontinued the PD as it “*cannibalised the doctoral system*” – also the response of other institutions approached. Thus, tradition is used to avoid change in spite of research showing a PD meets modern needs (Sage, 2020b).

4. Traditional World Education – Bowen, 1981, McCulloch & Crook, Peterson, et al. 2010

Formal Education BC

The earliest formal school is attributed to Egypt’s Middle Kingdom, directed by Kheti, treasurer to Mentuhotep II (2061-2010 BC). Literacy focused on elite scribes (1-5% of citizens) serving the temple, pharaonic, and military authorities. In India, education

developed *character* through the oral Vedic system (1500–600 BC) from age 8 onwards, in 3 steps. First was Shravana (*hearing*) – knowledge from listening. Second was Manana (*reflection*) – to think, analyse, and infer. Third was Nididhyasana – knowledge applied to real life. Educating women in dance, music, and housekeeping until marriage was key in ancient India. Gurukula education – Hindu residential schools – were in teacher houses or monasteries. The teacher (Guru) and student (Śiṣya) were considered equal, even from different classes. Education was free, but rich students paid "Gurudakshina," a contribution after completing studies. Buddhist education taught the "cannon" (scriptures) in monastery schools.

In **China**, the first education system was in the Xia dynasty (2076–1600 BC). The government built schools for aristocrats to learn rituals, literature, and archery. Private education existed in **Greece** except for Sparta. In 5th & 4th century (C) BC Athens, besides 2 years of military training, the state took little part in education. Anyone could open a school and decide curricula. Parents chose one offering subjects they wanted their children to learn, at a fee. Even the poor sent sons from 7–14 years, learning literacy, poetry, history, music, drama, gymnastics, athletics, sport, and wrestling.

Formal private schools in Rome, **Italy**, arose in 4thC BC, targeting socialisation and basic knowledge. Boys and girls were educated, though not always together. Like today, schools were in tiers – *elementary, middle, high school, & college*, starting early when memory is most retentive. Progression depended more on ability than age, stressing student *ingenium* or inborn "gift" for learning. Only the elite completed formal education. Others gained vocational abilities on the job. Higher education was a status symbol, not a practical concern. Literacy in the Greco-Roman world was seldom more than 20%; averaging 10% in the Roman Empire, but with wide regional variations.

Education in the Middle Ages 500–1500 AD

Town, church, and monastery schools were common in Europe with students between 7–14 years. Instruction for boys went from literacy basics (*alphabet, syllables, prayers & proverbs*) to advanced Latin. Schools also taught basic arithmetic, writing, and business. Often, various levels of instruction took place in the same Catholic monasteries, which were literacy education centres.

Universities evolved from Christian cathedral and monastic schools in **England, France, and Italy**, from the 11thC for arts, law, medicine, and theology. **Ireland** was known for saints and scholars in monastery learning centres, with Northumbria (England) famed for religion and arts. **Charlemagne**, King of the **Franks** (768–814 AD), united Western Europe for the first time since the Romans, with literature, art, and architecture flourishing in the *Carolingian Renaissance*. He set up free elementary education by priests in a 797 capitulary stating:

"that the priests establish schools in every town and village,... and let them exact no price from the children for their teaching nor receive anything from them save what parents may offer voluntarily" (PL.CV. Col 196: Carolingian School: Further Ambition).

In Dunfermline Abbey, **Scotland**, ordered by Malcolm Canmore and Queen Margaret, the first UK high school developed. Sculpture, paintings, and stained glass windows were media through which Biblical themes and Saints were taught to illiterate

viewers. The University of Cambridge, England (1209), and others were set up in the Middle Ages. The University of al-Qarawiyyin, in **Fes, Morocco**, is the oldest first degree-awarding institution, according to **UNESCO**.

Islamic mosque schools (**Madrasah**) taught the Arabic Quran (Pederson et al, 2010). In the 9thC, Bimaristan medical schools gave Islamic Diplomas for doctors. Al-Azhar University, **Cairo, Egypt** (975), was a "Jami'ah" (Arabic for university) offering post-graduate degrees with a **Madrasah** and theological **seminary** for **Islamic law, jurisprudence, philosophy**, logic, and **Arabic grammar**.

In **China**, 3 oral texts taught children by rote their language's written characters and Confucianism. *The Thousand Character Classic*, a 6thC poem, taught Chinese for a millennium, with 250 phrases of 4 characters each and 1000 unique ones. It was sung like children learning Latin through the "**Alphabet song**". From the 13th–19thC, the *Three Characters Classic* of Confucian ideas was a child's first formal home education, written in character triplets for easy retention. Confucianism is founded on humaneness, righteousness, propriety, knowledge, integrity, and filial piety. Chinese heuristic principles of teaching according to ability reflect contemporary personalisation in progressive, active education. Most people were illiterate at the time, so the oral tradition of reciting classics ensured popularity and survival. With simple text in 3-character verses, students learned grammar, **Chinese history**, and **Confucian** morality. Social aspirers studied classics. China depended on educated officials to operate the empire. During the 605 AD Sui era, a merit-based exam selected officials. Schools teaching Chinese classics continued for 1,300 years, until the Qing Dynasty ended in 1911 for Western methods. Core curricula for civil service exams from the mid-12thC onwards were the *Four Books*, introducing Confucianism. Before 1040–1050 AD, prefectural schools were ignored by the state and financed by patrons. The chancellor at the time, Fan Zhongyan, issued an edict combining government and private financing to rebuild disused schools, but did not issue funds, so it was enacted later. Fan's trend accelerated public schools to eclipse private ones – not officially reversed until the 13th C.

India, in millennium one, saw higher education thriving at Nalanda, Takshashila, Ujjain, and Vikramshila Universities. Subjects were grammar, literature, logic, maths, art, architecture, philosophy, astronomy, Buddhism, Hinduism, Arthashastra (*Economics+Politics*), law, and medicine. Takshila specialised in medicine; Ujjain in astronomy, but Nalanda, the largest, had all subjects with 10,000 students at its peak. The Mahavihara Buddhist Centre was created by King Dharmapala (783–820) because of the decline in learning quality at Nalanda. Education was free and oral. Hindus donated to preserve their religion with university centres for pilgrims. After Muslims ruled India, Islamic education and social morals spread their ethos. Education was oral in Maqtabas, Madrassahs, and Mosques, funded by nobles or landlords. Indigenous education was widespread in the 18thC, with a school for every temple, mosque, or village in most regions. Subjects were reading, writing, arithmetic, theology, law, astronomy, metaphysics, ethics, medicine, and religion for all students.

Japan education dates before the 6thC when Chinese ideas came to the Yamato court. Foreigners have helped cultural development. By the 9thC, Heian-kyo (**Kyoto**) capital had 5 higher institutes, with schools created by the nobility and imperial court. From

1185–1600, Zen Buddhist monasteries were learning centres, and Higher Ashikaga Schools, Ashikaga Gakko, flourished in the 15thC.

Aztec refers to certain ethnic groups of central Mexico, particularly Nahuatl speakers with political and military power over Mesoamerica areas in the 14th–16thCs (*late post-Classic period*). Until age 14, education was by parents but supervised by authorities for the *calpōlli*, “sayings of the old” – *huēhuetlātōlli*, with Aztec ideals. At 15, all boys and girls went to school. “China,” an Aztec group, was the first to have mandatory education for all, regardless of gender, rank, or station, with 2 school types: *telpochcalli* for practical and military studies and *calmecac* for advanced writing, astronomy, statesmanship, theology, and other subjects. These were common to Nahua people and may be older than Aztec culture. Aztec teachers (*tlatimine*) promoted a spartan regime to develop stoicism. Girls learned home crafts, child-rearing, and religion, but not to read or write. Paintings exist of females leading religious ceremonies, but there are no references to them as priests.

The Inca Empire in the 15th–16thCs divided education for upper classes and the general population. Royalty and chosen ones from the Empire learned administration, taught by *Amautas* (*wise men*), while commoners acquired knowledge and skills from families. Amautas, like British bards, included philosophers, poets, and priests, keeping oral Inca histories alive by imparting their culture, history, customs, and traditions. Inca education was socially discriminatory, but Amautas ensured all learned Quechua, the Empire language, like Romans promoted Latin in Europe. This was for political, not educational, reasons, to aid communication and minimize conflict from the many languages spoken.

Education Post 1500

In the 1950s, Communists expanded primary education in China, targeting personal and practical abilities for future worker productivity. Eradicating illiteracy was vital for the economy.

Europe's modern education derives from High Middle Age schools for religious principles to train clergy. Universities, like Paris (1160), were Christian. Secular ones existed, like the University of Bologna (1088). Free education was mandated by the Church (1179) to teach boys unable to pay fees. Parishes and monasteries had free schools for literacy study. Private religious schools reappeared in medieval Europe. Curricula were the trivium and quadrivium (7 *Liberal Arts*) in Latin, the language of educated Western Europe in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In Northern Europe, religious education was mostly superseded by elementary schooling following the Reformation. In Scotland, the church had a spiritual reform programme (1561), with a teacher for each parish church and free education for the poor. 16th–18thC education was widespread to produce obedient, compliant citizens.

In Central Europe, the 17thC scientist and educator, John Amos Comenius, promoted reformed universal education, widely used for new thinkers and doers. Universities were important. King's College (1831) was the founder of the University of London. By the 18thC, academic journals were published. In the 19thC, Germany and France had seminars and laboratories. Science, mathematics, theology, philosophy, and ancient history were subjects for the upper classes. Academic education led to analysis, and in the 1770s, the first Pedagogy Chair at the German Halle was created, promoting ideas of Johann Pestalozzi in Switzerland and Joseph Lancaster in Britain. By the late 19thC, most of West, Central, and

East Europe taught reading, writing, and arithmetic for orderly political behaviour. Having primary education, major nations created secondary levels by 1914. In the 20thC, progressive education included, in Italy, Montessori schools and, in Germany, Steiner and Waldorf ones.

In France, the Ancien Régime before 1789 institutionalised education to supply church and state administrators. Small local schools taught working-class children to read and serve God. Noble and bourgeois elites had a distinct education: boys went to upper school or university, while girls were finished at convents. The Enlightenment challenged this, but there were no real female alternatives. Modern education began in the 1790s Revolution, when Napoleon replaced traditional universities with polytechnics. Elementary schools received little attention until 1830, when France copied Prussia. The 1833 Guizot Law mandated primary schools for boys with common curricula for moral and religious education, reading, weights, and measures, promoting social order and political stability. Jules Ferry, an anti-cleric politician and Public Instruction Minister, set up free, compulsory Republican schools (*l'école républicaine*) for under 15s, to break the Catholic Church and monarchism hold in the 1880s.

French colonies were influenced by radical ideals of equality, standard curricula, and teaching, exporting mother-nation systems and methods. A trained lower bureaucracy was useful to colonial officials. After 1946, the best students went to Paris for advanced training and were influenced by the anti-colonial diaspora. Ho Chi Minh and others in 1920 formed the French Communist party. Tunisia built colonial and native education modelled on France, targeting females and vocational study. African nationalists rejected it, as attempts to retard growth and maintain colonial superiority. In Algeria, the debate polarised. The French set up schools for science and their culture. European Catholic migrants (*pied-noir*) welcomed this but not Muslim Arabs, who prized their religion. In South Vietnam, from 1955–1975, colonial powers competed, as the French continued work and Americans disagreed on aims. The French sought to preserve their culture among the Vietnamese, resenting the American invasion of their imperial zone. Americans wanted a strong nation to stop communism.

In England, John Pounds set up a free school (1818) teaching poor children reading, writing, and maths. In 1820, Samuel Wilderspin opened the first infant school in Spitalfields, London, and schools for girls (*classics & languages*) and boys (*sciences & business*) were established in Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, and other parts by 1830. From 1833, Parliament supported fees for the English and Welsh poor. In 1837, the Lord Chancellor, Henry Brougham, backed public education. Most were taught in church schools, with controversies between the Church and dissenters a theme from 1900.

Denmark started cathedral and monastery schools, with 7 from the 12th & 13th Cs existing today. After the 1536 Reformation, schools were controlled by the King, teaching theology, Latin, and Greek. Elementary education was primitive, but in 1721, 240 *rytterskoler* (*cavalry schools*) were created. Religious Pietism, in the 18thC, required literacy to promote public education. In the 19thC (*until today*), it was influenced by Grundtvig (*clergyman, politician, poet*), inspiring teaching in Folk High Schools. The 1871 secondary education divided languages and sciences. The Gymnasium (*upper secondary*) existed until 2005. In 1894, the *Folkeskole* (*government primary*) met industry needs. In 1903, the 3-year Gymnasium

course linked to the municipal school through the *mellemsskole* (middle school) grades 6–9, replaced by the *Realskole*. Previously, students entering the Gymnasium (to gain university entrance) needed private tuition. In 1975, the *realskole* ceased, and the *Folkeskole* (primary) transformed with pupils attending the same schools regardless of academic merits.

Norway, an archdiocese in 1152, taught priests at Trondheim, Oslo, Bergen, and Hamar cathedral schools. After the 1537 reformation, cathedral schools became Latin ones in towns. In 1736, reading was enforced for all children with the *Folkeskole*, mandatory for 7 years (1889) and 9 (1969). The *Folkeskole* ended in the 1970–80s, and *Grunnskole* was introduced in 1997. A new curriculum for elementary and middle schools began, based on ideological nationalism and new teaching methods, with a child and community orientation.

In 1842, **Sweden** introduced a 4-year primary school, "*Folkskola*," adding grades 5 & 6 in 1882, with some having 7 & 8 called "*Fortsättningsskola*." Schooling was mandatory for 7 years in the 1930s, 8 in the 1950s, and 9 in 1962. Numbers were slow from 1900–47, rising in the 1950s, and declining after 1962, with lower birth rates. The Gymnasium, from an upper social base, became open to all based on talent. Education was the producer of economic growth and the expansion of white-collar jobs.

Japan was isolated in 1600 under the Tokugawa (1600–1867) with few literate commoners. By the period's end, learning was widespread with a valuable legacy: an increasingly literate populace, a meritocratic ideology, and an emphasis on discipline and competency. Traditional Samurai curricula for elites stressed morality and martial arts. Confucian classics were memorised through reading and recitation, with arithmetic and calligraphy studied. Commoner education was practical, with the 3Rs, calligraphy, and abacus use, in temple schools (*terakoya*), devolved from Buddhist ones. They were no longer religious or in temples by 1867. The Tokugawa end saw more than 11,000 such schools, attended by 750,000 students. Teaching involved memorising texts, the abacus, and copying Chinese characters and Japanese script. By the 1860s, 40–50% of boys and 15% of girls had schooling outside the home, like major European nations (*apart from Germany, with compulsory schooling*). Meiji leaders turned a feudal nation into a modern one, with Western science, technology, and education methods. After 1868, the Iwakura mission applied decentralisation, local school boards, and teacher autonomy. Elementary rolls rose from 40–50% in the 1870s to over 90% by 1900, despite protests against fees. Modern child ideas emerged after 1850, with the state activating folks for service in Western-style schools. After 1890, Japan had many reformers, child experts, and educated mothers. Children had personal space to read, play, and do school homework. Ideas disseminated through all social classes. After 1870, Western texts replaced Confucian ones, with a reaction in the 1890s. Traditional Confucian and Shinto precepts were again stressed, regarding hierarchical human relations, state service, learning, and morality. The 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education guided learning until it was rejected in 1945.

In **India**, education was widespread for elite young men in the 18thC, with schools in most regions for reading, writing, arithmetic, theology, law, astronomy, metaphysics, ethics, medicine, and religion. The current system, with Western content, was introduced by the British Raj, following Lord Macaulay advocating English in schools. Traditional structures declined as

they were not recognised by the British government. Public education expenditure in the late 19th and early 20thCs varied across regions, with West and South provinces spending 3–4 times more than Eastern ones, due to historical land tax differences. Lord Curzon, the 1899–1905 Viceroy, made mass education a priority when only 20% of children attended school, focusing on literacy and restructuring universities to upgrade curricula, textbooks, and examinations. Technical education plans were enacted later.

Canada education became contentious after the 1867 Confederation, regarding the status of French schools outside Quebec. **New Zealand** provision was from provincial government, Christian missionary churches, and private education. The first education parliament act was passed in 1877 for standard primary education, compulsory from 6 to 16 years. **Australia** compulsory education began in the 1870s but was difficult to enforce because of fees. Teachers felt salaries were inadequate. In **Russia**, the 1897 census found 28% of people were literate. Universities were for the upper classes with weak provisions for others. Vladimir Lenin (1919) said the Soviet aim was abolishing illiteracy, thus establishing universal compulsory education. Millions of adults were enrolled in literacy schools, and youths (*Komsomol & Young Pioneers*) were teachers. In 1926, the literacy rate was 56.6%, and from 1937, it was 86% for men and 65% for women. Primary school expansion coincided with the First Five-Year Plan as Stalin said that all had the ability and desire to contribute to state industry and international supremacy. Soviet education is the top resource for achieving national social, economic, cultural, and scientific objectives. Responsibilities are placed on schools, and support is provided. The literacy campaign was a policy of "indigenisation" (*korenizatsiya*). From the 1920s to 1930s, this promoted non-Russian languages in government, media, and education. Intended to counter Russification practices, it ensured native-language teaching was the quick way to improve levels. National schools were set up by 1930 and grew in the Soviet era. Language policy changed over time, with the government mandating in 1938 the teaching of Russian in all non-Russian schools. In the 1950s, all non-Russian schools were converted to Russian.

In the 1920s–30s, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) imposed educational reforms in **Turkey** by separating government and religious affairs. In 1923, three main education groups existed. The first were Medreses, based on Arabic, the Qur'an, and memorisation. The second were İdadî and Sultanî reformist schools of the Tanzimat era. The third were foreign language colleges and minority schools using new teaching. Atatürk modernised the Medrese classical Islamic education, freeing it from dogma. In 1924, he sought American reformer John Dewey's advice. The 1924 Unification, with one education curriculum, promoted inclusion on civil community models, ending the "clerics of the Ottoman Empire" but not religious schools. These moved to higher education until restored later to a secondary position after Atatürk's death. In the 1930s, Albert Einstein suggested Atatürk hired 1000+ academics, including those escaping Nazi Germany. Most were in medicine, mathematics, and natural sciences, with some in law and arts, serving as directors in 8 of 12 Istanbul science institutes and 6 of 17 medical clinics.

West Africa education, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, was different from imperial France. "Adapted education" (1903) used a French curriculum as a base, with comparable information from an African context. French morality lessons referenced African

history and folklore, taught in French. Africa has 40+ million children. UNESCO's *Regional overview on sub-Saharan Africa* (2000) reported only 58% were enrolled in primary schools, the lowest of any region. The USAID (2005) reported 40% of African school-aged children were not attending primary school.

Education in the 21st Century

Compulsory education is now worldwide, but on the *International Day of Education* (2023), the United Nations announced that 244 million children were out of school (114 million boys & 130 million girls). Also, 1/3 of nations fail to provide adequate early learning because policies and finances do not support targets. In Afghanistan, the Taliban now govern, denying female education rights. Reasons for children being out of school are *because they - are girls - live in war zones - have disabilities - live in poor nations - are in child marriages - live in disaster areas - are child labourers - have poor sanitation or no area school*. Of the 781 million illiterate adults worldwide, nearly two-thirds are female.

Countries ranking lowest for education, with illiteracy rates in brackets, are:

- Mali (31.1%)
- Central African Republic (56%)
- Ethiopia (39%)
- Eritrea (67.8%)
- Guinea (41%)
- Pakistan (54.9%)
- Gambia (50%)
- Angola (70%)

The global literacy rate is mainly high. For all male and female 15-year-olds, it is 86.3%. Males aged 15+ have a 90% rate, with females at 82.7%. National differences exist, as the figures suggest. They may mislead, as it is easier to assess reading mechanics than comprehension. Some students read fluently but cannot assemble meaning, lacking oral narrative structures for understanding (Sage, 2020).

The 21st century has accelerated changes in economy and technology, with significant effects on work and education demands to prepare students for jobs. In the 1980s, government, educators, and employers identified key competencies and implementation strategies to meet changing digital environments (Scribner et al 2003). They encompass communication, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, resilience, perseverance, general knowledge, collaboration, information and digital literacy, technical competence, citizenship, and tolerance. These are required for 21st century success, requiring deep learning from analytic reasoning, complex problem-solving, and team approaches, compared to traditional knowledge-based competence, with less focus on flexible cooperation.

Trends include new technology, economic shifts, education-work mismatches, urban growth, human mobility, training demands, lifelong learning needs, and cultural mixing. The focus is on education to cultivate greater tenacity, adaptability, and communication underpinning personal development. In a competitive world, where tests and exams rule from *macro-political* decisions, it is easy to marginalise personal, practical growth, as teachers work to government standards, with *micro-political* influences emerging to meet goals. Surveys suggest that communication is a weak ability, declining now that technology precedes talk in human exchanges, specifically noted in science

and engineering, requiring interdisciplinary engagement (Khoo et al, 2020). Thus, communication emerges as a primary development area in a world where jobs need smarter personnel as robots carry out routines. Teamwork is vital for world challenges: *aging populations, fewer resources, immigration, and climate change*, etc.

The World Bank report "*The Education Crisis: being in school is not the same as learning*" (2020) suggests that hundreds of millions reach maturity with no basic competencies, so that 56%+ are not fully productive in life. The report stresses that educators generally are not given the knowledge to cope with diversity. The United Nations 75 Digital Report (2020) suggests that 87% globally think that for education to improve, there must be better communication and cooperation. Endorsing these views, World Economic Forum 2020 reports say it is lamentable that transmissive, lecture-based approaches dominate. Teachers must re-define their roles and focus on learners becoming contributing members of society by developing specific interests and talents. Learning to communicate and cooperate in project-based, relevant tasks facilitates personal, practical, and academic development. The Global Technology Governance Summit (Di Caro, 2021) shows how diversity, equity, and inclusion have failed, so attention should be given to equality issues. Future change should consider the following questions:

- Why do classes start at 9 am?
- Why do we split learning into subjects?
- What is the role of a teacher?
- How can informal and formal learning be encouraged?
- How can students learn from others?
- How might a learning journey be personalised and recorded?
- How could evidence of understanding be better demonstrated?
- What ways might show progress?
- How might we teach and reinforce abilities for the present and future?
- How has the 2020 pandemic impacted teaching methods?
- How can education deal with inequality issues of diverse learners?

Answers have political, educational, social, and technological aspects. Students deserve holistic education that challenges and inspires life-long learning. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Director says Britain has made the slowest progress of 38 nations because memorisation is the main learning strategy in a narrow, exam-driven culture (Schleicher, 2020). He says that education is not about teaching people facts, but about developing personal, practical, and mental competencies. Work-readiness requires understanding globalisation, from mobility to partnerships. Education must rebalance to develop a more holistic, world approach for coping with life by focusing on real, not abstract, issues. OECD reports that 50% of institutions are preparing for blended teaching (Bertling et al., 2020). This requires ongoing professional development to monitor new teaching modes, using practitioner models to review evidence with colleagues. Over 60% of students worldwide do not reach required standards (Luckin, 2020). If daring to alter traditional practice, progress is possible.

Review

Formal education has existed for over 4,000 years, influenced by societal values directing teaching content. Religious groups have led learning to sustain their differing beliefs, and although states

have largely taken over education to enact curriculum reform and consistency, their schools still thrive. **India** targets character improvement following Hindu beliefs, **Japan** focuses on personalised learning from Confucian views, while **Russia** promotes international supremacy. Autocracies, like **China** and **Iran**, urge compliancy. Thus, culture and tradition form values passed on and strengthened through generations to resist change. Countries are increasingly multicultural, with agreements difficult to achieve because of conflicting ethics.

To raise performance, learner “needs” must precede society “wants”. Communication needs prioritising and promoting as a whole process rather than just linguistic components, with awareness of growth within its varying contexts. This points to greater emphasis on human development and a clearer understanding of the shift between informal home and formal school communication to achieve higher performance. A model is the *Communication Opportunity Group Strategy* (COGS), developed to target narrative thinking and language structures (Sage, 2000). With writing tasks matching speaking levels in the framework and suitability for small or large groups, COGS participants have control over content to assist progress. It follows principles proving their worth and forms the basis of work regarding intercultural communication practice (Sage, 2020).

Traditional differences lead to serious misunderstandings, not only about interpreting knowledge but also about cooperation and what it means to negotiate. Categorisation misses cultural variations resulting from different contexts. At times, UK or US negotiations are *high context*, communicated nonverbally (*vocal dynamics, facial expressions, postures, movements, manner, etc.*) which participants in the culture recognise. What contexts vary negotiating tactics? Analysis of the balance of resources between people provides answers. Syrians dealing with British and Americans may take a *high context* approach, but with Lebanese or Kurds, a *low context* one, relying on verbal input. What is “*low context*”? While a way of perceiving, words assume what is important and how things work, to focus on *linguistic ambiguity*. Language’s traditional semantic distinctions reflect differing interpretations of reality and behaviour. A stick is identifiable at a non-linguistic level as something to be cut, kicked, lobbed, or arranged, as in two crossed ones for a religious symbol. The word name introduces tradition and culture, embedded in the history, religion, customs, and context of object meanings within the given linguistic group. A word evokes unique references, associations, and uses. It is polysemic- *capacity for a sign (symbol, morpheme, word, or phrase)* to have many related meanings and uses. Across these are different semantic fields, although overlapping, as in the word “*peace*”, with legal examples in many languages. In English, this may refer to state agreements, but the Hebrew “*shalom*” lacks the legal features that “*peace*” means in Europe, deriving from a Semitic root for *health, welfare, greetings, and safety*. An Israeli says “*All people returned b’shalom*”, indicating safe and sound, so word checks must occur in teaching information.

Communication among different national and professional cultures is challenging. I have a medical, psychology, and education background to appreciate this issue. In medical circles, the word “*tactile*” denotes tactile perception, body movements, muscle feelings, and space awareness. In education, *tactile* is not used, but the word *feeling* signifies a major teaching and learning input (*seeing/hearing/feeling*). Thus, there are problems discussing learners with sensory problems, as concepts differ. Knowing local

patterns helps comprehension. Transition between professional cultures requires expert linguistics and logic to change language for others and vice versa. This is more difficult than communication between different nations, which was the role of diplomats but now is expected of us all. We can review tradition and culture as:

- Communication
- Knowledge - shared by a group and transmitted across generations
- Concepts - experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, time ideas, roles, space relations, objects, and possessions acquired from individual/group acts
- Learned behaviour - totaling experience through social learning
- Group style -- values, beliefs, signs, behaviours - accepted & transmitted across generations
- Symbolic meanings - learned & maintained in a society through its institutions
- Symbolic messages - including group abilities, knowledge, attitudes, values & motives.
- Explicit & implicit behaviour - acquired & transmitted by symbols for group achievements
- Systems - develop from actions to influence further feats
- Entirety of learned tradition - ideas, values & group behaviour transmitted generationally
- Joint mind-programming - focused attention, open awareness & intention marking groups

(List compiled by Leicester students on an MA Psychology of Learning programme, 2007)

Tradition and culture evolved from an *essentialist (predefined/static)* to a *constructionist view (complex/dynamic/evolving)*. The former has fixed dimensions, with member variation a secondary concern, which is inadequate today, as migrations have constant physical and virtual interaction amongst persons. A *reductionist* view limits understanding and promotes naive analyses of complex problems. Intercultural learning, charting theories, contexts, and realities, in a constructionist way, defines people interactions, evolving and adapting to realities. This reshapes over time, from contacts with other beliefs and customs, plus context, economics, and globalisation. It is a creative, complex process - diverse in beliefs, values, mores, and practices. Tradition and culture are dynamic, with group understandings and boundaries renegotiated and redefined for current needs (Council of Europe Activity Report, 2009). An iceberg metaphor shows visible aspects: artefacts and behaviours - like dress, language, food, music, art, celebrations, and educational curricula, with invisible ones - beliefs, values, assumptions, and norms. Essentialist to constructivist moves clarify inconsistencies. They offer an implicit, qualitative gap between elements, implying *visible* are superficial and *invisible* are central.

Communication, tradition, and cultural awareness

How and what we communicate *verbally* and *non-verbally* is defined by context, tradition, and culture shaping attitudes, values, and knowledge. *Verbally* defines message information and the use of figurative, humorous, and inferential speech. *Non-verbally* includes voice-tone, pitch, pace, pause, power, and pronunciation marking meaning, with *body language* indicating mood and feelings through physical appearance, gaze, posture,

gestures, and facial expressions. Spoken and written genres have conventions to be learned and applied appropriately. *Dialogue* has equal speaker participation, but in a *monologue* one person controls, showing role positions and talk patterns accounting for factors:

Learning how to learn - defines communication *strategy*. Learning is gaining knowledge, experience, attitudes, and abilities over time to achieve the previously impossible. Interrelated stages include new experiences and behaviours, with reflection refining the embedding of new knowledge, understanding, and competencies. Implementation determines purpose, identifying procedures for this. Our *internal communication* grasps the goal and steps to achieve it. A *narrative schema*, developed from formal talk, enables independent learning, providing the internal mental framework for assembling events.

Mathematical, digital, scientific, and technical abilities - are *secondary* language representational activities, acquired from symbolic processes and narrative structures of primary speech. Coping with such tasks depends on gathering and interpreting information. Arithmetic operations, using ratios, percentages, indexes, and statistical analyses (*tables, graphs, charts*) are based on *narrative schema* for data assembly. Computers and mobile phones use lateral (*creative*) and linear (*critical*) thinking, following instructions to solve problems. Maths requires high levels of declarative, procedural, and conceptual knowledge, used in a strategic, efficient, and context-related way, acquired from talk.

Social and civic engagement - refer to social responsibility, awareness of values, attitudes, community needs, diversity, and inclusion. Knowledge, understanding, communicating, collaborating, and cooperating with others create loyalty, reliability, and commitment to common purposes. Sublimating desires at times for the common "*good*", considering others before "*self*" shares views, feelings, and attitudes underpins social dynamics and intelligence - taught in high-achieving nations like Japan.

Initiative and entrepreneurship - define leading in situations, with motivation and commitment to see things through. Selling oneself, services, or products is involved. Communicative abilities to assert, persuade, negotiate, make relationships, and develop suitable administrative arrangements, manage time, present ideas to others, and implement follow-ups are required. *Narrative, creative thinking* creates vision, and *critical thinking* structures delivery.

"The present situation corrodes the social contract that we are all subject to common rules and equal opportunities in education" (Sage, 2017, p. 34). Frankopan (2015) provides evidence that when people feel they are losing out, things turn ugly. If trends continue, the early 21st century will see free societies falter - weakened by divisions. Dictators, autocrats, terrorists, and corrupt opportunists show Western freedom could be mistaken. How does a liberal society deal with illiberalism? By becoming less liberal, says Furedi (2021). Free societies support multiculturalism but need leadership and protection, effective communication and relationships, and the resolve to be united for education aims and goals.

Hybridity (*racial mixtures*) focuses on the present and recent past. However, one of the greatest theorists is the ancient Greek historian and philosopher, Herodotus. Describing a globe in motion - movement of people across borders over time - he

ponders how we should regard diversity and its importance for political and educational enquiry. Consistent approaches to maintaining evolved principles must be followed by all (see Godley, 1920a, b). Using systematic investigation to study societies - Herodotus observed that immigrants must think, live, look, and behave in similar ways to host nations to avoid suspicion and rejection as different incomers. The saying, "*when in Rome do as Rome does*" was echoed in my education. When in different countries, it is important to know traditions so as not to offend and to prevent unsuccessful collaborations.

Recently, a Muslim schoolgirl was sent home from a UK school for wearing too long a skirt for uniform rules. Regulations defied bring penalties. Some insist this erodes individual rights and freedoms, but it allows and supports divisions. In diverse societies agreement is problematic unless national history, traditions, values and lifestyles are respected. People not accepting equality, tolerance and disagreement produce conflict. According to Olchawski (2016), 20% of 25-34 year-old British males think female equality has gone too far, supported by a politician, who announced in the European Parliament that women are weaker, smaller and less intelligent than men, so must earn less. How far do we go in abrogating or compromising principles, standards and laws to extinguish threats to a way of life, loss of identity and equality? British laws for only one wife are not enforced in cultures having multiple partners, with Sharia Law allowed in the UK to support this custom. Rules for some and not for others create unequal practices and divisions.

Greek philosophers, Socrates and Plato, said democracy brings tyranny. Giving rights and freedoms guarantee people assert views and confront others with different values, attitudes and traditions. Studying for a first degree, a lecturer asserted that a benevolent autocracy was the only government that worked! How can education encourage acceptance? Honest, open talk and empathetic communication helps solve conflicts, with studies in philosophy important to understand the history of different ideas and values. Those used to living how and where they wish must realise that these are not guaranteed rights if those in power disrespect freedoms. It is not possible to understand or uphold European ideas of law, liberty, government, education, family morality or culture without tracing relations to Christian roots and civil peace. Effects of Islam in the West - attacks on free speech, segregation of sexes in education (*with females covering faces*), radicalisation in schools and Jihadist violence demand a firm idea of how to preserve civilisation.

Education, as responsible for teaching society mores, must develop an identity, value-system, life-style and challenges acceptable to all cultures, whilst respecting national principles and traditions. This is a vital education role at all levels. People with shifting identities and social norms, need a strong anchor if not to feel outcasts in free societies. The Good Immigrant (Shukla, 2016) assembles ethnic voices in Britain today, revealing how it feels to be regarded as different and treated suspiciously by a country they think does not accept them. There are foreign practices that are anathema to British values and traditions, like multiple wives, child brides and virginity testing ceremonies. Acceptance is 2-way and 21stC illiterates are ones who cannot learn, unlearn and reflect for adaptability to survive.

This means communicating and implementing principles enabling cultural integration. Sweden is a humanitarian super-power welcoming immigrants, but not able to fully integrate them, because many lack education for entry-level jobs so cannot

get work. This has created a shadow society with its own moral codes and legal system. The same is seen in America, with an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants, shadow societies, mafia-style courts, gangland killings, attacks on Sheriffs and conundrums like “child brides”. Politicians dismiss problems and ignore reality, with no one allowed to speak the truth. Risings result from ignoring issues affecting lives negatively. In 2000, Pim Fortuyn, a Dutch academic, formed an anti-Islamic party. He did not oppose immigration, but said the Muslim religion was too dogmatic to integrate into Western traditions. In 2002, he was murdered by a Dutch environmentalist for promoting such ideas. A liberal proposed an illiberal view and was shot dead by another one. Although illogical, this shows that mass immigration is not just about jobs but identity.

To some, racial or national identity is bigoted, but for others, it is based in place and tradition. Globalisation portrays free movement as removing loyalties to birthplace values, but this is not how humans react. Identity questions eclipse reason, producing fear if immigrants, with differing views and lifestyles, swamp existing populations. This is not to suggest that incomers cannot integrate, as many have done successfully, but not everyone wishes to assimilate, as they view that original identity is vital to preserve with specific lifestyle and traditions (Sage, 2020b). Discussion of such issues is discouraged by the “*opinion corridor*” into which public debate is confined. Those stepping outside to talk about immigration risk bias accusations. Some in public life and the media, in spite of holding other views, see the future as an extension of the past, even though the present crises are attributed to rapid change, increased immigration, secularisation, family collapse, capitalism/neo-liberalism decay, technology worship, establishment breakdown, and overpopulation.

The world rumbles with conflicts, prejudice, poverty, inequality, and limited understanding between people and nations. We should value diversity’s ideas to solve problems. Liberty produces fascism, so it may be wise to control immigration and prevent countries from reshaping to lose traditional uniqueness. An identity crisis is faced by some in democratic Britain, but originating in autocratic nations. British principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity do not always fit comfortably with heritage norms, arising from different national histories, with suppression of women, sexual orientation, and majority ideas. Such persons do not know who they are and what they should think and believe in their present community. In homes, traditional values reign, conflicting with school and society norms (Sage & Matteucci, 2022). Clashes are common among people of different origins, thinking they are right and others are wrong. European identities are built on ancestry and Christianity, reinforced by education. Today, disinterest in Christian principles of respect means we are not energetic in creating wise, safe, moral pro-social codes. There are no longer agreed-upon virtues of love, compassion, forgiveness, humility, respect, reverence, beauty, and equality. “*Do as you would be done by*” is rarely uttered or reinforced today. Policy-makers talk of national identity based on liberal, universal values, which mean little to people reared without these. To such folk, it means living as you want, with freedom to do so, even if conflicting with host norms. There is a lack of what history has passed down, which extremists take advantage of, with bombings and beheadings. Learners must be educated about the past and why principles and identity have evolved, to understand lifestyles. G.K. Chesterton said: “*democracy means government by the*

uneducated, whilst aristocracy means government by the badly educated” (2013). British nobility stood for freedom and restrained tyranny of rulers and citizens. They are now replaced by commoners given titles for political support. In the House of Lords, aristocrats are reduced and displaced by business people, media-types, spin-doctors, political hacks, and donors with agendas. Who will check forces of excess and extremism now that impartiality has diminished? Where will minds be nurtured? Education must be the answer, as mind independence comes from knowledge and thought.

Furedi (2021) points out that education has lost freedom, tolerance, and experimentation and has given way to political correctness and an illiberal, preachy atmosphere, where a “*cancel culture*” reigns (*staff removed if not agreeing with management*). The magazine ‘Spiked’ found in a 2017 survey that 90% of UK universities restrict speech, censor specific ideas, speakers, language, and texts, and implement “safe spaces.” The effects on a fair society are disturbing. In 2017, Durham University Islamic Society distributed booklets saying “*every Muslim should be a terrorist*” during *Discover Islam* week. The media support propaganda but clamp down on Christian views and activities. The UPP and Higher Education Policy Institute Public Attitudes to Higher Education 2021-3 report that 83% agree that university does not prepare students for reality. Eighty-eight percent disagree that you need a degree for a high salary. People are put off by woke agendas.

Increased immigration has precipitated identity politics. Kaufmann’s (2019) survey found that 73% of white British wanted it reduced as their way of life had changed for the worse, with no power to prevent it. Many feel discriminated against in gaining needed services. When teaching in a Social Priority School in the 1980s, with immigrant and white students, the former had daily support from home office funding, and the latter, with severe educational needs, had to wait 3+ years for services. The white children had parents on benefits, having lost jobs due to increased mechanisation, but lacking communication abilities for service roles. This situation has not changed, and statistics show that poor whites are on the increase, with immigrants as top earners. The Cattle-Modood debate (Antonsich, 2016) concludes that multiculturalism is wrong, viewing tradition and culture as temporally and spatially fixed, with interculturalism attending to complexity. Collective identities are needed for cooperative citizenship. Multicultural societies are here to stay, and intercultural communication programmes must be mandatory in education to break down human barriers, with politicians listening to pleas for equality. Nations have different approaches, so no one model fits all. People need identity but in conjunction with where they live. State justice, civic organisations, and associations, along with the populace, must regard rights responsibly and understand that effective intercultural communication is the only way to cooperate. Traditional teaching does not support this effectively, so changes are urgent for societies to progress.

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