



In Need of Non-Western Education in Western Countries

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Abstract: Increasing cultural diversity within Western societies has generated renewed interest in the role of educational systems in promoting belonging, and social mobility. In the Netherlands, immigrants, refugees, and expatriates continue to experience disproportionate barriers to educational participation and achievement, resulting in educational stagnation, exclusion, and reduced opportunities for social- and economic integration. This article explores whether insights from non-Western educational traditions can contribute to addressing these challenges and inform contemporary debates on educational decolonisation. Drawing upon literature on Indigenous, Confucian, Islamic, and Ubuntu pedagogies, the article examines the philosophical foundations, pedagogical practices, and social objectives of non-Western educational systems and compares them with dominant Western educational traditions. Particular attention is given to differences in conceptions of knowledge, citizenship, socialisation, moral development, and the relationship between the individual and the community. The analysis demonstrates that while Western education has traditionally prioritised individual autonomy, critical thinking, and preparation for democratic and economic participation, many non-Western traditions emphasise relationality, communal responsibility, moral formation, intergenerational learning, and holistic human development. The article argues that the educational difficulties experienced by immigrants, refugees, and expatriates cannot be understood solely through individual or linguistic explanations but must also be situated within broader institutional, cultural, and historical contexts. Decolonising education therefore requires more than symbolic recognition of multiculturalism; it necessitates the inclusion of multiple epistemologies and educational traditions within educational policy and practice. The study concludes that educational pluralism, rather than the replacement of one dominant paradigm by another, offers the most promising pathway towards inclusive, culturally responsive, and socially just educational systems in multicultural societies such as the Netherlands.

Keywords: non-Western education, decolonisation of education, educational multiculturalism, belonging, immigrants, refugees, expatriates, educational inequality, Indigenous knowledge, Confucian pedagogy, Islamic pedagogy, Ubuntu pedagogy, multicultural education, educational pluralism, citizenship education, Netherlands.

INTRODUCTION

Within the Netherlands, a proportion of immigrants, refugees, and expatriates encounter significant challenges in accessing and progressing through the educational system. For the purposes of this discussion, the term *education* encompasses primary, secondary, vocational, higher, and university education.

The concept of “getting stuck” within education is multifaceted and may be interpreted in several ways. First, it may refer to students who prematurely leave the educational system without completing their studies. Second, it may describe learners who experience academic underachievement or fall behind their peers. Third, it may include children who become educated outside the formal school system, such as through home-

schooling arrangements. Fourth, it may refer to pupils who are placed in educational tracks or classes below their academic potential. Finally, the concept may encompass children, adolescents, and young adults who are not participating in any form of education or training.

The educational exclusion of immigrants, refugees, and expatriates has important social and economic consequences. At the individual level, it can limit educational attainment, employment opportunities, and social integration. At the societal level, it may contribute to labour market shortages, underutilisation of human capital, and reduced social cohesion. Consequently, understanding the factors that contribute to educational stagnation among these populations is of considerable importance for both educational policy and broader societal development.

A growing body of research has sought to identify and explain the patterns and underlying causes of educational exclusion among immigrants, refugees, and expatriates. Previous studies (Steinmetz et al., 2026) have highlighted several contributing factors, including a lack of belonging within educational institutions, institutional racism, and persistent bureaucratic barriers that impede access to educational opportunities. These factors operate at multiple levels of the educational system and may contribute to unequal educational outcomes among diverse student populations.

The present article examines broader systemic influences that indirectly shape educational participation and achievement. In Amsterdam, discussions concerning educational inequality and inclusion have increasingly been linked to efforts to decolonise education. Within this context, Dave Ensberg-Kleijkers, Chief Executive Officer of Zonova, has emphasised the importance of critically examining the historical, cultural, and institutional structures that may contribute to exclusionary educational practices. This article seeks to explore these dynamics in greater depth and to assess their implications for educational policy and practice.

The distinction between “Western” and “non-Western” educational traditions is necessarily broad and cannot fully capture the diversity and complexity of educational philosophies and practices across the world. Nevertheless, important differences can be identified in their historical development, cultural foundations, pedagogical approaches, and underlying conceptions of knowledge, learning, and human development. At the same time, processes of globalisation, migration, and educational modernisation have contributed to increasing convergence and the emergence of shared educational practices.

By examining both the differences and commonalities between Western and non-Western educational traditions, this article aims to contribute to ongoing discussions regarding educational inclusion, equity, and decolonisation. In doing so, it seeks to support Zonova’s broader objective of fostering a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational environment within the Amsterdam Zuid Oost region.

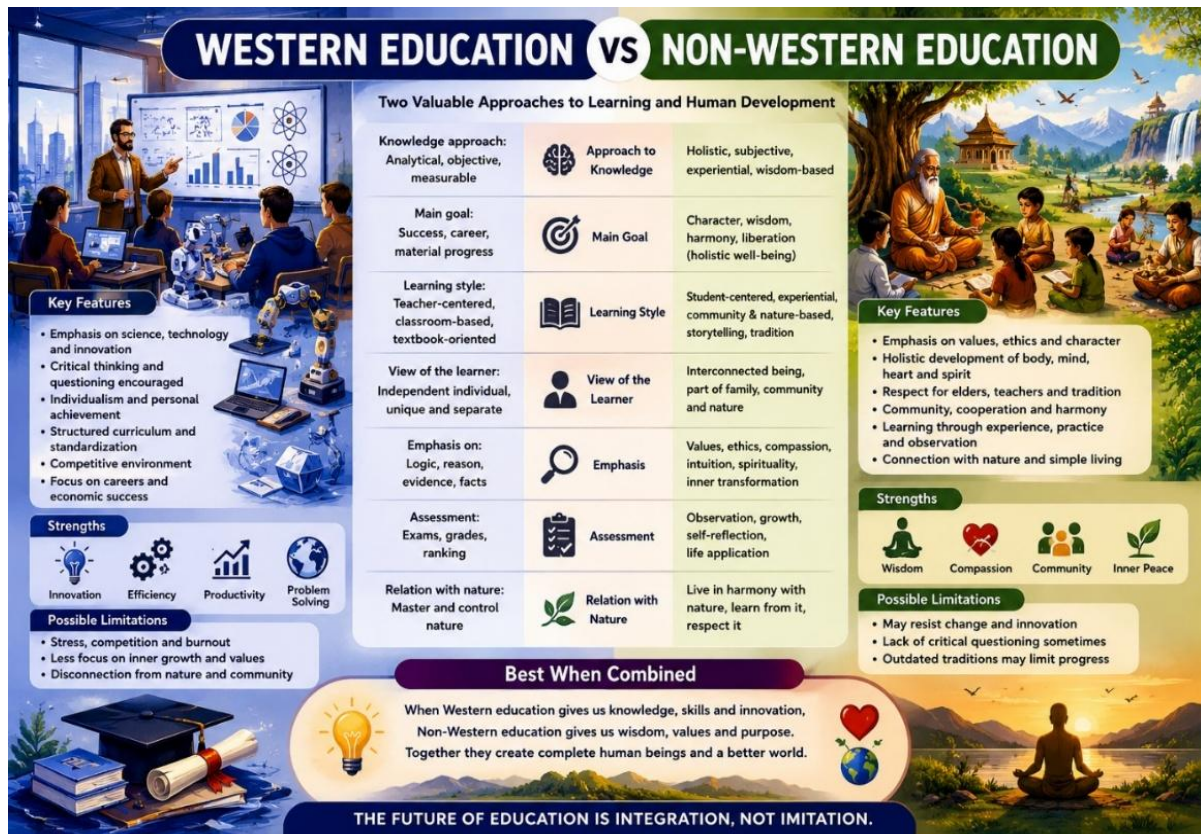


Figure 1: figure made with AI (link: <https://chatgpt.com/c/6a1809f8-4604-83eb-93a7-3934f8accec66>)

WESTERN AND NON-WESTERN EDUCATION

Transmission of Knowledge and Culture

Both Western and non-Western educational systems aim to transmit knowledge, values, skills, and cultural traditions from one generation to another. Education in all societies generally serves to:

- preserve cultural continuity,
- prepare individuals for adult life,
- develop literacy and practical competencies,
- socialise children into societal norms.

According to Émile Durkheim (1956), education functions as a mechanism through which societies reproduce their collective values and social cohesion.

Exploring non-Western educational transmission of knowledge and culture requires looking beyond formal schooling.

It encompasses oral traditions, community-centric mentorship, and indigenous pathways where history, spiritual practices, and survival skills are passed intergenerationally (Dong, 2023).

Key references and theoretical foundations include:

- **Foundational Text:** Timothy Reagan's book, *Non-Western Educational Traditions: Alternative Approaches to Educational Thought and Practice*, provides a thorough overview of indigenous educational systems, challenging Western educational assumptions (Matusov, 1998):

“Elements of Chinese civilization can be traced back at least as far as 6,000 years, and perhaps considerably further. By the time of the Shang dynasty (roughly 1700 B.C.E. to 1100 B.C.E.), schools and other social institutions of a complex culture had developed, as had the foundations for the examination system that would serve throughout the history of imperial China to select government officials. Although Chinese civilization evolved, developed, and changed throughout its history, it nevertheless retained a core set of features that characterize it as a single cultural tradition. Although much of the Chinese cultural heritage has been rejected in contemporary China, much remains as well. In other words, much of the culture of China that still thrives has a direct link to the civilization that emerged nearly as long ago as those of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.”

- **Indigenous Knowledge:** An academic analysis of how traditional customs are passed between generations is detailed in the ScienceDirect article, Transmission of indigenous knowledge systems under changing landscapes within vhavenda community, South Africa (Malapane et al. 2024):

“Nevertheless, the transmissions of indigenous knowledge are threatened and replaced by Western knowledge and ideologies. The focus of this study was to demonstrate the various Indigenous knowledge transmission methods, the driving forces behind their disappearance, and how they added value to the resilience of such knowledge forms in sustaining Indigenous and local communities throughout the centuries. To achieve this, the study used questionnaires consisting of open-ended and closed-ended questions (n = 136). Participants were selected and identified through purposeful sampling from five remote indigenous villages in South Africa. The data were collected only from principal elderly participants above 50 due to their profound knowledge and experiences with their local environment.

The most prevalent indigenous knowledge within the Vhavenda people is folklore, which is orally transmitted from one generation to the next through traditional songs, stories, dances, myths, customs, and rituals. Drivers such as invasion of technology, reluctance on the part of custodians to pass on the knowledge, knowledge being forgotten, and knowledge being less effective were ranked to be highest in the hindrance of IK transmission in the study area. Solutions such as revitalising knowledge systems through proper documentation, such as building online libraries, integrating Western and indigenous knowledge, and introducing indigenous knowledge into mainstream education systems and media could assist in preserving such knowledge

(PDF) Transmission of indigenous knowledge systems under changing landscapes within the vhavenda community, South Africa. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385456816_Transmission_of_indigenous_knowledge_systems_under_changing_landscapes_within_the_vhavenda_community_South_Africa.”

- **Global Perspectives & Philosophy:** An accessible overview of diverse non-Western pedagogies—including Confucianism, Buddhism, and African *Ubuntu* philosophy—can be found in Medium's Non-Western Pedagogies: An Overview and Analysis (Dong, 2023).

“Non-Western education offer holistic, relational, and community-centred alternatives to traditional Western education. Rooted in thousands of years of cultural history, these frameworks prioritize spiritual growth, moral development, and deep social interconnectedness over purely individualistic or empirical achievement.

Examples

A. Confucianism: Moral Virtue & Lifelong Self-Cultivation

Originating in ancient China, Confucian pedagogy views education primarily as a lifelong journey toward moral perfection.

1. **Core Philosophy:** Emphasizes the development of five constant virtues: benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and trustworthiness (*xin*).
2. **Teaching Style:** Focuses on the teacher as a moral exemplar rather than just an information provider. Students are expected to show deep filial piety (respect for elders and teachers). It involves active Socratic-style dialogue but only *after* the student has rigorously mastered foundational knowledge.

B. Buddhist pedagogic-education

Rooted in the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, Buddhist pedagogy treats education as a transformative, contemplative, and experiential journey rather than just the memorization of facts

- **Core Philosophy:** Focuses on eliminating suffering (*dukkha*) through the cultivation of wisdom, ethical conduct, and mindfulness.
- **Teaching Style:** Centers on "awakening" the student's inner critical awareness rather than indoctrinating them. Meditation, sensory training, and introspection are used as primary tools to enhance concentration and emotional stability.

C. African Ubuntu Philosophy: Interconnected Humanity

Derived from the Nguni Bantu term meaning "I am because we are" (*Ubuntu*), this indigenous African philosophy treats learning as a collective, community-building process.

1. **Core Philosophy:** Rejects exclusion and extreme individualism, operating instead on principles of solidarity, communal accountability, sharing, and compassion.
2. **Teaching Style:** Education is the shared responsibility of the entire community, including elders and peers. The classroom is designed to be a humane space where

students are treated with unconditional acceptance regardless of their backgrounds, which builds collective confidence and academic success.”

Key Non-Western Educational Frameworks

Indigenous and Oral Traditions

In pre-literate and indigenous societies, education is highly experiential, holistic, and community-centred (Stress Languages: Steinmetz, 2020).

- Mechanism: Knowledge is primarily transmitted orally through storytelling, ceremonies, art, taboos, and daily activities.
- Focus: Rather than isolated facts, education integrates the learner into their environment, teaching responsible leadership, socio-emotional balance, and ecological stewardship.

Stress Languages explores how people from different cultural backgrounds communicate experiences of illness, distress, suffering, and healing through culturally specific narratives, metaphors, symbols, and explanatory frameworks. The central argument is that health professionals often misunderstand immigrants, refugees, and expatriates because they interpret symptoms through Western biomedical models, while many patients understand illness through culturally embedded belief systems and storytelling traditions.

Steinmetz (2020) introduces the concept of “stress languages”, referring to the culturally shaped words, expressions, metaphors, stories, behavioural norms, and explanatory models through which individuals describe physical and psychological distress. These stress languages are rooted in collective histories, family traditions, religion, spirituality, and local understandings of health and illness.

The book examines disease and illness narratives from several non-Western regions, including Indonesia, West Africa, Suriname, Morocco, Turkey, and the Caribbean. Traditional storytelling figures such as Anansi, Ajapa, Too-too-moo, the Arabic Hakawati, and the Turkish Meddah are used to illustrate how cultures construct meaning around suffering, resilience, and recovery.

A major theme is the distinction between disease and illness. Disease refers to a medically diagnosed condition, whereas illness concerns the personal, family, spiritual, and cultural experience of suffering. According to Steinmetz, effective healthcare requires attention to both dimensions. Health professionals should therefore explore not only symptoms but also patients' cultural explanations of illness, family systems, spiritual beliefs, migration histories, and experiences of trauma. The book also discusses the DSM-5 Cultural Concepts of Distress, arguing that culturally specific idioms of distress, culture-bound syndromes, and explanatory models are essential for understanding patients from diverse backgrounds. Stress languages function as bridges between cultural worlds and can help practitioners avoid misdiagnosis and improve therapeutic relationships.

Main Conclusions

1. Illness narratives are culturally constructed and vary substantially across societies.

2. Western biomedical approaches alone are often insufficient for understanding the experiences of migrants, refugees, and expatriates.
3. Cultural narratives, spirituality, ancestors, family systems, and community relationships frequently play a central role in non-Western understandings of health and illness.
4. Understanding stress languages can reduce misunderstandings, improve diagnosis and treatment, and strengthen culturally responsive healthcare.
5. The ultimate goal is to create a more holistic and culturally sensitive approach to healthcare in increasingly diverse societies.

In essence, Stress Languages argues that healthcare professionals should become fluent not only in medical terminology but also in the cultural languages through which people narrate suffering, healing, and wellbeing.



Figure 2: Stress Languages (Steinmetz, 2020) with AI



Figure 3: Storytelling Traditions (Steinmetz, 2020) made by AI

NON-WESTERN PEDAGOGIC

Confucian Pedagogy

Centuries of East Asian educational thought—rooted heavily in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean societies—is deeply influenced by Confucius (Tan, 2025).

- **Mechanism:** Emphasizes rote memorization of classical texts, self-cultivation, and respect for elders and teachers.
- **Focus:** Focuses on developing a moral character (the *junzi*), discipline, filial piety, and social harmony.

"A major educational aim of Confucianism is to socialise individuals into a set of communal values and norms. Socialisation generally refers to the process of equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to function as full members of the community."

A textual analysis of the Analects (Lunyu) shows that Confucius promotes primary and secondary socialisation through education. He emphasises the importance of primary socialisation where the child is taught and given ample opportunities to practise, the virtue of filial piety (xiao) at home. Beyond the family, the child learns to relate to and appreciate other people such as neighbours, friends and employers, by cultivating values such as respect and trustworthiness.

A key question in Confucian socialisation is the extent to which individuals can challenge and revise the socialised knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

Confucius teaches and demonstrates evolutionary innovation: his allegiance to the traditional beliefs and practices of the sage-kings is coupled with his call for the critique and reimagining of customs, habituated thought and lifestyles to meet the changing needs of society. Rejecting a blind conformity to conventional beliefs and rules, he encourages learners to exercise personal moral judgement through the quality of appropriateness or rightness (yi) [Tan, 2025].”



Figure 4: Confusion Education made by AI

Islamic Pedagogy

Islamic education has historically combined religious instruction with the pursuit of secular sciences.

- **Mechanism:** Traditional transmission happens through *halaqat* (study circles), memorization of the Qur'an, and rigorous debate and commentary in *madrasas* (colleges/schools).
- **Focus:** Integrates intellectual rigor with moral, ethical, and spiritual development, aiming to unify sacred and secular truths.

Islamic pedagogy (Memon et al. 2020) is an educational framework rooted in revelation, the Prophetic model, and classical scholarship. It prioritizes the **holistic development** of the learner—intellectually, spiritually, morally, and socially—aiming not just to transmit information, but to foster character and lifelong wisdom.

Core Concepts

The framework is built around foundational Arabic terms that describe the goals of the learning process: [1]

- **Tarbiyah (تربيه nurturing):** The holistic growth and development of the learner in a supportive environment.
- **Ta'leem (تعليم instruction):** The structured transfer and acquisition of beneficial knowledge.
- **Ta'deeb (تأديب ethical formation):** The cultivation of discipline, good character, and respectful behavior.
- **Tazkiyah (تزكية spiritual refinement):** The purification of the soul and the alignment of knowledge with righteous action.

Foundational Principles (Mehmood et al. 2025)

Prophetic Methodology (Uswah Hasanah): Teachers often act as mentors and spiritual guides, modelling empathy, patience, and humility. The goal is to ignite a genuine desire to learn and seek the truth.

- **Connection of Intellect and Faith:** A strong intellect ($\textit{aql}$) and deep faith ($\textit{iman}$) are seen as mutually reinforcing. Knowledge (*ilm*) is meant to be actionable and serve humanity.
- **Lifelong Learning:** The pursuit of knowledge is considered a lifelong religious and personal obligation, famously encapsulated in the Prophetic tradition: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave."

Modern & Historical Integration

Historically championed by scholars like Al-Ghazali, Islamic pedagogy is now often synthesized with modern educational frameworks. Many contemporary Muslim educators integrate critical thinking, experiential learning, and 21st-century skills while maintaining an ethically-grounded worldview.

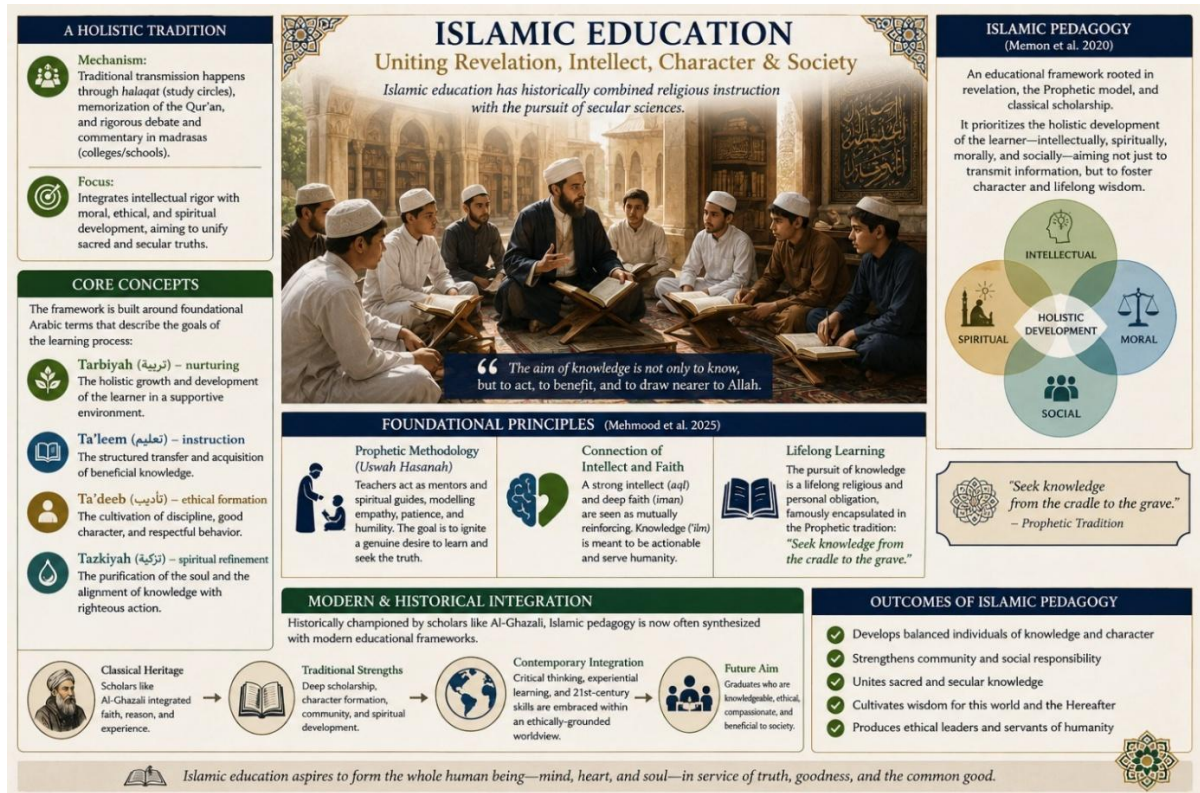


Figure 5: Islamic Education made with AI

Ubuntu Pedagogy (Africa)

Embedded in Southern African traditions, this Philosophy/ Pedagogy centres on communal identity, summarized as "I am because we are".

- **Mechanism:** Knowledge transfer involves the entire community; children are educated by extended family networks and community elders.
- **Focus:** Emphasizes collective responsibility, empathy, communal harmony, and active participation within society

Ubuntu pedagogy (Choana, 2025) is an ancient African educational philosophy rooted in human interconnectedness, mutual care, and collective responsibility, summarized by the phrase "I am because we are." It replaces rigid, Eurocentric instruction with relational teaching, valuing empathy, community ties, and collaborative knowledge co-creation.

Core Principles of Ubuntu Pedagogy

- **Relational Learning:** Emphasizes that students and teachers grow through interaction. Learning is highly collaborative rather than strictly competitive. [1]
- **Asset-Based Approach:** Treats a learner's cultural identity, background, and language as valuable resources in the classroom rather than obstacles to overcome.
- **Pedagogical Love & Compassion:** Centers the emotional and social well-being of students, aiming to foster a deep sense of belonging and mutual respect.

- **Collective Accountability:** Encourages students to take responsibility for the success and emotional safety of their peers.

Practical Classroom Implementation

Educators who implement Ubuntu principles often structure their learning environments around these practical shifts:

- **Talking Circles:** Shift away from lecture-only formats in favour of circles that promote dialogue, storytelling, and active listening.
- **Collaborative Assessments:** Use group projects or peer-assessment models that reward collective problem-solving and shared success.
- **Community Integration:** Bring local community elders, traditions, and real-world civic issues into the curriculum to make lessons highly relevant to the students' environments.

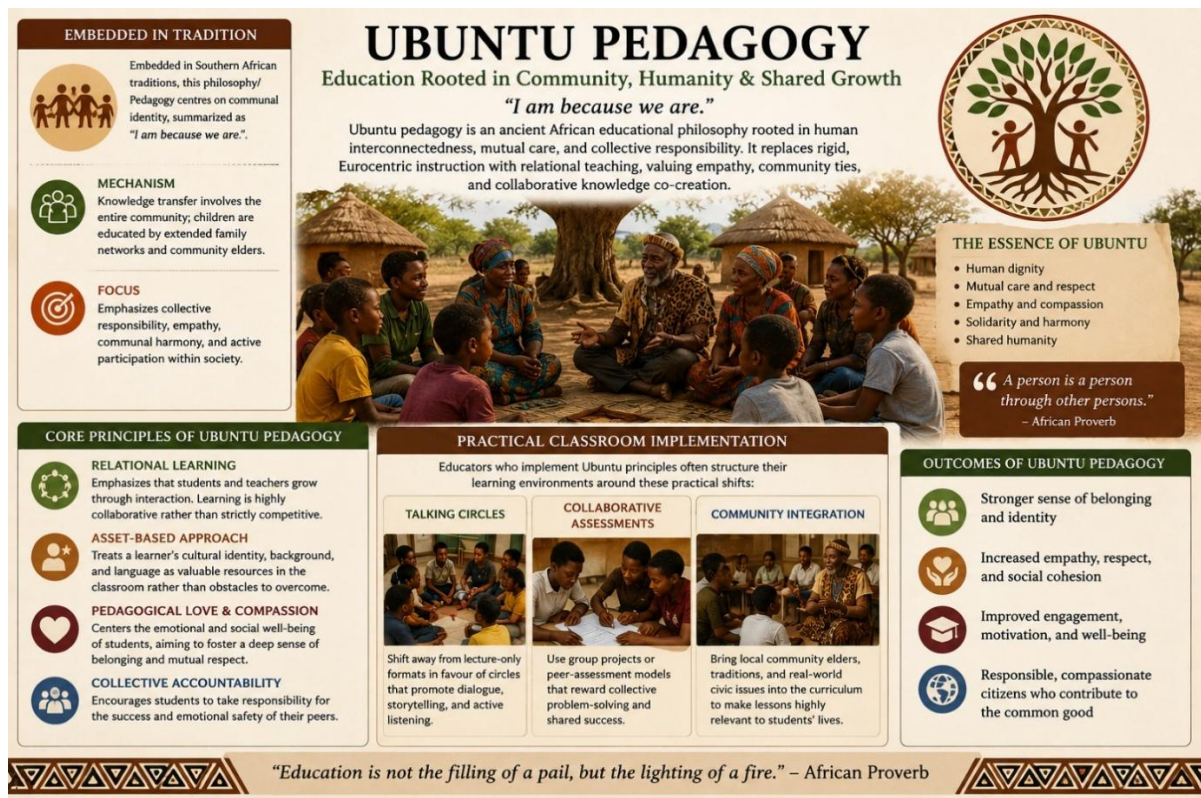


Figure 6: Ubuntu Pedagogic made with AI

Conclusion Non-Western pedagogics (Dong, 2023)

In the following, the aforementioned non-western pedagogies are analysed from the perspectives of:

1. Focus on Knowledge Transmission,
2. Cultivation of Skills and Competencies,

3. Student Engagement and Active Learning,
4. Adaptation to Cultural Context,
5. Assessment and Feedback.

The analytical result can be found in the following table.

Table 1: Analysis of the non-western pedagogics (source: Dong, 2023)

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH	FOCUS ON KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION	CULTIVATION OF SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVE LEARNING	ADAPTATION TO CULTURAL CONTEXT	ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK
CONFUCIAN PEDAGOGY	Emphasizes transmission of Confucian teachings, ethics, and moral values.	Emphasizes moral and ethical development, self-discipline, and adherence to societal roles.	Reliance on rote learning and memorization of texts.	Highly adapted to East Asian cultural contexts.	Assessments focus on adherence to Confucian values and moral principles.
INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGIES	Emphasizes transmission of Indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and values.	Cultivates holistic development, connection to land, intergenerational knowledge, and traditional skills.	Promotes experiential and hands-on learning within the community.	Rooted in specific Indigenous cultural contexts.	Assessment reflects Indigenous values, knowledge, and contributions to the community.
UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY	Focuses on sharing and communal construction of knowledge.	Cultivates interconnectedness, empathy, and collaboration.	Emphasizes dialogue, reflection, and cooperative learning.	Rooted in African cultural contexts.	Assessment emphasizes collective contributions, social responsibility, and community well-being.
ZEN BUDDHISM	Emphasizes direct experience and transmission of Zen Buddhist teachings.	Cultivates mindfulness, meditation, concentration, and non-dualistic thinking.	Encourages experiential and embodied learning through meditation and contemplation.	Rooted in East Asian cultural contexts.	Assessment may include self-reflection, oral questioning, and demonstration of understanding.
ISLAMIC PEDAGOGY	Emphasizes transmission of Islamic teachings, Quranic knowledge, and religious values.	Cultivates Islamic moral, ethical, and spiritual development, as well as practical skills.	Encourages active engagement, critical thinking, and inquiry-based learning.	Adaptable to diverse cultural contexts within the Islamic world.	Assessment evaluates understanding of Islamic teachings, practical application, and adherence to Islamic principles.

SOCIALISATION AND CITIZENSHIP (NON-WESTERN AND WESTERN)

Educational systems worldwide prepare learners to participate in society responsibly.

Both Western and non-Western systems often emphasise:

- moral behaviour,
- social responsibility,
- cooperation,
- citizenship,
- ethical conduct.

Western and non-Western educational philosophies offer starkly different approaches to socialisation (how individuals integrate into society) and citizenship (their rights, duties, and political identity).

These paradigms highlight how cultural values shape the ultimate purpose of schooling.

Western Education: The Autonomous and Political Citizen

Western educational systems are heavily rooted in the Enlightenment and focus on the individual.

- **Socialisation:** Focuses on the learner's autonomy and critical thinking. Students are socialised to challenge established norms, question authority, and develop independent moral reasoning.
- **Citizenship:** Defined primarily in political and legal terms. Civic education teaches students how democratic institutions function and emphasises individual rights, voting, and adherence to state laws.
- **Critique:** Critics argue this approach can sometimes be overly secular, individualistic, and disconnected from broader community obligations.

Non-Western Education: The Relational and Communal Citizen

Non-Western educational paradigms (e.g., Indigenous American, Asian, and African philosophies) focus on holistic, lifelong learning.

- **Socialisation:** Deeply grounded in the community and interconnectedness. For example, the African philosophy of Ubuntu ("I am because we are") teaches that an individual's identity is shaped by their relationship to the community, emphasizing harmony, respect, and mutual support.
- **Citizenship:** Civic responsibility is defined by moral and social duties to the group rather than individual political rights. The goal is to produce an ethical, contributing member of the family, tribe, or society.
- **Critique:** Western scholars historically viewed this model as overly conforming, though modern comparative studies increasingly value its focus on social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

The Emerging Middle Ground: Global Citizenship

In response to modern globalisation, both frameworks are evolving. Many systems now emphasize Global Citizenship Education (GCED), which integrates the Western focus on human rights with the non-Western emphasis on global interconnectedness, planetary stewardship, and social justice

ECONOMIC AND PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

Modern educational systems increasingly prepare students for labour markets and economic participation. Industrialisation, globalisation, and technological development have created convergences between educational systems across the world (Spring, 2015).

The alignment between education and economic goals is a defining feature of modern schooling. As you may have noted, global economic forces push educational systems toward standardization and workforce readiness.

Here are the primary drivers of this convergence (Riese et al. 2022):

- **Global Economic Competition:** With the rise of international assessments like the **PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)**, countries increasingly benchmark their curricula against global leaders to ensure their future workforce remains globally competitive.
- **Standardization of Skills:** The shift toward knowledge-based economies has created a universal demand for baseline competencies in **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)**, digital literacy, and critical problem-solving.
- **Policy Transfer:** International organizations such as the **OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)** and the **World Bank** frequently promote standardized educational reforms and vocational training models across diverse national contexts.
- **Technological Acceleration:** Rapid advancements in automation and artificial intelligence have forced educational institutions to pivot toward **lifelong learning** models and adaptable technical skills to prevent obsolescence in the labor market.

CONCLUSIONS

The present analysis has demonstrated that the distinction between Western and non-Western educational traditions extends beyond pedagogical techniques and curricular content to encompass fundamentally different conceptions of knowledge, learning, citizenship, and human development. While Western educational systems have historically emphasized individual autonomy, critical reasoning, and preparation for participation in democratic and economic institutions, many non-Western traditions place greater emphasis on communal responsibility, moral development, spiritual growth, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. These differences should not be understood as mutually exclusive opposites; rather, they represent complementary educational paradigms that offer distinct strengths and limitations.

At the same time, the analysis highlights the limitations of simplistic dichotomies between “Western” and “non-Western” education. Both categories encompass highly diverse traditions that have evolved through centuries of cultural exchange, colonisation, migration, and globalisation. Contemporary educational systems increasingly exhibit hybrid characteristics, combining elements of local traditions with globally standardised approaches to assessment, curriculum development, and labour-market preparation. Consequently, any attempt to decolonise education must avoid replacing one dominant narrative with another and instead embrace educational pluralism and epistemic diversity.

The discussion is particularly relevant in the context of the Netherlands, where immigrants, refugees, and expatriates continue to experience disproportionate barriers to educational participation and success. The findings suggest that these barriers cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics or linguistic challenges. Rather, they are embedded within broader institutional structures, cultural assumptions, and bureaucratic processes that may privilege particular forms of knowledge, communication, and socialisation while marginalising others. A lack of belonging, institutional racism, and bureaucratic complexity therefore emerge not merely as administrative issues but as manifestations of deeper systemic dynamics.

The examination of Indigenous, Confucian, Islamic, and Ubuntu pedagogies further demonstrates that alternative educational traditions offer valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges in Western multicultural societies. Their emphasis on relationality, community engagement, moral responsibility, intergenerational learning, and holistic human development may provide important correctives to increasingly individualised and performance-driven educational environments. However, these traditions should not be romanticised. Like Western educational systems, they contain internal tensions and may, under certain circumstances, reproduce hierarchy, conformity, or exclusion. Critical engagement rather than uncritical adoption is therefore required.

Ultimately, the decolonisation of education should be understood not as the rejection of Western educational traditions but as the creation of a more inclusive educational landscape in which multiple knowledge systems can coexist and interact on equal terms. For Amsterdam Zuid-Oost and comparable multicultural contexts, this requires moving beyond symbolic diversity initiatives towards substantive institutional change that promotes belonging, recognises diverse epistemologies, and removes structural barriers to educational participation. Future research should investigate how such pluralistic educational models influence educational attainment, social cohesion, and the long-term integration of immigrant, refugee, and expatriate populations. Only through such efforts can education fulfil its democratic promise as a vehicle for both individual flourishing and collective social justice.



Figure 7: Towards Inclusive, Pluralistic and Decolonised Education made by Al

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