



Educating Children: Non-westerns in Western Countries' by Mothers, Fathers, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, Aunts, Uncles, Big Sisters and Brothers

Carl Hermann Dino Steinmetz

1. Director Expats & Immigrants B.V.

Abstract: Increasing migration has transformed Western societies into culturally diverse environments in which educational institutions and family support services increasingly engage with children raised according to a wide range of childrearing traditions. This paper examines whether contemporary Western parenting practices should continue to serve as the dominant reference framework for child development or whether greater recognition should be given to non-Western and historically rooted approaches to raising children. Drawing upon research from developmental psychology, anthropology, evolutionary science, educational history, and cross-cultural parenting studies, the paper synthesises evidence from Western and non-Western societies, including Indigenous, African, East Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern contexts. Historical educational traditions from ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Persia, and India are reviewed alongside contemporary empirical research on extended-family caregiving, grandparent involvement, cooperative breeding, and culturally embedded parenting practices. The evidence indicates that no single childrearing model is universally superior. Rather, Western parenting generally promotes autonomy, self-expression, and individual achievement, whereas many non-Western traditions emphasise interdependence, social responsibility, community participation, multigenerational caregiving, and cultural continuity. Despite substantial cultural variation, the literature consistently identifies several universal determinants of healthy child development, including warm and responsive caregiving, emotional security, stable caregiving relationships, opportunities for learning and exploration, and strong social support networks. The paper further argues that the historical dominance of Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) populations in developmental research has limited understanding of alternative childrearing systems. As migration continues to increase cultural diversity across Europe, educational institutions, child mental health services, and family support organisations should adopt culturally inclusive frameworks that recognise multiple pathways to healthy child development. Rather than replacing Western parenting models, the evidence supports integrating insights from diverse childrearing traditions to promote educational equity, social inclusion, and children's wellbeing in multicultural societies.

Keywords: Childrearing, Parenting, Cross-cultural parenting, Non-Western childrearing, Western parenting, Child development, Extended family, Grandparents, Alloparenting, Belonging, Interdependence, Autonomy, Indigenous knowledge, Educational history, Decolonising education, Migration, Multicultural education, Developmental psychology, Anthropology, Early childhood development.

INTRODUCTION

The Eurostat *Migration and Asylum in Europe - 2025 Edition* provides a comprehensive statistical overview of migration, mobility, and asylum within the European Union (EU). The publication examines patterns of immigration and emigration, intra-EU mobility, legal

migration, international protection, and irregular migration, while enabling comparisons across Member States through harmonised indicators and interactive visualisations.

The report demonstrates that migration remains a defining demographic and socio-economic feature of the European Union. In 2023, approximately **4.4 million people immigrated to the EU from non-EU countries**, representing a decline of around 18% compared with the exceptionally high levels recorded in 2022. Despite this decrease, immigration from outside the EU continued to exceed migration between EU Member States in almost all countries, illustrating that international migration remains the principal source of population mobility across Europe. Countries such as Czechia, Lithuania, Ireland, Slovenia, and Italy recorded particularly high proportions of immigrants arriving directly from outside the EU.

The publication further highlights the increasing diversity of Europe's population. Nearly one in ten EU residents is foreign-born or holds non-national citizenship, although considerable variation exists between Member States. Migration patterns are shaped by multiple drivers, including employment opportunities, education, family reunification, humanitarian protection, and international conflicts. Consequently, European migration cannot be understood as a single phenomenon but rather as the outcome of diverse legal, economic, demographic, and geopolitical processes.

A major focus of the report concerns legal migration. Eurostat documents the issuance of residence permits for employment, education, and family reasons, demonstrating that labour migration continues to play an increasingly important role in addressing demographic ageing and labour shortages across several EU economies. At the same time, the publication presents extensive statistics on asylum applications, refugee protection, and temporary protection mechanisms, particularly following recent humanitarian crises. These data illustrate the continuing importance of international protection within the broader European migration system.

The report also addresses irregular migration, emphasising that migration governance involves both the management of legal migration channels and measures aimed at preventing unauthorised border crossings and irregular residence. By presenting harmonised data across Member States, Eurostat facilitates evidence-based comparisons while avoiding normative interpretations of migration trends. The publication therefore serves primarily as a statistical resource rather than a policy evaluation.

Overall, the *Migration and Asylum in Europe - 2025 Edition* demonstrates that migration remains a structural component of European demographic change and economic development. Population ageing, labour market demands, humanitarian obligations, and global instability continue to influence migration flows across the EU. The report underscores the importance of reliable, comparable statistical evidence for understanding migration patterns and for informing future policy development at both European and national levels.

These Figures Compel us to Reconsider our Approach

The increasing cultural diversity of Western societies challenges the long-standing assumption that Western parenting practices constitute the universal standard for healthy child development. Consequently, both parenting and education warrant critical re-

evaluation through a decolonising lens that recognises multiple cultural pathways to raising children. Such a perspective has significant implications for educational systems, child and adolescent mental health services, family support organisations, and social work. This article examines how a culturally inclusive understanding of parenting can broaden current approaches to child development by incorporating evidence from non-Western childrearing traditions alongside established Western perspectives. The process of child-rearing is inherently challenging. The intricacies involved in child-rearing are a matter of some surprise. Doucleff (2022) advances the argument that Western methods have yet to be demonstrated as effective. She draws on the knowledge of the Inuit, Peruvians and Tanzanians. The reliability of these sources is such that they can be considered as practised evidence-based.

“In *Hunt, Gather, Parent: What Ancient Cultures Can Teach Us About the Lost Art of Raising Happy, Helpful Little Humans*, science journalist Michaela Doucleff argues that many contemporary Western parenting practices differ substantially from those found in Indigenous and traditional societies. Drawing on ethnographic observations among Maya families in Mexico, Inuit families in the Canadian Arctic, and Hadza families in Tanzania, Doucleff concludes that many parenting challenges common in Western societies—such as frequent conflicts, resistance to chores, tantrums, and parental exhaustion—are less prevalent in cultures where children are integrated into family and community life from an early age.

A central conclusion of the book is that Western parenting is strongly influenced by what psychologists describe as **WEIRD cultures** (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic). Doucleff argues that these societies tend to emphasise child-centred activities, praise, intensive parental management, and individual achievement. In contrast, many Indigenous communities place greater emphasis on cooperation, autonomy, observation, and contribution to family life.

Doucleff summarises her findings through the acronym **TEAM: Togetherness, Encouragement, Autonomy, Minimal Interference**. According to Doucleff, these four principles help cultivate children who are helpful, emotionally regulated, and self-confident.

Maya Parenting: Raising Helpful Children

Among Maya families, children are encouraged to participate in household activities from a very young age. Rather than being entertained separately, children are included in everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning, carrying objects, and caring for younger children. Parents view helping as a privilege and an important part of belonging to the family. As a result, children often develop strong intrinsic motivation to contribute without requiring rewards or praise. Doucleff concludes that helpfulness emerges when children are treated as capable contributors rather than passive recipients of care.

Inuit Parenting: Teaching Emotional Regulation

Among Inuit families, emotional control is considered a fundamental life skill. Parents rarely respond to children's misbehaviour with shouting, punishment, or anger. Instead, they model

calm behaviour and use storytelling, role-playing, and reflective questioning to teach emotional self-regulation. The emphasis is placed on helping children understand the consequences of their actions rather than imposing external control.

Douclevff argues that children learn emotional regulation primarily by observing emotionally regulated adults.

Hadza Parenting: Promoting Autonomy and Confidence

Among the Hadza, one of the world's last hunter-gatherer societies, children enjoy substantial autonomy. They are trusted to explore, play, solve problems, and manage age-appropriate risks with relatively little adult interference. Adults provide guidance and protection but avoid excessive control. This approach fosters confidence, independence, and practical competence.

Douclevff concludes that confidence develops not through constant supervision but through opportunities to make decisions and learn from experience.

Critique of Modern Western Parenting

A broader conclusion of the book is that many modern Western parenting practices are historically recent rather than universal or biologically natural. Douclevff questions the effectiveness of excessive praise, over-scheduling, intensive supervision, and the isolation of children within nuclear families. She suggests that these practices may contribute to parental stress and reduce children's opportunities to develop responsibility and autonomy.

Overall Conclusion

Douclevff's overarching argument is that successful childrearing depends less on controlling children and more on integrating them into meaningful social relationships and community life. Across the Maya, Inuit, and Hadza communities, she identifies several recurring themes:

1. Children are viewed as capable contributors.
2. Learning occurs through participation and observation.
3. Emotional regulation is modelled rather than imposed.
4. Autonomy is encouraged from an early age.
5. Childrearing is embedded within family and community networks.
6. Cooperation is valued more highly than competition.

From an academic perspective, *Hunt, Gather, Parent* contributes to a growing body of anthropological and developmental literature suggesting that many non-Western childrearing systems prioritise belonging, interdependence, community participation, and experiential learning. These findings resonate strongly with contemporary research on attachment, social learning, resilience, and belonging, indicating that children often thrive when they are embedded within supportive and meaningful social networks”



Figure 1: Hunt, Gather, Parent created by AI (link: <https://chatgpt.com/c/6a33cbdd-0618-83ed-a822-1cb7520bdca1>)

THE FOLLOWING SOURCES ARE RECOGNISED AS THE MOST ANCIENT EXTANT SOURCES ON CHILD-REARING

The practice of child-rearing has been a preoccupation of humanity since its inception. The earliest known source of this practice originates from Mesopotamia, dating back more than 3.000-4.000 years.

“The earliest known evidence of formal education originates from Ancient Mesopotamia¹ (present-day Iraq) and Ancient Egypt. Historical records

¹ educating kids in ancient times: what is the oldest source

indicate that organized educational systems emerged more than 4,000 years ago, primarily to train scribes responsible for administration, record-keeping, and communication.

One of the oldest documented educational institutions was the Edubba ("tablet house"), which operated in Mesopotamia between approximately 2500 and 2000 BCE. Thousands of surviving clay tablets from these schools provide evidence of structured learning, ranging from basic writing exercises for young children to advanced literary and administrative texts.

Another important educational source is the Instructions of Shuruppak² (c. 2600 BCE), one of the world's oldest examples of wisdom literature. This Sumerian text consisted of moral and practical advice that pupils copied as part of their education. Through this process, children learned values relating to social behaviour, personal conduct, and daily life.

In Ancient Egypt, the Instruction of Ptahhotep³ (c. 2400 BCE) served as an influential educational and moral text. Used in temple schools to educate children from elite and priestly families, it emphasised virtues such as obedience, humility, self-discipline, and respect for authority. These texts demonstrate that early education focused not only on literacy and administrative skills but also on the transmission of moral and social values."

A defining characteristic of educational systems between approximately 3000 and 4000 years ago was that formal instruction was predominantly delivered by members of the priestly class. Educational opportunities were generally limited to boys and young men from privileged backgrounds, whereas girls and women typically received informal education within the household. This division of educational roles reflected the broader social hierarchies and gender inequalities that characterised many ancient civilisations.

Early education extended well beyond the acquisition of literacy and administrative competencies. In addition to preparing future scribes and officials, educational institutions sought to transmit religious beliefs, moral principles, and cultural traditions that reinforced social cohesion and continuity. Curricula frequently included subjects such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and practical sciences, illustrating that many early educational systems pursued a broad and holistic conception of learning that integrated intellectual, ethical, and practical development.

² dur3ur3 gu3-di na-ab-sa10-sa10 murub4-zu ca-ra-ab-si-il

You should not buy a donkey which brays; it will split (?) your midriff (?). See Instructions of Shuruppak or <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section5/tr561.htm>

³ The Teaching is set at court, with the highest official ('vizier' in Egyptological translation), a man named Ptahhotep, requesting retirement from the king. The official paints a bleak picture of old age, evidently to convince the king that retirement is necessary, and asks that he be replaced in office by his son as 'staff of old age', a term also found in a late Middle Kingdom legal document to denote a son taking the office of his father, presumably on condition that he continues to support the father (UC 32037). This term, the Middle Egyptian syntax and the late Middle Kingdom date of the two earliest surviving manuscript copies, point to a Twelfth Dynasty date of composition. See link: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/literature/ptahhotep.html>

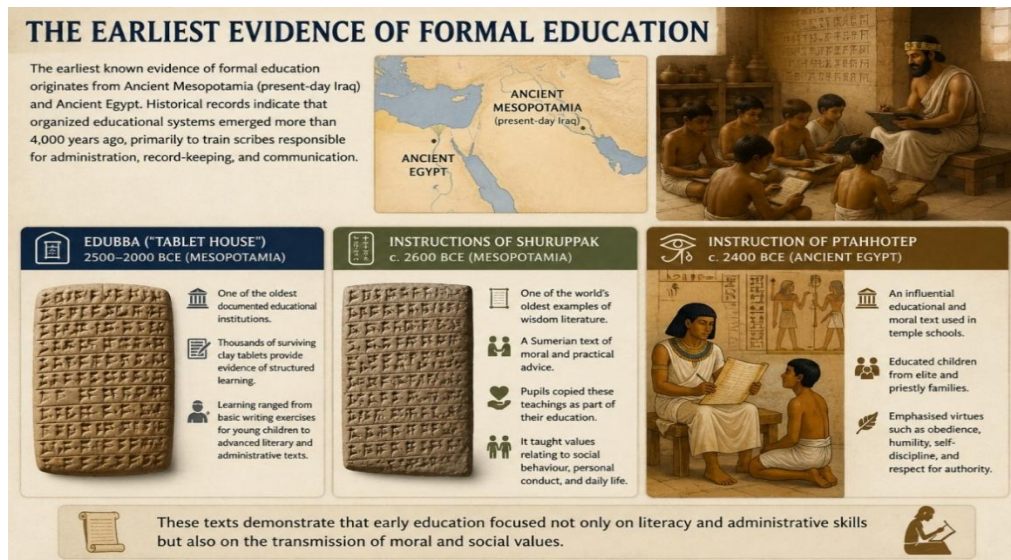


Figure 2: Picture created by AI (<https://chatgpt.com/c/6a33cbdd-0618-83ed-a822-1cb7520bdca1>)

Centers of advanced learning emerged in various regions of the ancient world. Among the most prominent was the medical school of Isfahan in present-day Iran, which attracted scholars and students from diverse geographical areas. The institution gained particular recognition for its contributions to medical knowledge, including accounts of physicians developing methods to understand and treat epidemic diseases, such as the plague. These developments illustrate the important role that educational institutions played in the advancement and dissemination of scientific and medical knowledge (Meyer, 2026).



Figure 3: Academy of Jundishapur (Gondishapur). [Daneshfard, et al. (2022)]. Medical education in the first university of the world, the Jundishapur Academy. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*

METHODS OF EDUCATING KIDS IN ANCIENT TIMES AND POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS

ANNO 2026

Education in ancient societies was predominantly practical, hierarchical, and closely aligned with social class, occupation, and gender roles. Educational methods were largely based on observation, imitation, storytelling, memorization, and, in many cases, strict disciplinary practices. Formal schooling was generally reserved for social elites, while the majority of children acquired knowledge and skills through participation in everyday life and vocational training.

One of the most common educational approaches was apprenticeship and experiential learning. Parents, family members, and community elders taught children essential skills related to agriculture, hunting, weaving, pottery, and other occupations. Learning occurred through observation, imitation, and active participation in daily activities. Specialized crafts were often acquired through long-term apprenticeships, during which young learners worked closely with experienced craftsmen to master practical skills.

In ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, formal education centred on literacy and administration. Scribes and priests educated students in institutions known as *edubbas* or "tablet houses." Pupils spent considerable time copying cuneiform script or hieroglyphic texts onto clay tablets and papyrus. Memorization and accurate reproduction of texts were regarded as essential indicators of learning and intellectual competence.

Educational practices in Ancient Greece and Rome placed greater emphasis on intellectual development, moral education, and public life. In Athens, elite boys were often supervised by a pedagogue who guided their academic and ethical development. Education included subjects such as poetry, music, mathematics, and physical training. The philosopher Socrates introduced a method of teaching based on questioning and dialogue, now known as the Socratic Method, which encouraged critical thinking and self-reflection rather than passive learning. In Ancient Rome, education increasingly focused on rhetoric and public speaking, preparing young men for careers in politics, law, and public administration.

A markedly different educational model emerged in Sparta. Through the *agoge*, a state-controlled educational system, boys were removed from their families at an early age and subjected to intensive military training. The curriculum emphasized physical endurance, discipline, obedience, and survival skills, reflecting Sparta's military-oriented society.

Across many ancient cultures, storytelling and oral tradition remained fundamental educational tools. Prior to the widespread development of literacy, myths, legends, religious narratives, and epic tales were transmitted orally from one generation to the next. These stories played a crucial role in preserving cultural knowledge, historical memory, moral values, and social norms. Consequently, education in ancient societies served not only to develop practical and intellectual skills but also to ensure the continuity of cultural and social traditions (Gupta et al. 2023).

"Ancient educational systems adopted a holistic approach to human development, integrating intellectual, physical, moral, spiritual, and practical dimensions of learning. According to Gupta and Kaur (2023), several principles underpinning these traditions—particularly those of the

Indian Gurukul system—remain relevant for contemporary education. They argue that modern educational systems have become increasingly examination-driven and technology-oriented, often at the expense of broader developmental goals such as character formation, ethical reasoning, practical competence, and social responsibility.

The Gurukul model was founded on a close teacher-student relationship in which learners lived and studied alongside their teachers. Education extended beyond the transmission of academic knowledge to foster self-discipline, moral integrity, self-awareness, and active engagement with the community. The curriculum was multidisciplinary, encompassing subjects such as philosophy, history, law, medicine, politics, agriculture, architecture, physical education, and the arts, thereby preparing learners for both personal development and meaningful participation in society.

A defining characteristic of ancient education was its emphasis on experiential and personalised learning. Students acquired knowledge through observation, participation, apprenticeship, and direct engagement with everyday life. Teaching was adapted to individual learners' abilities and interests, representing an early form of learner-centred education. In contrast, contemporary educational systems frequently rely on standardised curricula, uniform assessment methods, and examination performance as the primary indicators of achievement.

Gupta and Kaur (2023) further emphasise that moral and ethical education constituted a core component of ancient learning environments. Values such as respect, compassion, responsibility, loyalty, and self-discipline were cultivated through daily interactions between teachers and students and were regarded as essential attributes of responsible citizenship. Likewise, assessment extended beyond academic attainment to include practical competence, character development, and the effective application of knowledge.

Overall, Gupta and Kaur (2023) conclude that selected elements of ancient educational traditions continue to offer valuable insights for contemporary education. They advocate not a return to historical educational systems, but the integration of enduring principles—including experiential learning, personalised instruction, values-based education, holistic development, and strong teacher-student relationships—into modern educational practice. Such an approach may contribute to the development of well-rounded, socially responsible, and lifelong learners.”

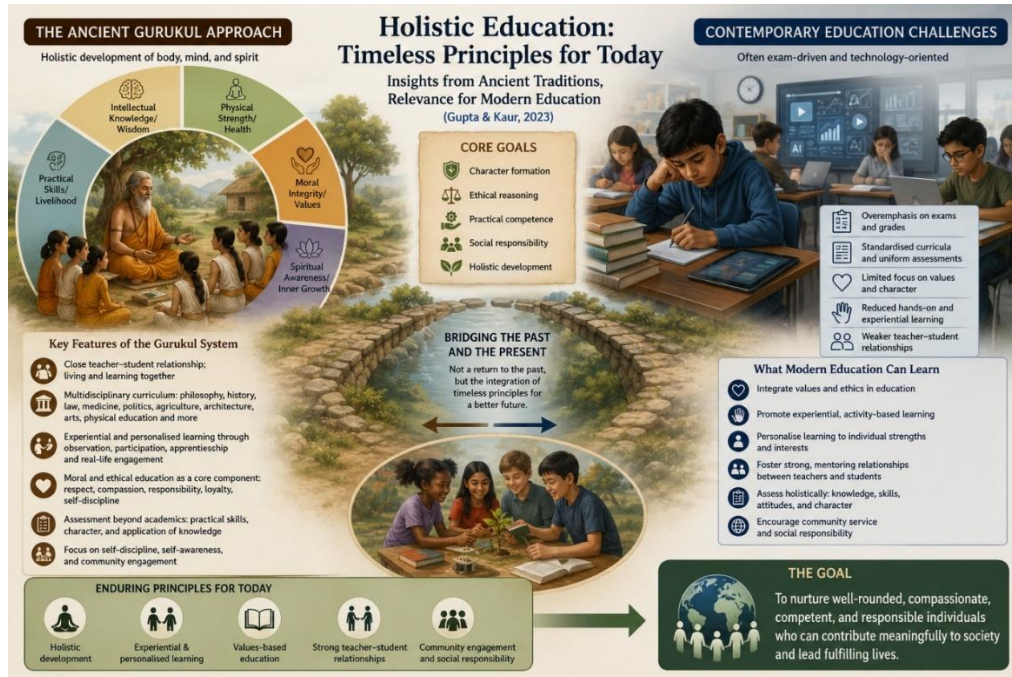


Figure 4: Holistic Education. Timeless Principles for Today (see AI: <https://chatgpt.com/c/6a47a327-85b0-83eb-a34d-1d6bbc53befb>)

ANCIENT CHILDREARING AT HOME

While the preceding chapter examined historical educational practices outside the family context, childrearing has never been confined to formal education alone. Across many societies, the extended family has played a central role in children's upbringing, providing care, guidance, cultural transmission, and emotional support. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of historical childrearing, this section explores the contribution of extended-family caregiving in past societies and considers its relevance for contemporary debates on parenting and child development.

"Education in ancient societies⁴ was fundamentally shaped by social hierarchy, cultural traditions, and the practical needs of communities. Unlike modern systems of mass education, learning opportunities were often determined by factors such as social class, gender, and occupation. Formal education was generally reserved for elites, while the majority of children acquired knowledge and skills through participation in everyday life, apprenticeships, and oral traditions.

One of the most common forms of education in ancient societies was learning through observation, imitation, and participation. Rather than relying primarily on formal instruction, children acquired essential knowledge and skills by actively engaging in everyday family and community life. Parents, relatives, and community elders taught agriculture, hunting, weaving, pottery, and other practical crafts by involving children in daily tasks from an early age. For more specialised occupations, apprenticeship served as the

⁴ <https://news.nd.edu/news/research-shows-child-rearing-practices-of-distant-ancestors-foster-morality-compassion-in-kids/>

principal educational pathway, with young learners living and working alongside experienced craftsmen to develop practical expertise through continuous observation and hands-on experience.

In the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, formal education was primarily intended to prepare scribes, priests, and administrators. Schools known as edubbas ("tablet houses") provided systematic instruction in literacy, writing, and record keeping. Students devoted considerable time to copying cuneiform inscriptions or hieroglyphic texts onto clay tablets and papyrus, with memorisation, precision, and discipline regarded as essential components of learning.

Educational traditions in Ancient Greece and Rome broadened the focus beyond literacy to include intellectual, civic, and moral development. In Athens, elite boys were educated under the supervision of pedagogues who guided both their academic progress and ethical formation. The curriculum included poetry, philosophy, music, mathematics, rhetoric, and physical education. The Socratic method, based on dialogue and critical questioning, encouraged learners to develop analytical thinking, self-reflection, and reasoned argument. In Rome, education increasingly emphasised rhetoric, law, and public speaking, preparing young men for careers in politics, public administration, and legal practice.

A contrasting educational philosophy emerged in Sparta, where the state-controlled agoge prioritised military preparedness above intellectual pursuits. From an early age, boys underwent rigorous training designed to cultivate physical endurance, discipline, obedience, courage, and survival skills, reflecting the military priorities of Spartan society.

Across virtually all ancient civilisations, oral traditions and storytelling remained fundamental methods of education. Before literacy became widespread, myths, legends, religious narratives, and epic poems transmitted historical knowledge, cultural identity, moral values, and social norms across generations. These oral traditions not only preserved collective memory but also reinforced social cohesion and cultural continuity.

Overall, educational systems in ancient societies were diverse and closely aligned with the cultural, political, economic, and religious contexts in which they developed. Although teaching methods varied considerably across civilisations, they shared a common purpose: to prepare individuals for meaningful participation in society while preserving the knowledge, values, skills, and traditions of their communities. Moreover, many of these educational traditions emphasised experiential learning, moral development, close mentoring relationships, and community engagement—principles that continue to inform contemporary discussions on holistic and culturally responsive education.”

“The role of grandparents, particularly grandmothers, in child development has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years. In many non-Western societies, childrearing is not solely the responsibility of biological parents but is shared among extended family members. The longitudinal

study by Chung et al. (2025) investigates how patterns of grandmother caregiving during the first two years of life influence children's cognitive, socioemotional, and mental health outcomes in rural Pakistan. Drawing upon data from the Bachpan birth cohort, the study provides valuable insights into the importance of intergenerational caregiving within multigenerational family systems.

Grandmother Involvement

The researchers identified four distinct trajectories of grandmother involvement during early childhood: low caregiving, unstable medium caregiving, stable medium caregiving, and high caregiving. These trajectories reflected varying levels and consistency of grandmother participation in activities such as feeding, bathing, playing, soothing, and supporting mothers in daily childcare responsibilities. The findings demonstrate that grandmother caregiving is a dynamic process that changes over time and is shaped by household structure, family resources, and social circumstances.

A key finding of the study of Chung et al. (2025) is that stable and sustained grandmother involvement is associated with positive developmental outcomes. Children whose grandmothers followed a high caregiving trajectory displayed stronger inhibitory control at six years of age, suggesting enhanced self-regulation and behavioural management. In contrast, children exposed to unstable patterns of grandmother caregiving showed higher levels of behavioural and emotional difficulties and lower levels of prosocial behaviour. These results indicate that consistency in caregiving relationships may be as important as the quantity of care provided.

The study of Chung et al. (2025) further highlights the significance of grandmothers as alloparents within extended family systems. Beyond providing practical assistance, grandmothers contribute to children's socioemotional development through nurturing, guidance, the transmission of cultural values, and emotional support. In societies where multigenerational households are common, grandmothers often function as complementary caregivers who reinforce family stability and strengthen children's developmental environments.

Overall, the findings suggest that child development should be understood within a broader family context rather than through a parent-centred perspective alone. The study demonstrates that grandmothers can play a meaningful role in fostering children's wellbeing and developmental outcomes. Consequently, policies and interventions aimed at supporting child development, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, may benefit from recognising and actively engaging grandmothers as important contributors to early childhood care and development (Chung, et al. 2025)."

"Narvaez⁵ identifies six characteristics of child rearing that were common to our distant ancestors:

- Lots of positive touch - as in no spanking - but nearly constant carrying, cuddling and holding;

⁵ <https://news.nd.edu/news/research-shows-child-rearing-practices-of-distant-ancestors-foster-morality-compassion-in-kids/>

- Prompt response to baby's fusses and cries. You can't "spoil" a baby. This means meeting a child's needs before they get upset and the brain is flooded with toxic chemicals. "Warm, responsive caregiving like this keeps the infant's brain calm in the years it is forming its personality and response to the world," Narvaez says.
- Breastfeeding, ideally 2 to 5 years. A child's immune system isn't fully formed until age 6 and breast milk provides its building blocks.
- Multiple adult caregivers - people beyond mom and dad who also love the child.
- Free play with multi-age playmates. Studies show that kids who don't play enough are more likely to have ADHD and other mental health issues.
- Natural childbirth, which provides mothers with the hormone boosts that give the energy to care for a newborn."



Figure 5: Picture created by AI (<https://chatgpt.com/c/6a33cbdd-0618-83ed-a822-1cb7520bdca1>)

FORMAL EVALUATIONS OF WESTERN AND NON-WESTERN CHILDCARE PRACTICES

Over the past 30 years, developmental psychologists, anthropologists, and public health researchers have conducted numerous formal evaluations comparing Western and non-Western childrearing practices. One of the most important conclusions is that there is **no single "best" childrearing system**. Instead, researchers increasingly distinguish between practices that are culturally specific and developmental outcomes that appear to be universal.

Major Findings from Cross-Cultural Research (Bornstein, 2012; Bornstein, 2013 & Landsford, 2022)

Childrearing Dimension	Typical Western Pattern	Typical Non-Western Pattern	Research Findings
Independence vs. Interdependence	Encourages autonomy, self-expression, individual achievement	Encourages family obligation, respect, group harmony	Both can produce healthy adults, but with different social orientations (Keller, 2007; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007 & Keller, 2018).
Sleeping Arrangements	Separate bedrooms and early independent sleep	Co-sleeping and close physical proximity	No consistent evidence that either approach is superior; secure attachment can develop in both contexts (McKenna et al. 2005; Ketter 2004; Barry 2019).
Caregiving Structure	Primarily parents	Multiple caregivers (grandparents, siblings, extended kin)	Multiple responsive caregivers are often associated with resilience and social competence (Baffer Hrdy, 2009; Emmott et al. 2019; Sear et al. 2008).
Discipline	Greater emphasis on reasoning and negotiation	Greater emphasis on obedience and hierarchy	Outcomes depend more on warmth and consistency than on specific disciplinary styles (Baumrind, 1967; Rohner, 2016; Landsford et al. 2021/2022).
Learning	Formal schooling and structured activities	Observation, participation, apprenticeship	Apprenticeship models can effectively develop practical and social skills (Rogoff et al. 2014).
Play	Child-centred play	Shared work and mixed-age interaction	Both contribute to development, though they foster somewhat different competencies (Gray, 2011 & 2013; Pelligrini, 2009).

What Appears to Be Universal?

Across cultures, researchers consistently find that children thrive when they receive (Mesman et al. 2018; Black at al. 2017; Who, 2018) :

- Warm and responsive caregiving
- Emotional security
- Protection from violence and chronic stress
- Opportunities for learning and exploration
- Stable relationships with caregivers
- Social support from family and community networks

These factors predict positive cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes regardless of whether children are raised in Western or non-Western societies.

The Importance of Grandmothers and Extended Families

A particularly interesting finding concerns alloparenting—the involvement of caregivers other than parents. Studies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Indigenous communities show that grandmothers frequently contribute to children's emotional regulation, social development, and survival. Stable grandmother involvement has been associated with better behavioural outcomes and stronger self-regulation in children (Chung et al. 2025; Sear et al. 2011; Coall et al. 2010; Wu et al. 2025). This finding supports the argument that the nuclear family model common in many Western societies is not the only effective childrearing arrangement. Extended-family caregiving systems may provide important developmental advantages, particularly during early childhood.

Narvaez's Evolutionary Evaluation

One of the most influential contemporary evaluations is provided by developmental psychologist Darcia Narvaez⁶⁷. Based on anthropological, neuroscientific, and developmental evidence, she argues that humans evolved within highly cooperative caregiving environments characterised by:

- Extensive positive physical contact
- Rapid responses to infant distress
- Prolonged breastfeeding
- Multiple adult caregivers
- Free mixed-age play
- Strong community support

According to Narvaez, many modern Western childrearing practices diverge from these evolutionary conditions and may contribute to increased stress, behavioural difficulties, and social disconnection. However, her conclusions remain debated among researchers and should be viewed as one influential perspective rather than a scientific consensus (Narvaez, 2013; Narvaez et al. 2014; Narvaez, 2014; Narvaez et al. 2016).

What Do Large Cross-Cultural Studies Conclude?

Perhaps the most important conclusion from modern cross-cultural parenting research is that parenting practices must be understood within their cultural context. Behaviours that appear strict, permissive, or unusual from one cultural perspective may function differently in another. Studies involving dozens of countries consistently find both cultural differences and remarkable similarities. Children generally benefit when caregiving is warm, predictable, and supportive, regardless of whether the cultural emphasis is on independence

⁶ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/contributors/darcia-f-narvaez-phd>

⁷ <https://kindredmedia.org/2026/01/how-we-build-the-evolved-nest-we-need-to-thrive-with-dr-darcia-narvaez-podcast-interview/>: Together, Emily and Darcia unpack how early “undercare” shapes everything from individual anxiety to collective violence, how capitalism and colonization disrupted our natural caregiving systems, and what it looks like to *return*—without shame—to a more connected, communal, and life-affirming way of raising children.

or interdependence (Bornstein, 2012; Hrdy, 2009-2011; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Keller, 2007; Lansford, 2022; Narvaez, 2014).

Overall Evaluation

If the evidence is synthesised across developmental psychology, anthropology, and public health, the results suggest:

1. Western childrearing excels at fostering autonomy, self-expression, and individual achievement.
2. Many non-Western childrearing systems excel at fostering social responsibility, family cohesion, and interdependence.
3. Neither model is universally superior.
4. The strongest predictor of positive child development is not whether parenting is Western or non-Western, but whether children experience consistent, responsive, and supportive caregiving relationships.

NON-WESTERN EVALUATIONS OF CHILDREARING PRACTICES

One of the major criticisms of child development research is that it has historically been dominated by Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) populations. In response, a growing body of non-Western scholarship has evaluated indigenous, African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Indigenous childrearing systems on their own terms rather than using Western norms as the benchmark (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Keller, 2007; Bornstein, 2012 & 2019; Lansford, 2022).

A. African Childrearing Evaluations

Research across Sub-Saharan Africa consistently finds that childrearing is often organised around the principle that "a child belongs to the community." Grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and neighbours frequently participate in caregiving. Studies report that these extended-family systems can strengthen social responsibility, cooperation, and resilience. Children often develop strong communal identities and practical competencies from an early age.

Main Findings

Outcome	Findings
Social competence	Generally high levels of cooperation and helping behaviour
Family attachment	Strong intergenerational bonds
Community participation	Greater sense of collective responsibility
Emotional support	Multiple caregivers provide buffering during adversity

At the same time, researchers note that economic hardship can place pressure on extended-family systems and may reduce some developmental advantages.

B. Chinese and East Asian Evaluations

Chinese parenting has frequently been evaluated through the concept of *guan* ("training" or "guided cultivation"). Western observers sometimes classify Chinese parenting as highly controlling. However, Chinese scholars argue that parental guidance is often interpreted by children as an expression of care, investment, and responsibility rather than coercion.

Main Findings

Outcome	Findings
Academic achievement	Often above international averages
Self-discipline	Strong development of persistence and effort
Respect for elders	High levels of filial responsibility
Family cohesion	Strong family obligations and support networks

Researchers conclude that practices appearing "authoritarian" in Western frameworks may function differently within East Asian cultural contexts.

C. Indigenous Evaluations (Americas, Australia, Arctic Regions)

Many Indigenous childrearing systems emphasise observation, participation, storytelling, and learning through contribution rather than direct instruction. Children are often granted considerable autonomy while remaining embedded within strong community networks.

Main Findings

Outcome	Findings
Independence	Children often demonstrate early self-reliance
Social responsibility	Strong orientation toward community welfare
Practical competence	High levels of observational learning
Cultural identity	Strong intergenerational transmission of traditions

Anthropologists frequently describe these systems as highly effective for producing socially integrated and adaptable adults.

D. South Asian Evaluations

Research from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal highlights the importance of multigenerational households. Grandparents frequently play substantial roles in caregiving, discipline, cultural transmission, and emotional support.

The recent Pakistani Bachpan study found that stable grandmother involvement predicted better self-regulation and fewer behavioural difficulties among children.

Main Findings

Outcome	Findings
Emotional development	Improved through stable caregiving relationships
Cultural continuity	Strong transmission of family values
Child wellbeing	Benefits associated with consistent grandmother involvement
Family resilience	Greater support during periods of stress

E. Narvaez and the "Evolved Nest"

One of the most influential non-Western-inspired evaluations comes from developmental psychologist Darcia Narvaez. Drawing heavily on Indigenous societies, hunter-gatherer communities, and anthropological evidence, she developed the concept of the Evolved Developmental Niche (EDN) or "Evolved Nest."

Narvaez identifies several caregiving practices that characterised most of human evolutionary history:

- Extensive positive touch
- Rapid responsiveness to infant distress
- Prolonged breastfeeding
- Multiple caregivers
- Free mixed-age play
- Strong community support
- Positive social climate

Studies using the EDN framework report associations between these practices and stronger empathy, prosocial behaviour, self-regulation, wellbeing, and moral development.

F. Large Comparative Non-Western Studies

A major comparative study examining parenting across four non-Western cultures found both similarities and differences in how parenting practices affect child outcomes. Importantly, the researchers concluded that some developmental processes appear universal, while others are highly culture-specific. Parenting practices that are normative within a culture tend to produce better outcomes than practices that conflict with cultural expectations.

Overall Results of Non-Western Childrearing Evaluations

When the findings from African, Asian, Indigenous, and Middle Eastern studies are combined, several recurring strengths emerge:

Strength Identified	Evidence Across Non-Western Studies
Multiple caregivers	Strongly supported
Grandparent involvement	Strongly supported
Community responsibility	Strongly supported
Intergenerational learning	Strongly supported

Cultural identity formation	Strongly supported
Practical learning through participation	Strongly supported
Social cohesion	Strongly supported
Emotional resilience	Frequently supported

In contrast, Western systems generally score more strongly on:

Strength Identified	Evidence Across Western Studies
Individual autonomy	Strongly supported
Self-expression	Strongly supported
Independent decision-making	Strongly supported
Personal achievement orientation	Strongly supported

Conclusions

The most important conclusion emerging from non-Western evaluation studies is that successful child development does not depend on a single universal parenting model. Rather, different cultural systems appear to produce different strengths. Western childrearing tends to foster autonomy, self-expression, and individual achievement, whereas many non-Western childrearing traditions foster interdependence, community responsibility, family cohesion, and multigenerational support. Across both traditions, however, the strongest predictors of positive child outcomes remain consistent: responsive caregiving, emotional security, stable relationships, and a sense of belonging.

CONCLUSIONS

This article examines childrearing from a cross-cultural and historical perspective, arguing that contemporary Western parenting practices represent only one of many legitimate approaches to raising children. Against the backdrop of increasing migration and cultural diversity within Europe, this article contends that educational systems and family support services should broaden their understanding of child development by recognising non-Western parenting traditions and extended family caregiving arrangements. Drawing upon research from developmental psychology, anthropology, evolutionary science, and educational history, this paper proposes that childrearing should be understood as a culturally embedded process rather than evaluated solely according to Western norms.

The discussion begins with demographic evidence from Eurostat's Migration and Asylum in Europe - 2025 Edition, demonstrating that migration has become a structural characteristic of European societies. Approximately 4.4 million individuals migrated to the European Union from non-EU countries in 2023, contributing to increasing cultural diversity within schools and communities. The author argues that these demographic changes require educational institutions and child welfare services to recognise diverse family structures and parenting practices rather than assuming the universality of Western childrearing models.

A central argument of the manuscript is that many contemporary Western parenting practices are historically recent rather than universal. Building on Doucleff's (2022) *Hunt, Gather, Parent*, the paper contrasts Western child-centred parenting with Indigenous childrearing traditions observed among Maya, Inuit, and Hadza communities. These societies

emphasise children's participation in family life, observational learning, emotional self-regulation, autonomy, and cooperation instead of intensive parental management and individual achievement. According to the reviewed evidence, children raised within these systems often develop strong practical competence, intrinsic motivation, emotional regulation, and social responsibility through active participation in everyday family and community activities.

This manuscript further situates childrearing within a long historical tradition by reviewing educational systems in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Persia, and India. Ancient education is characterised as holistic, integrating intellectual, moral, practical, physical, and spiritual development. Learning occurred primarily through observation, apprenticeship, storytelling, and close teacher-student relationships, while moral education and community participation formed essential educational objectives. The author argues that contemporary education may benefit from reintroducing selected elements of these historical traditions, including experiential learning, values education, personalised instruction, and stronger relationships between educators and learners.

A recurring theme throughout the manuscript is the importance of the extended family. Whereas Western societies often regard childrearing as the responsibility of biological parents, evidence from Africa, Asia, and Indigenous communities demonstrates that grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and other relatives frequently function as important caregivers. Particular attention is given to recent longitudinal research from Pakistan showing that stable grandmother involvement during early childhood is associated with improved self-regulation, fewer behavioural difficulties, and stronger socio-emotional development. These findings support evolutionary theories of cooperative breeding, suggesting that children benefit from multiple responsive caregivers rather than exclusively from parental care.

This manuscript synthesises three decades of comparative research evaluating Western and non-Western parenting systems. Cross-cultural studies consistently indicate that no single parenting model is universally superior. Western childrearing generally promotes autonomy, self-expression, and individual achievement, whereas many non-Western traditions place greater emphasis on interdependence, community responsibility, family cohesion, and respect for elders. Despite these cultural differences, researchers identify several universal predictors of healthy child development, including warm and responsive caregiving, emotional security, stable relationships, protection from chronic stress, opportunities for exploration, and strong social support networks. These factors predict positive developmental outcomes across diverse cultural contexts regardless of specific parenting styles.

The review also highlights increasing criticism of the historical dominance of WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) populations in developmental psychology. Research from African, East Asian, Indigenous American, Australian, Arctic, and South Asian societies demonstrates that parenting practices should be interpreted within their own cultural contexts rather than judged against Western developmental ideals. Extended-family caregiving, multigenerational households, observational learning, storytelling, apprenticeship, and collective responsibility emerge as recurring strengths across many non-Western societies. Likewise, East Asian concepts such as *guan* illustrate

that parental guidance, often labelled "authoritarian" in Western psychology, may instead be experienced by children as care, investment, and responsibility.

Finally, this manuscript incorporates evolutionary perspectives, particularly Darcia Narvaez's concept of the Evolved Developmental Niche, which argues that human development evolved within cooperative communities characterised by frequent physical contact, rapid responsiveness to infants, prolonged breastfeeding, multiple caregivers, mixed-age play, and strong community support. Although aspects of this framework remain debated, it reinforces the broader conclusion that child development is optimised through supportive social environments rather than through any single culturally specific parenting model.

Overall, this manuscript concludes that successful child development cannot be attributed to one universal parenting system. Instead, Western and non-Western childrearing traditions cultivate different developmental strengths while sharing common foundations of responsive caregiving, emotional security, and social belonging. As European societies become increasingly diverse through migration, educational institutions, mental health services, and family support organisations should move beyond Western-centric assumptions and adopt culturally inclusive approaches that recognise the value of multiple childrearing traditions. Such an approach may contribute to more equitable educational policies and better developmental outcomes for children growing up in multicultural societies.



Figure 6: Many Ways to raise a child. Many strengths to grow. Created by AI (link: <https://chatgpt.com/c/6a47a327-85b0-83eb-a34d-1d6bbc53befb>)

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