

Dimensions of holistic education in Indian higher education: A LIBRE/EMC²-guided systematic literature review



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ABSTRACT

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Whole person approach.

Recognizing the increasing emphasis on whole-person development, this study investigates key dimensions of holistic education in Indian higher education by integrating philosophical, policy, and literature perspectives. Drawing from contemporary Indian spiritual-philosophical wisdom and policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy 2020 and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, the study identifies LIBRE/EMC² as a culturally grounded, neurocognitively informed framework for holistic education in India. A qualitative systematic literature review, conducted in line with PRISMA guidelines, was undertaken using Scopus and Semantic Scholar databases to evaluate the presence of four core LIBRE/EMC² dimensions, empathy, mindfulness, compassion, and critical inquiry, within holistic education literature. Eight original peer-reviewed articles were selected and analyzed using thematic coding and qualitative comparative methods to validate these dimensions. The findings confirm their consistent presence, often linked to themes such as interpersonal sensitivity, lifelong learning, social-emotional competencies, and reflective practice. The review further underscores the institutional and pedagogical need for holistic approaches to foster whole-person development. These insights suggest that culturally sensitive, evidence-based frameworks like LIBRE/EMC² can inform curriculum design, policy implementation, and assessment in India, and potentially beyond. The study calls for developing localized assessment tools and scalable strategies to integrate these dimensions into higher education.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by substantiating the CASEL-based LIBRE/EMC² framework, employing a systematic literature review as a model for holistic education. Furthermore, aligned with the zeitgeist of NEP 2020 and UN SDG 4.7, it supports LIBRE/EMC²'s four competencies as viable dimensions of holistic education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The word 'education' originates from two Latin roots: 'educere', meaning 'to draw out', and 'educare', meaning 'to train or mold' (Bass & Good, 2004; Craft, 2017). Indian sages-thinkers have long argued that education should facilitate the unfolding of both self and society, aiming for liberation, a vision historically represented in the 'guru-

shishya tradition' (Ghonge, Bag, & Singh, 2020; Krishnamurti, 2022; Osho, 2017). However, in the current ecosphere, business models have shaped human "civilization (Napier, Curry, Libert, & De Vries, 2020) equating success with material wealth. Accordingly, contemporary education emphasizes external achievements, diverting focus from the self (Krishnan, 2020). Building on Indian sages-thinkers' teachings, we argue that neither material nor intellectual wealth alone constitutes holistic success; rather, it entails the development of mind, matter, and spirit. This aligns with the call among educators today in response to the increasing flux in global and national education systems to emphasize 'wholeness of education', centered on 'wholeness of the human' (Miller, 2016, 2019). Significantly, this reflects the educational principles historically highlighted by Indian sages and thinkers. Such ideas, orientations, and practices towards education have been encapsulated in the literature as 'holistic education' (Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi, & Liaghatdar, 2012). Overall, the harmonious integration of the various aspects of individual learning, including intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions, constitutes the essence of the holistic education approach (Miseliunaite, Kliziene, & Cibulskas, 2022).

1.1. Educational Philosophy of Contemporary Indian Sages-Thinkers

Contemporary education, largely reflecting materialist and corporatist values, contrasts with ancient Indian philosophy, which prioritized inner growth over vocational training (Ruhela, 2000; Sedlmeier & Srinivas, 2016). Eastern thinkers have consistently upheld a spiritual-metaphysical outlook akin to that of Hegel, Steiner, and Plato (Ferrer, 2018). One such thinker, Rabindranath Tagore, envisioned education as a path to achieving spiritual growth and freedom (Ferrer, 2018; Leviste & Wui, 2022). Blending naturalism, humanism, internationalism, and idealism, his approach centered on the metaphysical trinity of Satyam-Shivam-Sundaram (Chakraborty, 1996; Ferrer, 2018). Institutions like Sriniketan, Shantiniketan, and Viswabharati embodied his inspirational and humanistic pedagogy (Ferrer, 2018; Pritchard, 2013). His ideal of the "universal man" captures the core aspiration of holistic "education (Miseliunaite et al., 2022), harmonizing Eastern and Western thought in the pursuit of self-realization and human unity (Ferrer, 2018). Similar to Tagore's vision of the "universal man," another Indian sage-thinker, Osho, proposed the ideal of "Zorba the Buddha" a synthesis of material engagement (Zorba) and spiritual introspection (Buddha) to address the existential and practical demands of the modern, technocratic world (Bansal, Mittal, & Seth, 2016). Further, his fivefold educational philosophy includes dimensions reflective of a profound synthesis of existential insight and practical knowledge: Informative Competency (languages, history, etc.), Scientific Inquiry, Art of Living, Art and Creativity, and Art of Dying (Osho, 2019).

In a similar vein, Swami Vivekananda, an Indian sage and thinker, favored spiritual and human value development, warning that corporatist education undermines individuality (Ferrer, 2018). He emphasized man-making through self-development, guiding learners toward 'svadharma,' their potential self-religion or morality (Bhat, 2016; Vivekananda, 2013). Overall, his prescribed holistic curriculum balanced academic knowledge with arts, physical training, spiritual practices, ethics, Vedanta teachings, and Upanishads, delivered within a secular framework. Lastly, another Indian sage-thinker, Sri Aurobindo, along with The Mother (Mirra Alfassa), promoted integral education rooted in svadharma (intrinsic natural principles) and svabhava (inherent dispositions) (Ferrer, 2018; Joshi, 1989) advocating a "love-centered pedagogy for psychic and spiritual growth (Das, 2020; Joshi, 1989). Critiquing pure intellectualism reliant on familiarity "with state-of-the-art machinery (Ferrer, 2018) he instead" championed a soul-centered approach, fulfilling the growth of the individual.

Collectively, these sages-thinkers advocate a holistic educational paradigm integrating spiritual and material dimensions. Their vision of multidimensional development echoes the aforementioned etymology of education leading out the internal ('educere') and training/molding ('educare') and remains especially relevant today, as educational systems globally navigate profound transitions. This integrative vision aligns with and has the potential to influence progressive educational policies, such as India's National Education Policy 2020 and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4.7.

1.2. Modern Educational Policy Initiatives: NEP 2020, UN SDG 4.7 and Beyond

Recent educational policies reflect a growing emphasis on holistic and human-centered learning. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018) highlights the 'full development of human personality' and a 'just and equitable society' (Khunyakari & Takker, 2025). Further, it advocates for integrated learning that includes foundational literacy and numeracy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional and ethical development (Ministry of Education Government of India, 2023). The NEP 2020 proposes a shift from rote learning and syllabus completion to creativity and learner-centered pedagogy. Globally, the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a blueprint for a more equitable future (United Nations General Assembly, 2023); specifically, goal 4 focuses on 'quality education', with sub-goal 4.7 addressing 'education for sustainable development and "global citizenship' (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016)". By 2030, this target aims for all learners to acquire knowledge that promotes sustainability, human rights, gender equality, and peace (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Looking beyond 2030, the International Science and Evidence-Based Education (ISEE) Assessment emphasizes education for human flourishing, integrating cognitive and social-emotional development through a learner-centric, whole-brain approach (Duraiappah et al., 2021). Together, these modern initiatives unite Eastern introspective ideals with Western progressivism to promote holistic, human-centered education, reinforcing the relevance of holistic education dimensions in relation to contemporary neuroscience and developmental science.

1.3. The Present Study

Despite extensive theoretical identification of holistic education "principles (Miller, 2016, 2019) recent research highlights the need to identify their universal and India-specific dimensions (Miseliunaite et al., 2022). This study aims to identify key dimensions of holistic education within the Indian higher education context to inform successful curriculum design and evaluation. This work uses the term "dimensions" instead of "competencies" or "skills" to reflect the fluid, evolving, and complex nature of holistic education, encompassing emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual development.

2. METHOD

The study adopted a twofold approach: a comprehensive literature review to identify a suitable holistic education framework and its key dimensions, followed by a systematic literature review (SLR) adhering to the 'Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)' guidelines (Page et al., 2021). SLR aimed to substantiate the identified holistic education dimensions within existing literature, therefore combining breadth of coverage with depth of validation. Scopus and Semantic Scholar databases were selected as primary sources due to their credibility, efficient data retrieval, and wide coverage of relevant articles (Miseliunaite et al., 2022). Bibliographic data search utilized a combination of the following descriptors: 'holis* (title)' AND 'education OR curricul* OR pedagog* OR sel (title, abstract, keywords)' AND 'skill* OR competenc* OR dimension* OR proficienc* (title, abstract, keywords)' AND NOT 'review*'. The search was limited to English-language original articles published before 2021. This timeline limitation was in accordance with the study's intent to analyze foundational literature preceding major shifts in the Indian education landscape, such as the release of India's National Education Policy (2020) and the International Science and Evidence-Based Education (ISEE) Assessment (2021). Excluding research published after these developments helped ensure that the review captured pre-existing perspectives, rather than studies potentially shaped in response to the reviewed policy changes.

Following automated database screening, the articles (n = 472) were imported into Excel and sequentially numbered. Two researchers conducted a three-stage PRISMA-guided screening process, collaboratively determining inclusion and exclusion criteria through discussion. First, duplicates (n = 5) and irrelevant or non-peer-reviewed articles (n = 435) were removed after title screening. Abstract and keyword screening led to the

exclusion of articles ($n = 11$) due to a lack of curricular focus on holistic education or excessive emphasis on a specific approach (e.g., particular philosophical orientations or stakeholder-focused studies). Additionally, one article was excluded due to unavailability ($n = 1$). Lastly, full-text inspection removed articles on three bases: (A) non-comprehensive approach towards holistic educational dimensions, (B) targeting only a specific discipline, and (C) non-focus on studying dimensions ($n = 3, 4, 5$, respectively). Finally, eight original articles were subjected to further thematic analyses (see Figure 1).

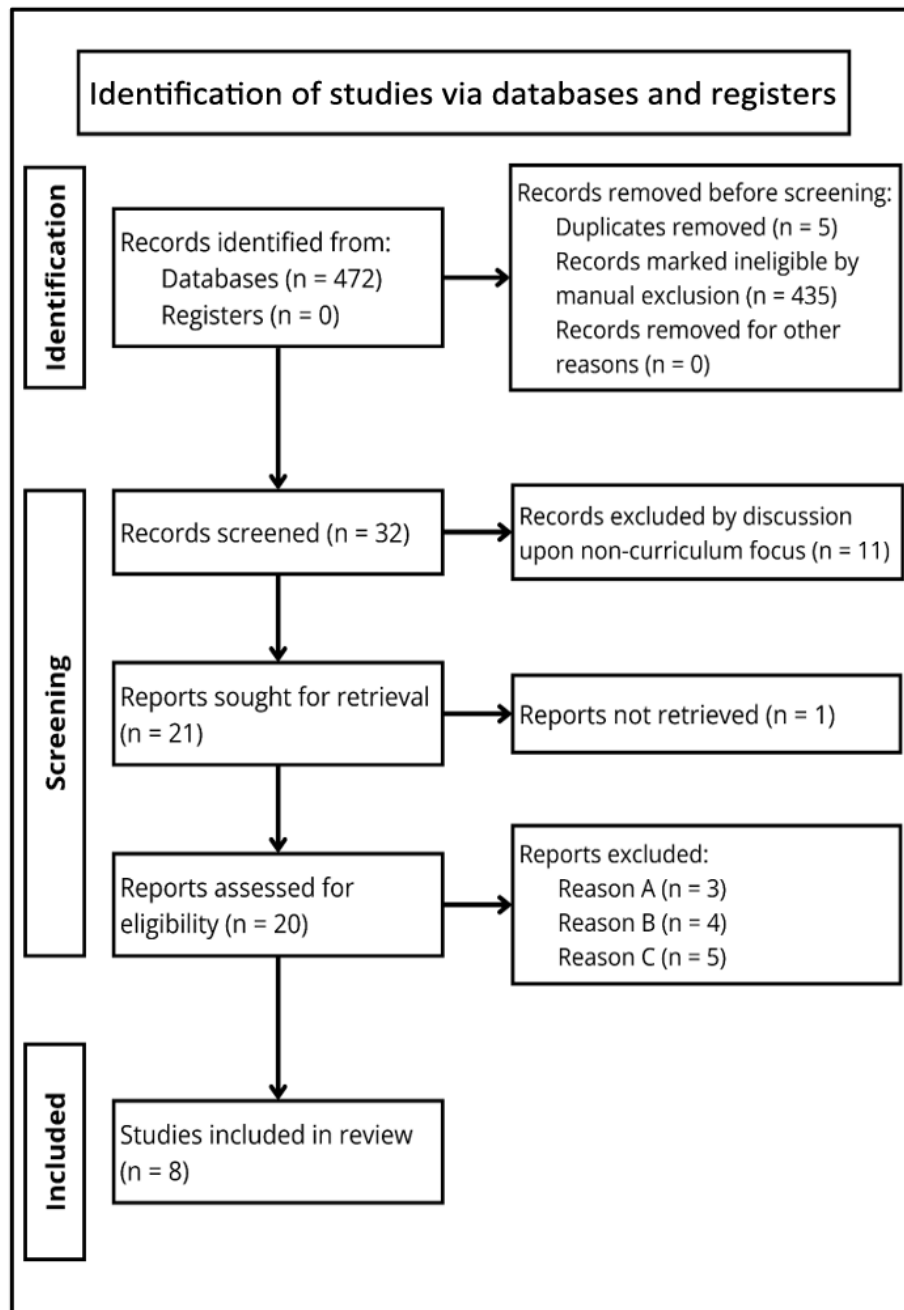


Figure 1. “Flowchart for selecting articles on holistic education dimensions”.
Source: Page et al. (2021).

Selected articles were analyzed using MAXQDA version 24.5.1 (Marjaei, Yazdi, & Chandrashekara, 2019). Open coding was employed within an interpretive paradigm to identify relevant qualitative segments, allowing themes to emerge organically (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017). This inductive process relied on patterns within the literature, building conclusions without applying any predetermined hypotheses (Azungah, 2018). Two

researchers coded the data twice to ensure accuracy and consistency in identifying relevant information and overlaps. Thereafter, a qualitative comparative analysis of the coded segments was conducted. (Cohen et al., 2017) Examined theoretical and empirical information to validate emergent holistic dimensional categories within the broader holistic education literature.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Comprehensive Review: Identifying Modern Holistic Education Frameworks

Holistic education has gained global traction as a compelling alternative to traditional curricula. In North America, approaches such as Montessori and Waldorf have embodied holistic principles while aligning with national education standards (Miseliunaite et al., 2022; Rudge, 2016, 2021). Europe showcases regional diversity: Finland has institutionalized holistic education in national “policy (Vitikka, Krokfors, & Hurmerinta, 2012) while the United Kingdom has adopted more localized, teacher-led initiatives (Glenn, 2011; Renshaw & Wood, 2011). Similarly, Singapore and Taiwan have integrated holistic elements within broader educational “reforms (Lee, Hong, & Niemi, 2014; Miseliunaite et al., 2022) and New Zealand’s bicultural curriculum offers a policy-level embodiment of holistic values (Blaklock, 2010; Hedges & Cooper, 2014).

These international cases indicate that identifying and implementing holistic education dimensions is most effective when rooted in modern, macro-level policymaking. Furthermore, several scholars emphasize the importance of contextual relevance in shaping how holistic principles are interpreted and applied across regions (Lee et al., 2014; Miseliunaite et al., 2022). Therefore, global policies such as ‘UN-SDG 4.7’ or ISEE, alongside India’s ‘NEP-2020’, provide a stable starting point for identifying holistic education dimensions.

3.1.1. Holistic Education and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Amid global efforts to reimagine education, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained prominence as a key bridge between traditional academic goals and broader human development. SEL emphasizes skills that resonate strongly with the broader aims of holistic education: the development of self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making (Cojocar, 2023; McKay-Jackson, 2014; Payton et al., 2000). Across the reviewed international literature on holistic approaches, transformative learning and community engagement emerged as recurring elements (Lee et al., 2014; Zgur, Dubis, & Koc, 2021). These themes closely align with the global SEL movement, which promotes academic and social-emotional competencies in tandem (Varela, Kelcey, Gould, & Sklar, 2013). Moreover, SEL supports multiple SDGs, particularly 4.7, by supporting whole-brain development (Bryan, 2022). Similarly, the ISEE framework stresses the integration of cognitive and social-emotional dimensions (Miseliunaite et al., 2022; Owen, 2021); a focus is also reflected in frameworks such as Education for Sustainable Development Goals and Finland’s National Core Curriculum.(Ellyatt, 2022).

A growing consensus among educators and scholars supports SEL as a means of educating the “whole child” (Bushaw & Lopez, 2013; Greenberg et al., 2003; Rose & Gallup, 2000) with a study” reporting that 90% of educational leaders, teachers, and parents vouch for its integration (The Aspen Institute, 2018). Responding to global educational needs, organizations such as the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also endorsed SEL and well-being as central to education reform (Chernyshenko, Kankaraš, & Drasgow, 2018; Varela et al., 2013). Therefore, SEL’s politically neutral and interdisciplinary foundations facilitate its adaptation across diverse contexts, including India (Osher et al., 2016). Notably, aligning with the NEP 2020, the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to collaborate on teacher training for SEL and digital pedagogies (UNESCO MGIEP, 2023)

Overall, SEL-based frameworks not only align with Indian policy and global education movements (Greenberg, 2010; Shonkoff & Bales, 2011) but also present a practical, scalable approach to integrating holistic principles into curriculum design (Greenberg, 2010; Shonkoff & Bales, 2011). However, identifying a balanced, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive SEL model remains crucial (Mochizuki & Singh, 2022).

3.1.2. Evaluating SEL Frameworks

Research demonstrates that well-designed SEL programs significantly benefit learners across geographical, socio-economic, and demographic backgrounds (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). “Brush et al. (2022), through an extensive analysis of 40 SEL frameworks featured on Harvard’s Explore SEL platform, identified ten frameworks with strong conceptual foundations (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2019). Of these, only five were developed for broader global utilization: ‘Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning’ (CASEL), OECD’s SEL competencies, International Rescue Committee’s social and emotional competencies, the ‘Measure of Development and Early Learning’ (MODEL) framework by ‘Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes’ (MELQO), and the European Union’s ‘Network of Experts on the Social Dimension of Education and Training’ (NESET).

These globally relevant frameworks demonstrated satisfactory scores on evaluations of specificity, balance, developmental relevance, cultural sensitivity, and empirical grounding (Blyth & Borowski, 2019; Brush et al., 2022; Mochizuki & Singh, 2022). All five demonstrated balanced coverage in four of six SEL coding domains: cognitive, emotional, social, and values (Jones, Bailey, Meland, Brush, & Nelson, 2019). However, the SEL domains of identity and perspectives remained consistently underrepresented.

To address this limitation, the CASEL-based Social-Emotional Ability Development framework was developed by the Aspen Institute and endorsed by UNESCO MGIEP as a more inclusive model (Mochizuki & Singh, 2022). On these lines, a culturally grounded and evidence-based Indian framework named LIBRE/EMC² was developed, aligning with ‘whole brain learning’ (Chatterjee Singh & Duraipappah, 2020).

While CASEL offers global strengths, LIBRE integrates overlooked SEL domains such as mindfulness, compassion, and empathy, which plausibly enhance its score in the underrepresented domains of identity and perspective (Mochizuki & Singh, 2022).

3.1.3. LIBRE/EMC² Framework

The LIBRE/EMC² framework promotes ‘whole brain learning’ by integrating cognitive and emotional systems through four core dimensions: empathy, mindfulness, compassion, and critical inquiry (Saurabh, Singh, & Duraipappah, 2019). Grounded in CASEL-based neurobiological findings, it posits that social-emotional learning and well-being are teachable and cultivable (Immordino-Yang & Gotlieb, 2017).

It links neocortex-associated cognitive functions (Frith & Frith, 2005) to social-emotional “attributes (Sheinman & Russo-Netzer, 2021), drawing on theory of mind and a socially driven brain model (Adolphs, 2008; Frith & Frith, 2010). It highlights neuroplasticity as essential for managing social-psychological processes parallel to the cognitive learning of academic skills (Beckes & Coan, 2015; Di & Biswal, 2019; Gazzaniga, 2008; Ruge, Liou, & Hoad, 2012). In summary, the LIBRE/EMC² framework presents a well-rounded and contextually appropriate model for operationalizing holistic education in India across four dimensions (Figure 2) that merit empirical validation through a systematic review.

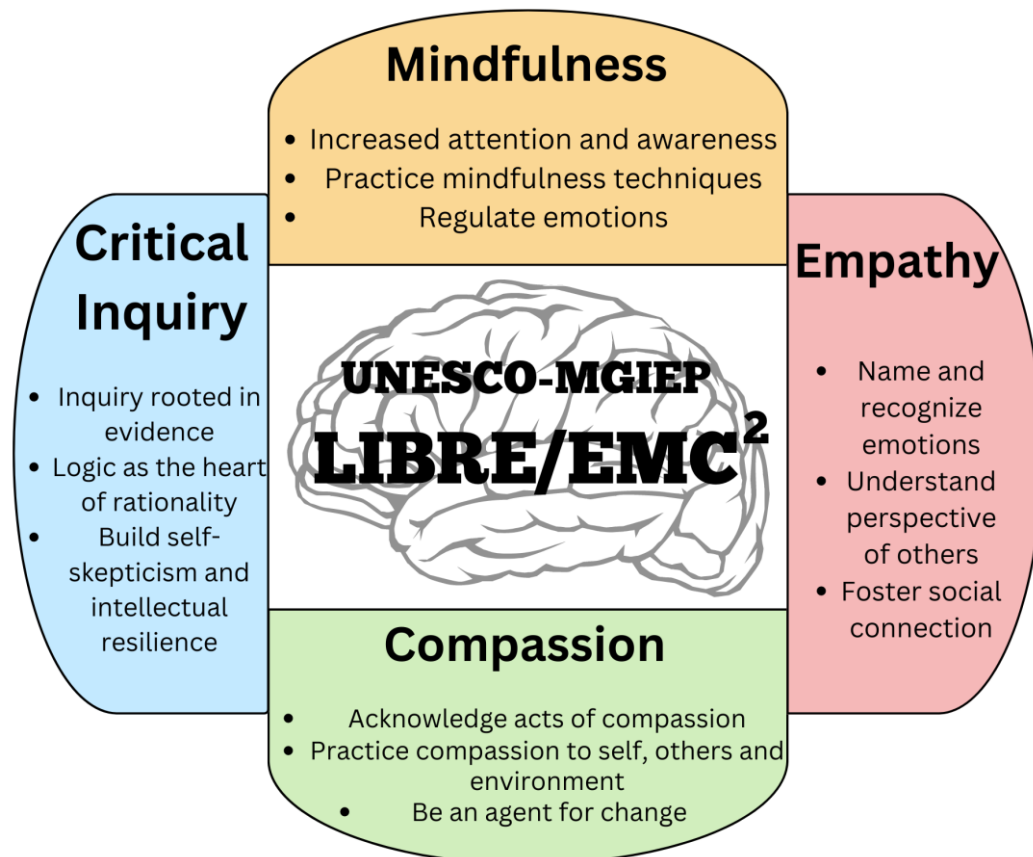


Figure 2. LIBRE/EMC² Framework.

Source: Chatterjee Singh and Duraipah (2020).

3.2. Systematic Literature Review: Validating Holistic Education Dimensions in the Indian Context

The SLR aimed to verify the four LIBRE-based holistic education dimensions within the broader holistic education context. The resulting analysis was limited to two primary clusters: (1) foundational themes that emphasize the broader value and necessity of holistic education in general and the LIBRE/EMC² framework specifically, and (2) dimension-specific themes aligned with the LIBRE/EMC² framework.

3.2.1. Foundational Themes: The Need for Holistic Competence and LIBRE/EMC² in Higher Education

The first group of themes emphasized the expansive role of holistic education in supporting multiple dimensions of student development (Table 1). Reviewed literature describes holistic education as encompassing cognitive, affective, physical, spiritual, and social domains, and it is oriented toward lifelong learning and personal growth (Fringe, 2018; Hare, 2006; Tirri, 2011; Wu & Tan, 2021). This extends beyond subject mastery to include the development of attitudes, values, and capabilities necessary for contributing to both individual flourishing and communal engagement (Chan & Luk, 2022; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Wu & Tan, 2021).

Several studies have underscored the role of higher education institutions in fostering global competence, especially in light of sustainability and interconnectedness in education (Kjellgren & Richter, 2021). In this context, global competence refers to the integration of disciplinary knowledge with ethical awareness, intercultural understanding, and critical thinking (Chan & Luk, 2020; Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Crucially, the literature emphasizes that higher education institutions bear the responsibility of cultivating both discipline-specific expertise and globally relevant competencies (Chan & Luk, 2022; Kjellgren & Richter, 2021). Articles emphasized the need for clearly defined educational goals, structured implementation strategies, and mechanisms for monitoring outputs and outcomes (Hare, 2006). A related concern was the current lack of standardized instruments for assessing

holistic competencies. Authors argued for the development of tools that could be used across disciplines and institutions to evaluate students' perceived holistic growth (Chan & Luk, 2020; Fringe, 2018).

Moreover, the thematic exploration of LIBRE-like features further reinforced the need for multidimensional, socio-spiritual, and emotional competencies, echoing the 'human flourishing' ethos embedded in the LIBRE framework (Hare, 2006; Mochizuki & Singh, 2022; Tirri, 2011). The emphasis on holistic self-development, holistic pedagogies, social-emotional capacities, multidimensional competence, balanced pedagogical environments, and lifelong learning orientations (Table 1) highlighted the structural and philosophical resonance with the LIBRE/EMC² model (Hare, 2006; Kjellgren & Richter, 2021).

Table 1. Themes from the SLR: Need for emphasis on holistic education and LIBRE/EMC²-related features.

Theme	Literature segment
A broad need for emphasis on holistic education	
Whole-person development	"...Holistic education must acknowledge the multiple dimensions of the human personality, physical, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and spiritual, thus moving towards the perennial dream of an integrated individual living on a harmonious planet..." [6].
Holistic pedagogy and environments	"...Holistic education attempts to develop a pedagogy that is interconnected and dynamic and thus is in harmony with the cosmos. In contrast, much of traditional education tends to be static and fragmented..." [7].
Active and critical learners	"...Within this holistic perspective, the student is positioned as an active, participatory and critical learner who perceives and understands him/herself in a changing world..." [6].
Competency-based approach	"...Despite divergence in the contents of educational changes, a converging trend is an attention to the promotion of competencies based on global frameworks such as the core competency definitions by the Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD)..." [2].
Institutional clarity and commitment	"...Institutional clarity about goals and concepts, including institutional guidelines, clear definitions, and practical implications that are communicated throughout the institution and updated periodically..." [1].
Lifelong and global citizenship	"...education—must take into account as they strive for holistic global competence development, which is a key aspect of education for sustainable development." [1].
LIBRE/EMC² framework-related holistic education features	
Holistic self-development	"...There are five social and emotional competencies and three emerging twenty-first century competencies in the 21CC framework, and they are (1) Self-awareness, (2) Self-management, (3) Social awareness, (4) Relationship management, and (5) Responsible decision-making..." [2].
Social-emotional capacities	"...This is the first level of wholeness with which the holistic educator works. The person is viewed as an integral being with six essential elements: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, aesthetic, and spiritual..." [7].
Multidimensional competence	"The empirical results support the importance of a holistic approach to school pedagogy. In both schools, teachers and students emphasized the emotional, social, moral, and spiritual aspects of education..." [8].
Balanced and inclusive pedagogy	"...1) 'Connection' – entails integrating school subjects; establishing connections with the community...2) 'Inclusion' refers to including students of diverse races and abilities...3) 'Balance' means reaching for equilibrium between complementary energies (individual learning and group learning, analytic thinking and intuitive thinking, content and process, and learning and assessment)." [7].
Lifelong learning orientation	"...These core values are followed by the social and emotional competencies and the emerging twenty-first century competencies that all Singaporeans aspire to develop, acquire and continue to hone through lifelong learning..." [2].

Note: Literature segments marked by article number in brackets: 1- (Kjellgren & Richter, 2021); 2- (Wu & Tan, 2021); 3- (Chan & Luk, 2022); 4- (Chan & Luk, 2020); 5- (Fringe, 2018); 6- (Hare, 2006); 7- (Mahmoudi et al., 2012); 8- (Tirri, 2011).

3.2.2. Dimension-Based Themes: Validating the LIBRE/EMC² Framework

The second cluster of themes addressed the extent to which existing literature reflects the four key dimensions of the LIBRE/EMC² framework. The review found consistent support for each dimension, with recurring references across multiple studies (Table 2).

Empathy was demonstrated through interpersonal sensitivity, cultural awareness, and the ability to engage constructively with diverse perspectives (Chan & Luk, 2020; Hare, 2006; Wu & Tan, 2021). The literature

emphasized skills such as communication, active listening, and relationship-building as relevant aspects of this dimension (Kjellgren & Richter, 2021). These skills are frequently linked to students' ability to participate in collaborative environments and navigate culturally diverse contexts (Chan & Luk, 2022; Kjellgren & Richter, 2021). Critical inquiry emerged as a commonly cited element in holistic education in relation to analytical thinking, information literacy, and interdisciplinary application (Chan & Luk, 2022; Fringe, 2018; Hare, 2006). Several articles highlighted the importance of these competencies, linking them to reflective and self-directed learning practices (Hare, 2006; Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Wu & Tan, 2021).

Mindfulness also emerged from the selected literature in terms of self-awareness, self-management, and emotional regulation (Hare, 2006; Mahmoudi et al., 2012). It was described as supportive of students' inner clarity, focus, and resilience in the face of challenges (Chan & Luk, 2020; Tirri, 2011). It was also connected to spiritual awareness, identity development, and the pursuit of inner purpose or meaning (Kjellgren & Richter, 2021; Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Lastly, compassion was presented as an important element of moral and relational development (Chan & Luk, 2020; Hare, 2006). Studies describe compassion as encompassing respect, care for others, and social responsibility (Wu & Tan, 2021). This dimension was linked to educational practices that promote supportive peer relationships, community values, and the cultivation of integrity and fairness in student conduct (Chan & Luk, 2022; Tirri, 2011).

Table 2. Themes from the SLR: Validating dimensions of the LIBRE/EMC² framework.

Theme	Illustrative quote
Empathy as a dimension	
Interpersonal sensitivity	"...Interpersonal awareness: This is the area of personal growth in which the student will learn how to establish and maintain relationships encompassing communication skills, collaborative skills and meeting skills..." [6].
Cultural awareness	"...Through interpersonal skills, develops and maintains relationships in interactions with others from a range of different backgrounds and cultures, the student will act with care, empathy, compassion and consideration especially in circumstances in which the views of others are at variance with their own..." [6].
Collaborative mindset and communication competence	"...an interaction sphere the individual's behavior in communication, collaboration, and relation-building..." [1].
Relationship building	"...In this second level of wholeness, the emphasis is upon the quality of human relationships. In the course of human interaction, a community can be comprised of the school, the town, or even the family..." [7].
Global citizenship	"...Cultural Sensitivity and Global Citizenship – the ability to understand one's own culture, respect the culture of others, and demonstrate consideration and appreciation for others..." [3].
Critical inquiry as a dimension	
Analytical thinking	"Critical thinking skills- The ability to reflect on and evaluate different perspectives (Davies 2015). Analyze and evaluate an issue, think critically..." [4].
Problem-solving aptitude	"...Problem-solving and Critical Thinking Skills – the ability to identify problems, think critically, and solve problems..." [3].
Information management	"...Information Literacy – the ability to find, evaluate, and use information and to demonstrate information technology and numerical skills..." [3].
Intellectual curiosity	"...In this process of person-making, children's sense of curiosity should be supported so that they would eventually become self-directed learners..." [2].
Interdisciplinary synthesis	"...Within this area of personal growth: a student develops their knowledge and understanding of a subject area and its links to other areas and disciplines and can apply this knowledge broadly and creatively to a range of situations and problems..." [6].
Reflective practice	"...a reflective approach and an attitude of continuous improvement. The student can review and evaluate the quality of their work objectively and identify areas of success and development..." [6].
Mindfulness as a dimension	
Self-actualization	"...Holistic education is a journey towards self-realization and self-actualization through which the student aims to achieve a rare insight and awareness of who they are and their true purpose..." [6].
Spiritual awareness	"...Self awareness: This represents the personal values and beliefs that a student will develop internally. It identifies the person and the standards that others will recognize and admire in

Theme	Illustrative quote
	<i>them...</i> " [6].
Self-knowledge	<i>"...It is the discovery of one's own being and the inner wisdom achieved through self-knowledge. Holistic education nurtures this learning in a special way, by recognizing the human being as a basically spiritual being in search of meaning..."</i> [7].
Self-ownership and emotional resilience	<i>"...Self-understanding and Resilience – the ability to self-manage, reflect, and demonstrate self-confidence and resilience..."</i> [3].
Moral compass	<i>"...For example, when the child develops one's inner person, such as "knowing what is right and what is wrong", they develop the moral compass to become someone "who has a strong sense of right and wrong..."</i> [2].
Holistic integration	<i>"...the goal of holistic education is best encapsulated by the term 'Ultimacy.'...Ultimacy, also called enlightenment or union with cosmic harmony, is a common theme throughout the holistic literature. It is the highest potential of the student who is involved in a holistic educational process...provides enlightenment as to the philosophical coherence of what distinguishes holistic education from mainstream approaches to education..."</i> [7].
Compassion as a dimension	
Caring attitude	<i>"...A sense of shared community should lead to collective social responsibility and a real sense of caring for those around us, and the world in which we live..."</i> [6].
Supportive actions	<i>"...Humanity is a supreme virtue that encompasses other qualities such as respect, harmony and care. For example, Confucius teaches that respect is the root of humanity..."</i> [2].
Stewardship	<i>"...Individuals are custodians of the environment and hold a position of stewardship and trust both for others and future generations..."</i> [6].
Integrity	<i>"...They act according to their own values and, within these, act with integrity. They challenge the values of others in a caring and considerate manner, avoiding judgment."</i> [6].

Note: Literature segments marked by article number in brackets: 1- (Kjellgren & Richter, 2021); 2- (Wu & Tan, 2021); 3- (Chan & Luk, 2022); 4- (Chan & Luk, 2020); 5- (Fringe, 2018); 6- (Hare, 2006); 7- (Mahmoudi et al., 2012); 8- (Tirri, 2011).

4. DISCUSSION

The present review supported the four dimensions of the LIBRE/EMC² framework, empathy, mindfulness, compassion, and critical inquiry as foundational elements of holistic education within the Indian higher education context. Importantly, this validation aligns with the philosophies of Indian sages and thinkers who have long emphasized the integrated development of the human being, a perspective strongly echoed in the thematic analysis of holistic education literature. Osho's postulation of Zorba the Buddha symbolizes a synthesis of material engagement (Zorba) and spiritual introspection (Buddha), advocating for a balanced cultivation of worldly competence and inner awakening reflecting the holistic self-development and social-emotional capacities essential to a holistic education paradigm (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Wu & Tan, 2021). Similarly, Tagore's vision of the Universal Man emphasized the ideal of whole-person development, advocating for harmony between nature, humanity, and the divine—a principle aligned with nurturing both creativity and character (Hare, 2006). Sri Aurobindo's concept of Integral Education calls for a balanced and inclusive pedagogy that fosters the simultaneous cultivation of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities, promoting multidimensional competence (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Tirri, 2011). Likewise, Swami Vivekananda emphasized a competency-based approach rooted in the lifelong and global citizenship ethos, promoting education that develops strength, compassion, intellect, and self-realization attributes essential for sustainable development (Kjellgren & Richter, 2021; Wu & Tan, 2021).

Collectively, these perspectives resonate with the LIBRE/EMC² framework's foundational aim: to cultivate multidimensional holistic competencies critical inquiry, mindfulness, empathy, and compassion necessary for human flourishing in a complex, interconnected world. For example, Tagore's ideal of the "universal man" finds contemporary resonance in the dimension of empathy, which supports intercultural sensitivity, relationship-building, and collaborative engagement (Ferrer, 2018; Pritchard, 2013). Similarly, Osho's call for inner awareness and existential insight is conceptually reflected in the mindfulness dimension, which fosters self-knowledge, emotional resilience, and spiritual attunement (Bansal et al., 2016). The compassion dimension also closely mirrors the value-centric education advocated by Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Their emphasis on self-transcendence and moral formation resonates with educational practices that promote collective stewardship,

community values, and moral integrity elements repeatedly emphasized in the reviewed literature (Ferrer, 2018; Joshi, 1989; Vivekananda, 2013). Likewise, the dimension of critical inquiry, which emerged as a pivotal element in fostering intellectual curiosity, interdisciplinary thinking, and reflective practice, finds roots in the critical pedagogy and rational spiritualism upheld by these sages-thinkers. Overall, these timeless pedagogical philosophies anticipated—at least in spirit the very dimensions now foregrounded in contemporary neurocognitive research and holistic education policy frameworks, as reflected in the ethos and philosophy of the LIBRE/EMC² framework.

Beyond philosophical alignment, these dimensions also resonate with contemporary imperatives such as NEP 2020 and SDG 4.7, suggesting that these timeless values can find concrete application in current policy and curricular reform (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Moreover, the two broad foundational clusters (1) the overarching need for holistic competence and (2) LIBRE/EMC²-aligned competencies can be seen as structurally echoing the ‘educere’ and ‘educare’ dialectic (Bass & Good, 2004; Craft, 2017). Educere, or the drawing out of latent capacities, aligns with fostering internal competencies like mindfulness and compassion, while educare, or the nurturing and shaping of the individual, is reflected in cultivating external, socially-directed dimensions like empathy and critical inquiry. In unison, these dimensions offer a concrete operationalization of the holistic ideals that both ancient Indian philosophy and contemporary frameworks like NEP 2020 and SDG 4.7 strive to institutionalize (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Therefore, this synthesis between ancient Indian educational ideals and modern policy frameworks reinforces the LIBRE/EMC² model’s cultural, empirical, and philosophical relevance. The strong thematic overlap between foundational goals and dimension-specific competencies further suggests that these elements are not isolated traits but interdependent facets of holistic development.

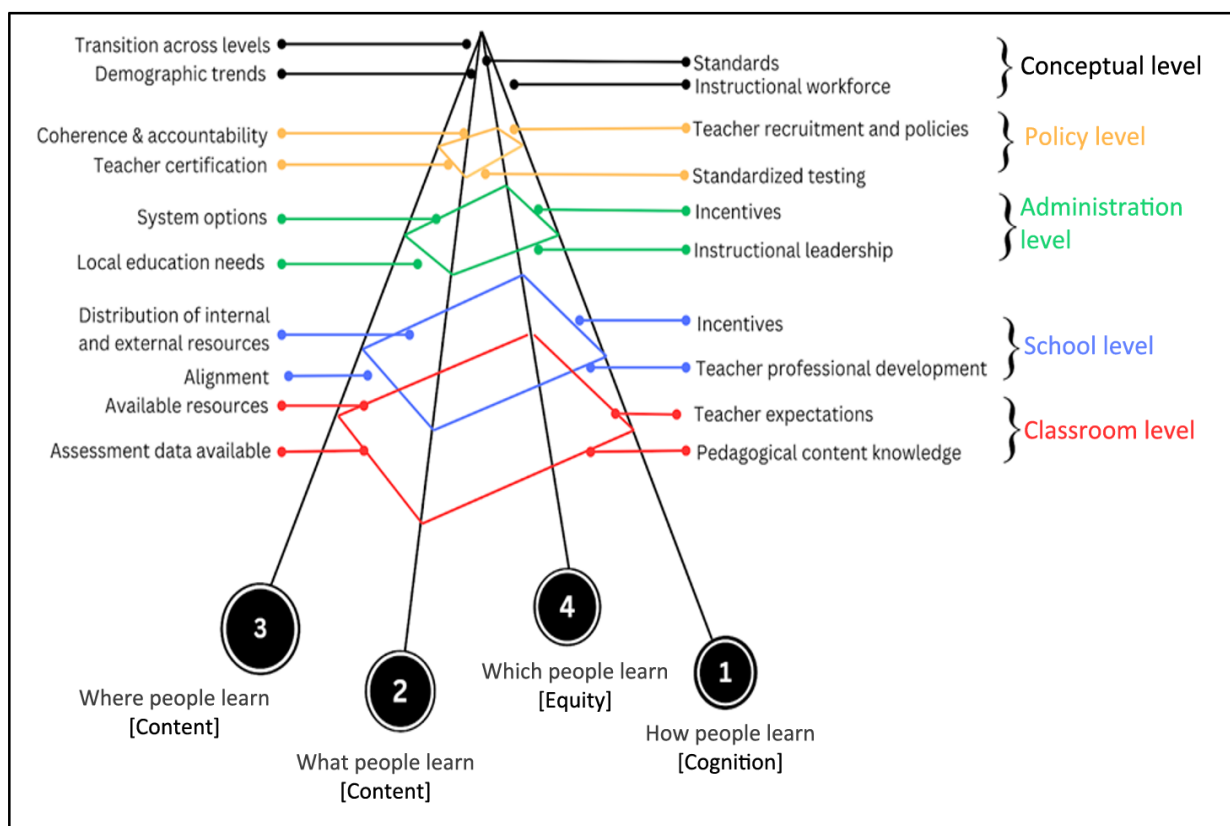


Figure 3. A conceptual feedback model illustrating how classroom-level assessment of holistic education dimensions can inform institutional practices and shape educational policy through iterative implementation.

Source: Lemke and Sabelli (2008).

Critically, this validation also highlights the need for systematic, culturally grounded assessment practices. As argued in emerging literature, assessments at the classroom level can yield timely insights into students' socio-emotional growth while informing institutional and curricular planning (Duraiappah et al., 2021; Miseliunaite et al., 2022). Such feedback mechanisms can support bottom-up implementation that meaningfully aligns with policy-level visions of learner-centered, integrated education (Lemke & Sabelli, 2008). As illustrated in recent frameworks, assessments of holistic dimensions serve as a crucial bridge between pedagogy and policy (Duraiappah et al., 2021; Miseliunaite et al., 2022). When conducted at the classroom level, they provide actionable insights into student growth, which can inform institutional decision-making and eventually influence curriculum and policy reform. This iterative feedback loop from classroom assessment to systemic implementation is essential for embedding holistic education into the structure of Indian higher education (Figure 3).

In sum, findings from the systematic review support the LIBRE dimensions as core elements of holistic education literature (Hare, 2006; Tirri, 2011) with particular alignment to the 'human flourishing' motive of the LIBRE/EMC² framework (Mochizuki & Singh, 2022). These thematic findings bolster the framework's potential as a validated model, particularly in the Indian educational context.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored holistic education within the Indian higher education context through a twofold literature review, identifying empathy, mindfulness, compassion, and critical inquiry of the LIBRE/EMC² model as core dimensions. Recent research has pointed to the necessity of identifying the universal dimensions of holistic education (Miseliunaite et al., 2022) especially in the Indian context. By integrating both Indian and contemporary perspectives, this study addressed the gap and reinforced the potential of the LIBRE model for application in educational practice and assessment. Identification of these key dimensions also enables their systematic evaluation, laying the groundwork for establishing culturally grounded assessment tools. This work can inform the development of a standardized curriculum (Miseliunaite et al., 2022) that moves beyond theoretical discourse and directly engages with the distinct needs and challenges of Indian higher education.

However, a notable limitation of this review is the reliance on two databases and the exclusion of the Holistic Education Review journal, as it is not indexed in the Scopus database. Thus, future research can expand database coverage, especially of regional and non-indexed sources, and focus on creating culturally sensitive instruments to operationalize and evaluate the four key dimensions of the LIBRE model. Additionally, studies can explore implementation across diverse educational settings to support the scalable integration of holistic education into pedagogy and policy.

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