FROM AUTHORITARIAN TO POSITIVE EDUCATION: PARADIGM SHIFTS IN EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, educational paradigms have undergone significant transformations driven by social, cultural, and pedagogical changes. The aim of the present study is to analyze the evolution of educational models through a systematic comparative analysis of the authoritarian and positive approaches, with an emphasis on their guiding principles, methodological foundations, and impact on the personal development of the learner. The methodology includes a critical review and theoretical systematization of the main characteristics of the two educational models. An analytical framework was developed to compare criteria such as the educator's role, employed educational strategies, mechanisms for motivation, and expected outcomes related to social-emotional development. A conceptual model was designed to visualize the potential pathways through which educational style influences the formation of autonomy, internal discipline, and social competence. The results of the analysis demonstrate that positive education, characterized by collaboration, respect, and the promotion of self-regulation, offers significant advantages over the authoritarian model, including the stimulation of intrinsic motivation and social-emotional skills. The research concludes that positive education is not just a pedagogical alternative, but a transformative approach corresponding to contemporary social, psychological, and educational challenges. It emphasizes the need to integrate the principles of positive psychology into educational practice through respect, emotional literacy, and engagement as foundations for full personal and academic growth.

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INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 21st century is characterized by unprecedented dynamics, driven by deep social and technological transformations. The entry into an era, defined by Klaus Schwab as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, fundamentally changes the way people live and work, requiring a radical reassessment of education (Schwab, 2017). Educational systems, largely a legacy of the industrial era, were designed to prepare standardized personnel, traditionally focusing on teaching and reproducing specific, factual knowledge. The persistence of the authoritarian model is not only a historical legacy but also a consequence of institutional inertia and entrenched traditions. Educational authorities often emphasize control, accountability, and standardized outcomes, which creates resistance to alternative approaches. Furthermore, moving toward more student-centered practices requires additional resources, continuous professional development for teachers, and cultural adaptation within schools, all of which make the transition slower and more complex (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Cuban, 2013; OECD, 2018). In contemporary conditions, where access to information is unlimited and routine tasks are being automated, the value of purely factual knowledge decreases. The World Economic Forum (2023) regularly warns that the future of the labor market will require an entirely different set of competencies, creating a sharp discrepancy between what the educational system develops and what is actually needed.

At the forefront are the so-called "21st-century skills" – transversal competencies such as those defined by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (n.d.) in the "4 Cs" model: critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Along with them, emotional intelligence (EI) acquires key significance – the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and those of others, which is critical for personal well-being and effective leadership (Goleman, 1995). In its global report, UNESCO (2021) also calls for a fundamental rethinking of the goals of learning, emphasizing that education should prepare individuals to actively shape the future.

Despite this changed reality, many educational systems continue to function within the framework of the traditional, authoritarian model. This model is based on a hierarchy where the teacher is the central figure, and the student is a passive recipient. Paulo Freire (1970) criticizes this approach as "banking education," in which the teacher "deposits" information into the students' minds, who mechanically reproduce it. The problematic nature of this model today is multilayered. First, through its emphasis on obedience and reproducing "correct" answers, it systematically suppresses creativity and critical thinking (Robinson, 2011). Second, its motivational mechanisms, based on external control through rewards and punishments, turn out to be counterproductive, often undermining intrinsic motivation for learning (Kohn, 1993). Self-determination theory posits that for optimal development, a person has three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The authoritarian model directly hinders all three (Ryan & Deci, 2017), leading to increased anxiety and alienation from the learning process.

In response to these systemic shortcomings, a new educational paradigm has emerged – positive education. It represents a direct application of the principles of positive psychology, defined as "the science of human flourishing" (Seligman, 2011), in the educational context. Positive education deliberately integrates academic learning with the development of well-being skills (Seligman et al., 2009). The key idea is that academic achievement and personal happiness are not mutually exclusive but should be pursued simultaneously. At the core of many programs is the PERMA model of well-being (Seligman, 2011), which includes five elements: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Thus, positive education offers a holistic approach with a dual purpose: to prepare students for academic challenges and to equip them with psychological tools for building a fulfilling life.

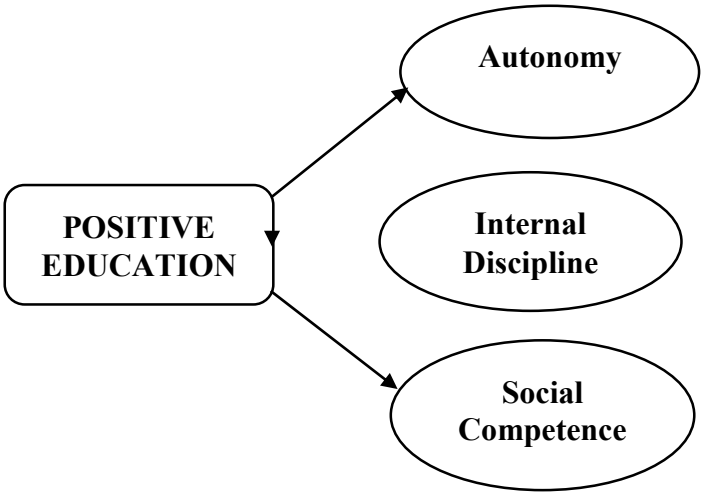

Figure 1. *Psychological Development Areas Fostered through Positive Education*

In this context, positive education not only integrates emotional well-being with academic progress but also aims at the formation of a fully mature and adaptive personality. This approach leads to the development of key psychological and social qualities in students (Figure 1) – autonomy, self-discipline, and social competence. According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), autonomy is a fundamental psychological need that supports intrinsic motivation and subjective well-being. Self-discipline, understood as self-regulation and moral resilience, is also crucial – it has been proven to predict academic success more accurately than IQ (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Alongside this, social-emotional learning programs help build social competence and effectiveness in interpersonal communication (Elias et al., 1997; CASEL, 2020).

These are not just results of positive interventions, but sustainable internal resources that support personal development and social adaptation. By promoting autonomy (the ability to make independent and responsible decisions), self-discipline (self-regulation and ethical resilience), and social competence (effective interaction and collaboration with others), positive education contributes to the development of a person capable not only of dealing with life's challenges but also of growing personally and contributing to the community.

Physical Education and Sport (PES) represents a sphere where the conflict between the two paradigms is particularly pronounced and illustrative. The traditional model in PES, focused on meeting standards, drill training, and elite competitiveness, is a prime example of an authoritarian approach. It often achieves the opposite of the desired effect: for many students who do not meet the standards, PES class becomes a source of stress and shame, leading to a lasting negative attitude toward sports. As Kirk (2010) points out, the dominant sport-technical model in PES lessons has been focused on identifying athletic talents (elitism) and preparing students for competitive sports, while completely disregarding the needs, interests, and abilities of the majority of students. This approach leads to exclusion and marginalization, rather than promoting inclusive participation in physical activity. An emphasis on technical performance and winning at any costs creates an environment in which students who are not "good at sports" feel incompetent and consequently lose interest (Kirk, 2010). This directly supports the argument that the model achieves the opposite of the desired effect (Armour, 2011). Cale & Harris (2009) offer a direct and strong critique of fitness testing in schools, arguing that tests are often unreliable, invalid, and, most importantly, can be humiliating and demotivating for many students. The public disclosure of results, peer comparisons, and the focus on standardized benchmarks lead to shame, anxiety, and negative associations with physical activity. Silverman et al. (2008) reviewed the practice of fitness testing and concluded that, if not applied properly, it can leave lasting negative impressions on students. They emphasize that when tests are used for assessment, they create enormous stress and cause students to focus on avoiding failure rather than on improving their health.

According to Ntoumanis (2001) and Standage et al. (2005), the authoritarian model in PES is ineffective. According to Self-Determination Theory, and in the context of PES, when teachers use a controlling, authoritarian style (characteristic of the traditional model), it undermines the basic psychological needs of students for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The result is reduced intrinsic motivation and, in some cases, amotivation – a state of complete lack of desire to participate in lessons (Ntoumanis, 2001). An environment that fosters autonomy leads to significantly more positive outcomes – such as a stronger intention to engage in physical activity outside of school - compared to a controlling environment. When students are forced to perform exercises, they dislike meeting a standard they do not understand, they develop a lasting negative attitude (Standage et al., 2005).

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), this model systematically undermines all three basic needs: it removes autonomy (lack of choice), attacks the sense of competence (failure to meet the standard), and harms relatedness (by promoting rivalry).

In response to these limitations, the positive approach in PES shifts the focus from the product (sporting achievement) to the process (the joy of movement). Central to this is the concept of physical literacy, defined by Margaret Whitehead (2010) as "motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout life" (Whitehead, 2010). The goal is no longer to create elite athletes, but to cultivate physically literate individuals who find joy in movement and make informed choices for an active lifestyle. In practice, this is expressed through offering a variety of activities (dance, yoga, hiking), focusing on personal improvement, and cooperative games. In this way, positive education in PES directly addresses the basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017) by fostering autonomy, building competence, and promoting relatedness. Thus, it transforms the philosophy of the subject – from a perceived obligation to meet standards to an opportunity to build healthy habits and lifelong well-being.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the present study is to analyze the evolution of educational models by conducting a systematic comparative analysis of authoritarian and positive educational practices, including their fundamental philosophical foundations, guiding principles, methodological tools, and their specific impact on the overall personal development of students.

METHODOLOGY

This study is theoretical-analytical in nature and uses a qualitative systematic review of literature as the main approach, a method focused on the interpretation and synthesis of existing research with the aim of developing a deeper conceptual understanding (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The choice of this approach is driven by the study's aim – not to generate new empirical data, but to perform a critical synthesis of theoretical propositions to un-

derstand the evolution of educational paradigms.
The process was carried out in three consecutive stages. First, a targeted review of scientific literature from key areas such as pedagogy, educational and positive psychology was conducted. The sources were selected based on their foundational role and contemporary relevance, covering both classical works and current reports from global organizations.
The second stage involved the development and application of an analytical framework to provide a structured and objective comparison of the authoritarian and positive models. The creation of such frameworks is a key method for conceptual analysis and theory building (Jabareen, 2009). The framework compared the two approaches based on four main criteria: (a) the role and status of the teacher (controller vs. facilitator); (b) educational strategies and environment (transmissive vs. interactive); (c) mechanisms for motivation and discipline (external vs. internal); and (d) impact on personal and social-emotional development.
The third stage involved the development of a conceptual model of impact based on the findings. Unlike the comparative framework, this model aims to explain and visualize the dynamic process through which the educational approach influences the learner. It illustrates the hypothetical path from the educational style (Input), through classroom experiences (Process), to the long-term outcomes for the individual, such as autonomy and social competence (Output). This model serves as a theoretical construct that summarizes the conclusions and may serve as a basis for future empirical testing.

RESULTS

The application of the developed analytical framework to the organized body of literature reveals fundamental and diametrically opposed impacts of the authoritarian and positive educational models on the personal development of the learner.

Analysis of the impact on the personal development of students

The two models cultivate fundamentally different attitudes, skills, and personality constructs, which have long-term consequences for the individual.

Impact of the authoritarian model:

The authoritarian approach, with its emphasis on external control and submission, systematically hinders the development of autonomy. By depriving the student of the right to choice and initiative and requiring unquestioning adherence to instructions, the model fosters the formation of an external locus of control – the belief that events and outcomes are determined by external forces rather than personal effort. In this model, discipline is externally imposed and maintained through fear of punishment or the desire for rewards, a dynamic that does not foster the development of internal, conscious self-discipline (Kohn, 1993).
In socio-emotional terms, the hierarchical and highly competitive environment, focused on comparative evaluation, often proves to be detrimental. Rather than fostering growth, it suppresses the development of empathy and social competence, as peers are primarily perceived as competitors. The constant fear of making mistakes and subsequent punishment cultivates the so-called "fixed mindset", where the student believes that their abilities are innate and unchangeable. This leads to the avoidance of challenges and low psychological resilience when facing difficulties (Dweck, 2006).
Impact of the positive model:
In contrast, positive education intentionally cultivates autonomy and intrinsic motivation. By providing choice, encouraging self-reflection, and involving students in the decision-making process, this model supports the development of an internal locus of control and a sense of personal responsibility. This approach is fully in line with Self-Determination Theory, which proves that fulfilling the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is key to the thriving of the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
One of the main goals of positive education is the development of social-emotional skills through Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs. In a collaborative and mutually respectful environment, students learn empathy, effective communication, and conflict resolution (CASEL, n.d.). The focus shifts from deficiencies to developing character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), which builds self-esteem and confidence. The approach promotes a "growth mindset" – the belief that abilities can be developed through effort. This makes students more resilient to failure, more open to challenges, and better able to learn from their mistakes (Dweck, 2006).
These contrasting results clearly demonstrate that the educational model is not simply a neutral tool for transmitting knowledge, but a powerful environment that actively shapes fundamental aspects of personality.

Conceptual model of the impact of educational style

The model not only compares static characteristics but also illustrates the process of transformation from educational practices (input) to lasting personality traits (output) through the filter of classroom experiences (process). Two parallel, yet fundamentally different, paths of influence are presented (Table 1).

Table 1. *Authoritarian and Positive Educational Models*

Stage	Authoritarian method	Positive model
Input	Hierarchy; external control; "banking model" of teaching (Freire, 1970); rewards and punishments (Kohn, 1993)	Partnership; autonomy; encouragement of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017); character strengths (Seligman, 2004)
Process	Passivity; fear of mistakes; external motivation; undermined autonomy (Ryan, Deci, 2000)	Engagement; satisfaction; connectedness and psychological safety (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Elias et al., 1997)
Output	External locus of control; fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006); low resilience (Duckworth et al., 2007)	Self-regulation; internal locus; growth mindset (Dweck, 2006; Taylor et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2015)

Path A: Authoritarian Educational Model

This path illustrates how external control and hierarchy lead to dependence and low resilience.

Educational practices and principles (Input): a hierarchical structure in which the teacher is the sole bearer of knowledge (the 'banking model') (Freire, 1970); a strong focus on normative standards and the flawless reproduction of knowledge; reliance on external control through systems of rewards and punishments (Kohn, 1993); and a highly competitive environment based on comparative evaluation.

Student's Experiences and Attitudes (Process): Passivity, lack of initiative, and fear of making mistakes; systematic undermining of basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence (Ryan, Deci, 2017); perceiving learning as an obligation motivated by external factors; feeling of lack of control over one's own success and development.

Formed Personality Traits (Output): Dependence on external evaluation and validation; formation of an external locus of control; low psychological resilience when facing difficulties; development of a "fixed mindset," where abilities are perceived as unchangeable (Dweck, 2006); underdeveloped internal self-discipline.

Path B: Positive Educational Model

This path illustrates how support for autonomy and cooperation leads to self-regulation and well-being.

Educational practices and principles (Input): partnership structure (teacher-facilitator); a focus on the learning process, efforts, and development of individual character strengths (Peterson, Seligman, 2004); promoting autonomy, choice, and intrinsic motivation in line with basic psychological needs (Ryan, Deci, 2017); cooperative environment and psychological safety.

Experiences and attitudes of the student (Process)**:** active engagement and taking intellectual risks; meeting the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; perceiving mistakes as a natural and necessary part of the learning process; experiencing joy and satisfaction from achievements made through personal effort.

Formed personality characteristics (Output): autonomy and developed self-regulation ability; established internal locus of control; high psychological resilience and adaptability; development of a "growth mindset," where abilities are viewed as developable (Dweck, 2006); developed internal discipline and responsibility.

This conceptual model serves as a synthesized theoretical framework, which not only summarizes the key differences between the two approaches but also provides a clear hypothesis for future empirical research aimed at measuring the causal relationships between specific educational practices and long-term outcomes for students' personal development. Table 2 presents other comparative characteristics between the two models:

Table 2. *Comparison between authoritarian and positive approaches*

Criteria	Authoritarian model	Positive model
Philosophy and goals	Submission, control, reproduction of authority	Development of potential, autonomy, and inclusion
Role of the teacher	Authoritative figure applying control and sanctions	Facilitator, mentor, encourages dialogue and empathy
Pedagogical approaches	One-way transmission of knowledge, punishments, standardization	Dialogicality, active learning, cooperation, and emotional engagement
Motivation and discipline	External motivation (punishments / rewards), strictly regulated behavior	Internal motivation (interest, personal relevance) self- regulation
Effects on personality	Passivity, submission, low self-esteem, fear of failure	Confidence, emotional resilience, independence, social sensitivity
Long-term results	Short-term behavior, low internal motivation, risk of alienation	Sustainable learning, social competence, higher academic and life achievements

DISCUSSION

The results of the comparison between authoritarian educational practices and positive education have deep and practical implications for the goals of contemporary education. The significance of the established advantages of the positive approach lies in their direct connection to the demands of the 21st century. While the authoritarian model prepares students for a world of routine and hierarchy, positive education intentionally cultivates competencies such as autonomy, resilience, and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), which are critical for adaptation and innovation (World Economic Forum, 2023). This is especially valid in sports education practice. The traditional, authoritarian model in Physical Education (PE), focused on meeting standardized baselines (the product), often has the opposite effect – alienating children from movement. In contrast, the positive approach, centered around the concept of physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010), shifts the focus to the process – building confidence, motivation, and a lifelong love for movement. The primary aim of PE lessons should be the cultivation of healthy and active individuals, rather than the exclusive pursuit of athletic performance. Similarly, fostering physical literacy does not obstruct future sporting achievements; instead, it establishes the foundation for them while ensuring health benefits for all students.

Despite the clear advantages of positive education, several challenges should be acknowledged. Transitioning from authoritarian to positive practices is a complex process that requires sustained teacher training, parental engagement, and administrative support, making large-scale implementation difficult (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Moreover, defining "success" in education remains a contested issue. While positive education prioritizes well-being and intrinsic motivation, schools are often under pressure to demonstrate achievement through traditional indicators such as standardized test scores. Research suggests, however, that these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive: large-scale meta-analyses confirm that social-emotional learning and positive education programs can improve both well-being and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

In sum, recognizing these challenges reinforces rather than diminishes the case for positive education, as it shows its potential to adapt, endure, and ultimately transform contemporary schooling.

CONCLUSION

The transition to positive education is a complex but necessary process, the challenges and opportunities of which are particularly clear in the field of physical education and sports. This study confirms the existence of a fundamental difference between the authoritarian and positive educational models. This difference is especially evident in the realm of physical education and sports (PE), where the authoritarian approach, focused on meeting standards and competitive outcomes, often leads to alienation from movement. In contrast, the positive approach, centered around the concept of physical literacy, fosters intrinsic motivation, confidence, and lasting habits for an active lifestyle. The results indicate that the paradigmatic shift from a control-based model to one grounded in well-being and self-regulation is not merely a desirable alternative, but a necessity for achieving modern educational goals.

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