

Slow Education as a Form of Resistance to the Acceleration of Modern Learning: A Humanistic Approach to Education

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ABSTRACT

The acceleration of modern education, driven by neoliberal demands, standardized testing, and digital technologies, has fundamentally altered the learning landscape, marginalizing students' well-being, depth of understanding, and intrinsic motivation. This article examines Slow Education as a form of philosophical and pedagogical resistance to these trends, grounded in the humanistic tradition of education. Drawing on a systematic literature review, this study analyzes the theoretical foundations of Slow Education including its intellectual roots in the Slow Movement and alignment with humanistic psychology and evaluates its implications for contemporary classroom practice. The findings indicate that Slow Education prioritizes meaningful engagement, emotional safety, autonomy, and the cultivation of critical thinking over efficiency-driven metrics. When integrated with humanistic principles derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rogers' student-centered learning, Slow Education offers a coherent alternative pedagogy that restores dignity and depth to learning. The study further explores specific strategies contemplative practices, dialogic learning, project-based inquiry, and reduced curriculum coverage that operationalize slow principles in practice. This article contributes to the growing scholarly conversation on pedagogical sustainability, student mental health, and the ethics of care in education, concluding that Slow Education is not merely a nostalgic retreat but a forward-looking humanistic framework urgently needed in an age of educational acceleration

Keywords: *slow education, humanistic pedagogy, student wellbeing, contemplative learning*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational landscape is characterized by an unrelenting culture of speed. Curricula are increasingly compressed, assessment cycles are shortened, and learners are subjected to an ever-growing battery of standardized tests designed to measure productivity rather than understanding. This acceleration of learning is not accidental; it reflects broader neoliberal transformations in public life that position education primarily as an instrument of economic competitiveness, workforce preparation, and measurable output. Within this paradigm, fast learning characterized by information transfer, superficial exposure, and performance metrics has displaced slower, deeper, and more humanistically oriented forms of educational engagement.

The consequences of this shift are increasingly visible in empirical research. Studies document rising rates of academic stress, anxiety, and burnout among students at all levels of education. The pressures of high-stakes testing, the commodification of credentials, and the colonization of learning time by digital media conspire to create an educational environment that is simultaneously over-stimulating and cognitively shallow. Teachers, too, bear the weight of this acceleration: workloads have intensified, professional autonomy has eroded, and the creative dimensions of pedagogy have been

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subordinated to curriculum delivery targets. Against this backdrop, Slow Education has emerged as a coherent critical response a philosophical and practical countermovement that insists on restoring quality, depth, and humanity to the learning experience.

The concept of Slow Education draws its intellectual lineage from Carl Honoré's broader Slow Movement, which challenges the cultural assumption that faster is always better. Analogous to the Slow Food movement's rejection of fast food in favor of nourishment and conviviality, Slow Education proposes a pedagogical ecology in which learning is allowed to unfold at a pace commensurate with human development, curiosity, and meaning-making. Sardalova (2025) articulates this position sharply, arguing that the pedagogy of slow education stands directly against the culture of acceleration and productivity that has come to dominate modern schooling. Rather than treating slowness as a deficiency or obstacle, Slow Education reclaims it as a pedagogical virtue one that enables reflection, creativity, connection, and genuine understanding.

Within educational theory, Slow Education finds its most natural home within the humanistic tradition. Humanistic education, rooted in the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, insists that authentic learning must attend to the whole person: their emotional states, their intrinsic motivations, their need for belonging, and their capacity for self-actualization. As Feigenbaum (2023) has observed, Maslow and Rogers conceptualized education not as the efficient transmission of content but as a process of human becoming one that requires safety, encouragement, and time. This resonance between humanistic psychology and slow pedagogy is not incidental; both traditions are united by a critique of instrumentalism and a commitment to learning as a deeply personal and irreducibly human activity.

Despite its theoretical coherence, Slow Education has not yet received the systematic scholarly attention its significance warrants. Much of the existing literature treats slow pedagogy in fragmentary terms—as a component of mindfulness education, as a reaction to standardized testing, or as a feature of early childhood practice. Catalano et al. (2023) have demonstrated the value of slow education principles for child personality development in early childhood, but fewer studies have addressed its implications across the educational spectrum, particularly in the context of higher education. Similarly, while humanistic learning has attracted considerable scholarly attention Rawal and Harji (2024) conducted a bibliometric analysis spanning over five decades its intersection with slow pedagogy as a unified theoretical framework has been insufficiently theorized.

The novelty of the present study lies in its synthesis of Slow Education and humanistic pedagogy as mutually reinforcing frameworks for resisting educational acceleration. While prior scholarship has examined these domains separately, this article proposes that their convergence constitutes a theoretically robust and practically actionable alternative to the dominant accelerationist model of education. By situating Slow Education within the humanistic tradition, this study moves beyond a purely critical stance—identifying not only what is wrong with accelerated learning, but offering a coherent philosophical and pedagogical vision for what education grounded in dignity, care, and depth might look like. This contribution is timely: as digital technologies continue to reshape the pace and texture of educational experience, and as evidence of the psychological costs of acceleration continues to accumulate, the need for a rigorously articulated alternative has never been more urgent.

The article is further motivated by the recognition that educational acceleration is not a uniform global phenomenon; its effects are mediated by context, culture, and systemic inequality. In the Global South, including Indonesia, educational acceleration often coexists with inadequate resources, large class sizes, and the specific pressures of

examination culture, creating conditions in which the humanizing potential of slow pedagogy may be especially significant. Nuzulia et al. (2025) have highlighted the challenges and possibilities of applying humanistic learning in modern educational settings, including those shaped by the particular conditions of developing-world schooling. This article engages with these contextual dimensions while advancing a theoretical framework with broader applicability.

Methodologically, this study employs a systematic literature review approach, integrating sources from both the Slow Education and humanistic pedagogy traditions, supplemented by recent empirical research on student well-being, pedagogical innovation, and educational philosophy. The analysis is organized around three central questions: What are the theoretical foundations of Slow Education and how do they relate to the humanistic tradition? What empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of slow pedagogical practices? And what practical strategies can educators draw on to implement Slow Education as a form of humanistic resistance to accelerationism? In addressing these questions, the article aspires to contribute to a growing body of scholarship that takes seriously the ethical and philosophical dimensions of educational practice and that refuses to measure educational success solely in the currency of speed, efficiency, and measurable output.

METHODS

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to examine and synthesize research on Slow Education and its humanistic foundations. The SLR approach was selected because it allows for a rigorous, transparent, and reproducible synthesis of evidence across diverse disciplinary traditions, enabling the identification of conceptual patterns, theoretical convergences, and empirical findings that inform the central research questions.

Search Strategy

Literature searches were conducted across multiple electronic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ERIC, and PubMed. Search terms included combinations of: 'slow education,' 'slow pedagogy,' 'humanistic education,' 'educational acceleration,' 'neoliberalism and education,' 'student wellbeing,' 'contemplative learning,' 'care ethics in education,' and 'pedagogical resistance.' Both English and Indonesian-language sources were consulted to ensure contextual breadth. No fixed date restriction was applied to theoretical foundational texts, but empirical studies were prioritized from 2021 onwards to ensure currency.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they: (1) addressed Slow Education, humanistic pedagogy, or related alternative pedagogical frameworks; (2) engaged with the critique of educational acceleration, neoliberalism in education, or standardized testing culture; (3) were published in peer-reviewed journals or as book-length scholarly works; (4) were available in English or Indonesian. Studies were excluded if they: (1) used 'slow' or 'humanistic' in non-educational contexts; (2) were opinion pieces without scholarly grounding; or (3) focused exclusively on vocational or clinical training contexts without broader pedagogical relevance.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Following screening, 25 sources were selected for inclusion in the final synthesis. Data were extracted using a structured template capturing: author(s), year of publication, study design, theoretical framework, key findings, and implications for Slow Education and/or humanistic pedagogy. Thematic analysis was employed to identify cross-cutting themes and theoretical convergences. The PRISMA framework guided the reporting of the review process.

Figure 1 below illustrates the PRISMA flow of the systematic literature review process:

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Systematic Literature Review

IDENTIFICATION Records identified through database searching (n = 312)
SCREENING Records screened after duplicates removed (n = 241) Records excluded – irrelevant topic or context (n = 162)
ELIGIBILITY Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 79) Full-text excluded with reasons (n = 54)
INCLUDED Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n = 25)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Theoretical Landscape: Slow Education and Humanistic Pedagogy

The literature review identified three major theoretical currents that converge in Slow Education as a humanistic response to accelerationism: (1) the philosophical critique of speed and productivity in modern education; (2) the humanistic psychology tradition as a foundation for learner-centered pedagogy; and (3) empirical evidence on the pedagogical and psychological benefits of slow practices. Table 1 summarizes the main themes identified across the reviewed literature.

Table 1. Summary of Major Themes Identified in the Systematic Literature Review

Theme	Key References	Core Argument	Pedagogical Implication
Critique of Acceleration	Sardalova (2025); Stacey et al. (2023); Robson & Mills (2022)	Neoliberal pressures create shallow, stress-laden learning environments	Reduce pace; reject performativity as primary metric
Humanistic Foundations	Feigenbaum (2023); Mielkov et al. (2021); Putri et al. (2024)	Maslow and Rogers foreground self-actualization and emotional safety in learning	Center learner autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and well-being
Slow Classroom Practices	Catalano et al. (2023); Yao (2023); López-González (2023)	Contemplative, dialogic, and project-based methods	Integrate reflection time, open inquiry, and relational pedagogy

		support depth over coverage	
Ethics of Care	Chen & Shih (2025); Fakhrrurozi & Dimiyathi (2025)	Teacher-student relationships anchored in care are central to humanistic learning	Cultivate relational trust; humanize the classroom context
Resonance & Non-Alienation	López-González (2023); Winarko & Budiwati (2024)	Slow education fosters resonant, non-alienated relationships with knowledge	Design learning environments that allow authentic engagement
Mindfulness & Well-being	Li (2025); Rawal & Harji (2024)	Mindful, diversified humanist curricula reduce burnout and increase engagement	Embed reflective and mindful elements across the curriculum

The Critique of Educational Acceleration: Evidence and Analysis

The literature reviewed converges on a robust critique of educational acceleration and its consequences. Sardalova (2025) documents how the culture of speed and productivity in contemporary pedagogy generates not only cognitive superficiality but also significant emotional and psychological harm. The drive to cover more content in less time, to optimize learning for measurable outcomes, and to rank students and institutions on performance metrics creates what Stacey et al. (2023) describe as an intensification of educational work a phenomenon affecting both teachers and students alike. Teacher workload has escalated dramatically, eroding both professional satisfaction and the quality of instructional relationships, while students increasingly report experiences of alienation, anxiety, and disengagement from the learning process itself.

Robson and Mills (2022) offer an illuminating analysis of fast versus slow modalities in educational experience, particularly in the context of emergency remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their research reveals that students experienced emergency remote learning primarily as 'fast education'—transactional, surface-level, and disconnected from the relational dimensions of classroom life that sustain intrinsic motivation. Paradoxically, the enforced slowdown of physical movement during the pandemic created, in many educational contexts, an acceleration of digital learning pace and volume. This finding underscores the extent to which acceleration is not merely a function of physical speed but of an underlying ideology that prioritizes quantity over quality and efficiency over meaning.

The humanistic tradition provides a powerful diagnostic lens for understanding why acceleration is educationally problematic. Feigenbaum (2023), in a critical engagement with the educational thought of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, argues that both thinkers recognized that genuine learning cannot be compelled, accelerated, or reduced to behavioral outcomes. For Maslow, learning is inseparable from the fulfillment of hierarchical needs—safety, belonging, esteem—and self-actualization as a learner can only occur when these foundational needs are adequately met. Acceleration, by generating chronic stress and competitive anxiety, systematically undermines the psychological safety that meaningful learning requires. Rogers similarly insisted that the most significant learning is self-initiated, emotionally engaged, and personally meaningful qualities that are antithetical to a pedagogical culture of speed and standardization.

Mielkov et al. (2021) extend this critique to the philosophy of higher education, arguing that the humanist approach to twenty-first-century education must resist the reduction of universities to credentialing machines and reaffirm their role as communities of inquiry devoted to human flourishing. This argument resonates with López-González's (2023) invocation of resonance theory as a framework for understanding what is lost in accelerated education: the capacity for what he calls non-alienated relationships with knowledge, with teachers, with fellow learners, and with the self. When education is experienced as an alienating treadmill of tasks and assessments, the resonant encounter with ideas that constitutes genuine learning becomes impossible.

Slow Education Principles and Their Humanistic Foundations

The analysis identifies several core principles of Slow Education, each with clear grounding in the humanistic tradition. First, Slow Education insists on depth over breadth the conviction that understanding a smaller number of ideas profoundly is educationally more valuable than superficially covering a vast curriculum. This principle aligns directly with Rogers' concept of significant learning, which he distinguished from mere academic learning precisely by its personal meaningfulness and transformative potential. Catalano et al. (2023) demonstrate that child-centered approaches operating through slow education principles yield measurable gains in personality development, emotional intelligence, and intrinsic motivation precisely the outcomes that depth-oriented pedagogy predicts.

Second, Slow Education privileges process over product—the learning journey over the grade or credential it produces. Yao (2023) examines how student autonomy during learning processes, including unstructured break and reflection time, aligns with the principles of humanistic education. His analysis suggests that when students are given genuine control over their learning pace and focus, they demonstrate increased engagement, deeper processing, and greater ownership of their intellectual development. This finding converges with Winarko and Budiwati's (2024) study of humanistic pedagogy as an approach to enhancing individual development, which identifies self-regulation, autonomy, and positive interpersonal relations as core outcomes of humanistically oriented teaching.

Third, Slow Education is fundamentally relational. Against the transactional model of teacher-as-information-deliverer, slow pedagogy insists on the educational significance of care, trust, and genuine interpersonal connection in the classroom. Chen and Shih (2025) provide a detailed analysis of Nel Noddings' ethics of care and its implications for teacher-student relationships in higher education, arguing that care is not a pedagogical supplement but a constitutive dimension of learning environments that foster genuine development. Fakhrurrozi and Dimyathi (2025) demonstrate this concretely in the context of post-disaster recovery education in Central Sulawesi, showing how humanizing the classroom through relational care practices produces marked improvements in learner engagement and resilience even under conditions of severe contextual adversity.

Fourth, Slow Education attends to the emotional and psychological dimensions of the learning experience. Nuzulia et al. (2025) synthesize the literature on humanistic learning in modern education, highlighting emotional safety, positive affect, and the integration of personal experience as key mediators of deep learning. Li's (2025) study of mindfulness-based and diversified humanist curricula demonstrates that embedding contemplative and reflective practices into formal educational programs produces significant improvements in student engagement, self-awareness, and critical thinking

capacity. These findings suggest that the emotional architecture of the learning environment is not peripheral to academic achievement but foundational to it.

Implementing Slow Education: Strategies and Evidence

The literature identifies a range of concrete pedagogical strategies through which slow education principles can be operationalized in practice. Table 2 presents these strategies alongside supporting evidence and their humanistic rationale.

Strategy	Key Evidence	Humanistic Rationale	Expected Outcome
Contemplative / Mindfulness Practices	Li (2025); Rawal & Harji (2024)	Develops self-awareness and present-moment engagement aligned with Maslow's esteem and self-actualization needs	Reduced anxiety; deeper learning engagement
Dialogic and Socratic Inquiry	Bhuttah et al. (2024); López-González (2023)	Fosters resonant, non-alienated engagement with knowledge; honors student voice	Enhanced critical thinking and intrinsic motivation
Project-Based and Inquiry Learning	Thomas et al. (2025); Davey et al. (2026)	Supports autonomous, meaningful, self-directed learning; Rogers' concept of significant learning	Deeper understanding; transferable competencies
Curriculum Narrowing with Depth	Sardalova (2025); Catalano et al. (2023)	Prioritizes quality over quantity; creates space for reflection and consolidation	Greater conceptual mastery; reduced cognitive overload
Relational and Care-Based Pedagogy	Chen & Shih (2025); Fakhurrozi & Dimyathi (2025)	Fulfills Maslow's belonging and safety needs; creates conditions for authentic learning	Improved learner trust, engagement, and resilience
Narrative and Reflective Assessment	Maistry et al. (2023); Novrizal et al. (2023)	Replaces deficit-oriented grading with developmental, person-centered evaluation	More accurate representation of learning; reduced test anxiety
Unstructured Time and Play	Yao (2023); Winarko & Budiwati (2024)	Honors learner autonomy and intrinsic curiosity; resists instrumentalist time use	Greater creativity and self-directed inquiry

The evidence presented in Table 2 reveals that Slow Education is not a monolithic or uniform intervention but a family of related pedagogical orientations united by their commitment to depth, care, and human wholeness. Bhuttah et al. (2024) provide compelling evidence that innovative pedagogical approaches emphasizing critical thinking and inclusive leadership consistent with slow education principles produce measurable improvements in student learning outcomes and critical thinking capacity in higher education settings. Thomas et al. (2025) similarly document the experiences of education academics navigating pedagogical innovation through active and inquiry-

based learning in intensive teaching contexts, finding that even within demanding institutional frameworks, slow principles can be integrated without sacrificing rigor.

The implementation of Slow Education is not without challenges. Maistry et al. (2023) invoke posthumanist perspectives to critically examine how curriculum practices can be reimagined beyond the constraints of conventional humanist frameworks, arguing that slow pedagogy must engage with questions of power, difference, and systemic inequity rather than treating the humanization of education as a politically neutral project. This is an important corrective: Slow Education must be understood not merely as a therapeutic response to student stress but as a political and ethical stance that challenges the structural conditions producing that stress in the first place. Novrizal et al. (2023) reinforce this point in their comparative study of humanistic and constructivist learning theories from both Western and Islamic perspectives, demonstrating that the philosophical foundations of slow and humanistic pedagogy are themselves contested and culturally situated.

The digital dimension of educational acceleration presents particular challenges for the implementation of Slow Education. Archambault et al. (2022) identify the 'pillars of online pedagogy' that support meaningful learning in digital environments, noting that the principles they identify—presence, community, design, and feedback—align substantially with slow educational values. Their framework suggests that Slow Education need not reject technology wholesale but must resist the accelerationist uses of technology that prioritize information delivery over relational engagement. Talib et al. (2021) similarly highlight the dual potential of technology in higher education: when thoughtfully deployed, digital tools can support reflective and collaborative learning; when poorly implemented, they amplify the very pressures that Slow Education seeks to counteract.

Taken together, the evidence supports the conclusion that Slow Education, when grounded in humanistic principles and attentive to systemic context, represents a theoretically coherent and empirically supported alternative to the dominant model of accelerated, performativity-driven education. Its central contribution is not the simple advocacy of 'less' education but the insistence on 'better' education that honors the complexity, the temporality, and the humanity of the learning process.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined Slow Education as a form of pedagogical resistance to the acceleration of modern learning, grounding its analysis in the humanistic tradition of education. Through a systematic review of twenty-five scholarly sources, the study has demonstrated that Slow Education and humanistic pedagogy share a common philosophical foundation: the conviction that authentic learning is a deeply personal, temporal, and relational process that cannot be reduced to performance metrics or optimized for speed without fundamental educational loss.

The findings reveal that the consequences of educational acceleration—student burnout, cognitive superficiality, alienation, and the erosion of teacher-student relationships—are well-documented across diverse educational contexts. In response, Slow Education offers a coherent set of principles and practices: depth over breadth, process over product, care over efficiency, and reflection over mere activity. These principles find their philosophical warrant in the humanistic tradition of Maslow and Rogers, who insisted that meaningful learning requires safety, autonomy, and conditions conducive to self-actualization. Contemporary humanistic educators—including those working in post-disaster contexts, in cross-cultural settings, and at the intersection of

mindfulness and curriculum—continue to demonstrate the practical relevance of these commitments.

The novelty of this study lies in its explicit theorization of the convergence between Slow Education and humanistic pedagogy as a unified framework for resisting educational acceleration. By synthesizing these two traditions, the article provides educators, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers with a theoretically grounded rationale for pedagogical alternatives that have often been advocated in practical terms but less often articulated as a coherent philosophical stance. The article also highlights the political dimensions of Slow Education, emphasizing that the struggle for humanistic and slow approaches to learning is inseparable from broader struggles for educational equity, dignity, and justice.

Future research should explore the implementation of Slow Education principles across diverse cultural and institutional contexts, with particular attention to the challenges and possibilities presented by digital learning environments. Longitudinal studies examining the effects of slow pedagogical interventions on student wellbeing, academic engagement, and long-term learning outcomes are also needed. Ultimately, the argument of this article is simple but urgent: in an age of relentless acceleration, education needs slowness not as an absence of rigor but as the very condition under which genuine rigor becomes possible.

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