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More Than Academics: Educating the Whole Person in a New Dental Faculty

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ABSTRACT

Whole Person Education (WPE) is central to the identity of a private Christian university in East Java, yet little is known about how it is enacted in a newly established faculty. This descriptive-exploratory study compared lecturers' self-reports with students' perceptions of WPE practices in the Faculty of Dentistry, where both students and lecturers were new to the institution. Parallel five-point Likert scale questionnaires with open-ended items were completed by 15 of 19 students and 10 of 14 lecturers. Perceptions were closely aligned across the intellectual, spiritual/character, social-emotional, mental-physical well-being, and vocational/career domains (domain gaps ≤ 0.17). The largest item-level divergence ran in the opposite direction of the usual self-enhancement pattern: lecturers rated their own non-academic mentoring lower (M = 3.80) than students rated it (M = 4.53), although this exploratory difference was not significant after correction for multiple comparisons. Only eight of 15 students had heard of WPE, although most described experiencing its practices. Lecturers repeatedly requested basic WPE orientation and mentoring and communication training. In a new faculty, whole person education practices may precede both students' awareness of the framework and lecturers' confidence in enacting it; faculty development should therefore build lecturers' capability and confidence and make WPE explicit to students.

INTRODUCTION

A private Christian university in East Java (hereafter, "the University") grounds its educational philosophy in whole-person education, which the university's guide calls Whole Person Education (WPE). WPE positions the university's educational task as extending beyond transfer of knowledge to the formation of the whole person: spiritually, mentally, intellectually, physically, and socially, so that students can live out God's calling in every area of their lives (Universitas Kristen Petra, 2023). This aspiration is rooted in the university statutes (Universitas Kristen Petra, 2022) and is anticipated to be implemented across all faculties, irrespective of discipline.

The Faculty of Dentistry (Fakultas Kedokteran Gigi, FKG) offers an unusual setting in which to examine how this aspiration is realized. FKG was established shortly before its first students enrolled, so its lecturers are themselves new to the University and, in most cases, encountering WPE as an institutional framework at the same time as their students. Within an established faculty, Whole Person Education (WPE) practices have been developed over years of institutional learning. In FKG, the implementation of these practices illustrates the initial stages of whole person education as experienced by both teachers and students. Dentistry also brings a specific tension: it is a competency-driven professional program in which technical and accreditation demands can easily crowd out non-cognitive-based formation (Lin et al., 2025; Masella, 2007).

The University's guide to whole person education describes WPE as comprising five concentric dimensions: the spiritual dimension forms the innermost circle and shapes, in turn, the mental, intellectual, physical, and social dimensions; all directed toward students living out God's calling in every area of life (Universitas Kristen Petra, 2023). The guide names three obstacles to implementation: dichotomous thinking that treats intellectual achievement as superior to character and faith formation; educators whose own lives are not whole (*Kehidupan pendidik yang tidak utuh*); and work cultures shaped by accreditation and ranking demands, as well as heavy administrative workloads (Universitas Kristen Petra, 2023). Because whole person formation occurs through the sharing of life rather than the transfer of knowledge, the guide's

response is the principle of "WPE lecturers for WPE students": whole person students are formed by whole person educators, and lecturers' formation should begin from the time they first serve at the University (Universitas Kristen Petra, 2023).

Whole-person or character-infused approaches to professional education are increasingly advocated where technical competence is otherwise privileged over the formation of the whole person, and competency-driven fields such as dentistry risk crowding out such formation unless it is deliberately built in (Lin et al., 2025; Masella, 2007). In Christian higher education specifically, the educator is expected to hold together roles that secular training treats separately: academic authority and spiritual guide. Drawing on the Reformed doctrine of Christ's threefold office, some argues that the Christian educator simultaneously exercises prophetic, priestly, and kingly responsibility — an integration of academic and spiritual leadership rather than a choice between them — while other finds that Christian faculty sustain this integrated identity more through ongoing spiritual formation than through formal instruction, a mechanism that presupposes an institutional history FKG's lecturers do not yet have (Condrey, 2024; French, 2023).

Read together, these literatures converge on the University's own principle that whole-person students are formed by whole-person educators, but neither addresses a faculty in which lecturers are themselves new to both the institution and its whole-person framework at the same time as their students. Evidence on how new faculty and new students jointly perceive whole-person education, rather than how an established faculty transmits it, remains limited — a gap this study addresses.

Guided by this gap, the study addresses three research questions: (1) How aware are FKG students and lecturers of whole-person education? (2) To what extent do students' perceptions and lecturers' self-reports of whole-person practice align? (3) Which specific practices most clearly support, or best illustrate, whole-person education in a faculty where both students and lecturers are new?

METHODOLOGY

Design and Setting

In this study, a cross-sectional, descriptive-exploratory survey approach was employed. The data were sourced from the 2026 Whole Person Education (WPE) survey conducted by the University, which was distributed online through Google Forms from 3 to 27 March 2026. The survey items were associated with the WPE framework under the name "wHOPE"; however, this article consistently refers to it as WPE. Two separate instruments were utilized: one for students, who evaluated the WPE practices of their lecturers, and another for lecturers, who assessed their own practices. This study exclusively examines the anonymous responses from FKG participants.

Participants

At the time of the survey, FKG had 19 students and 14 lecturers. Fifteen students responded (about 79%): 10 women and 5 men; all were in their second semester. Ten lecturers responded (about 71%): five women and five men. All had worked at the University for less than two years (seven for 1–2 years, three for under one year), and none yet held an academic rank (*jabatan akademik*). Seven lecturers had one to three advisees in the semester during which the survey was conducted; three had none. Because the respondents approached the whole of a small, bounded population, the data were treated as a near-census and analyzed primarily descriptively.

Instruments

Both instruments contained 16 parallel five-point Likert scale items (1 = lowest, 5 = highest) on the consistency of lecturers' WPE practices, grouped into five domains: intellectual (three items), spiritual/character (three items), social-emotional (three items), mental-physical well-being (four items), and vocational/career (three items). Both also included three questions items on academic advising (*dosen wali*), items on awareness and understanding of WPE, an overall rating, and open-ended questions on advising experiences and WPE implementation. Internal consistency across the 16 practice items was high among FKG students (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$, 95% CI 0.88–0.97) and FKG lecturers ($\alpha = 0.82$, 95% CI 0.59–0.95). Domain-level α values for students ranged from 0.69 (social-emotional) to 0.92 (intellectual). Lecturer domain-level α values were unstable because of the small sample and strong ceiling effects; therefore, they were not interpreted.

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Data Analysis

For each item and domain, means and standard deviations were calculated separately for students and lecturers, along with the lecturer–student difference (L–S). A negative difference suggests that lecturers rated their practices lower than the students did. To explore item-level differences, the Mann–Whitney U test with effect size r was used, and a Bonferroni correction was applied to the 18 comparisons of practice and advising. Due to the near-census design and small group sizes, p-values are provided as supplementary information rather than for drawing conclusions. Open-ended responses were thoroughly reviewed and thematically summarized. The authors translated quotations from Indonesian, and the participants' names were omitted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Awareness of WPE

All ten lecturers had heard of WPE, and their mean self-reported understanding was 3.80 (SD = 1.14). Among students, only eight of 15 had heard of WPE, and their mean self-rated understanding was 2.87 (SD = 1.60). Respondents who answered the belief items rated WPE as important (students M = 4.22, n = 9; lecturers M = 4.78, n = 9) and helpful for facing life and career challenges (students M = 4.33; lecturers M = 5.00). Students' overall rating of how well the University prepared them as whole persons was 4.13 (SD = 0.99). Therefore, awareness lagged behind endorsement: several students reported never having heard the term while rating their lecturers' whole person education practices highly.

Domain-Level Congruence

Table 1. Mean WPE domain scores, students vs. lecturers (5-point scale)

Domain	Students (n = 15) M (SD)	Lecturers (n = 10) M (SD)	Gap (L − S)
Intellectual	4.53 (0.69)	4.43 (0.45)	−0.10
Spiritual/character	4.76 (0.43)	4.80 (0.23)	+0.04
Social-emotional	4.51 (0.62)	4.50 (0.42)	−0.01
Mental-physical well-being	4.60 (0.51)	4.42 (0.51)	−0.17
Vocational/career	4.49 (0.63)	4.47 (0.36)	−0.02

Note. L − S = lecturer mean minus student mean.

Students and lecturers showed close congruence with each other. All domain gaps were 0.17 points or smaller, and spiritual/character formation, the core of the WPE model, received the highest ratings from both groups. Scores were high overall: 68% of all student item responses received the maximum score of 5. This ceiling effect limits the instrument's ability to discriminate between the practices.

Item-Level Divergence: Non-Academic Mentoring

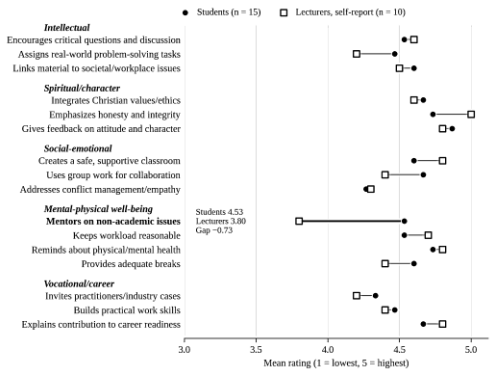


Figure 1. Students' ratings and lecturers' self-ratings of WPE practice, by item and domain
Note. Filled circles = students (n = 15); open squares = lecturers' self-report (n = 10). The x-axis begins at 3.0 to show differences between means. The only item with a notable gap is non-academic mentoring (Mann–Whitney U = 113, uncorrected p = .025, r = 0.42; not significant after Bonferroni correction across 18 comparisons, adjusted p = .45). All other item gaps were ≤ 0.27 points (uncorrected p ≥ .15).

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Only one item diverged markedly. On mentoring students on non-academic issues, lecturers rated themselves lower (M = 3.80, SD = 0.79) than students themselves rated their lecturers (M = 4.53, SD = 0.64), a gap of −0.73 points (U = 113, uncorrected p = .025, r = 0.42). Nine of the 15 students gave the maximum score of 5, compared with only two of the 10 lecturers; four lecturers gave 4 and four gave 3. The difference was no longer statistically significant (adjusted p = .45); it is therefore treated as an exploratory signal rather than an established effect. On the honesty and integrity item, the pattern was the reverse but small: all ten lecturers gave themselves the maximum score (M = 5.00), while students rated this practice slightly lower (M = 4.73).

The Academic Advisor Role

Students rated their advisors' attention to academic matters almost at the ceiling (M = 4.93; 14 of 15 rated 5), and their overall advising experience was also high (M = 4.73). Attention to non-academic matters was rated lower (M = 3.93) and showed the widest spread of any item: six students gave 5, but one gave 2, and one gave 1. Lecturers showed the same academic-over-non-academic pattern, with a smaller difference. When the three lecturers without current advisees were excluded, the lecturer means moved closer to the student means for academic attention (4.86) and remained at 4.29 for nonacademic attention.

Table 2. Attention to academic and non-academic matters in academic advising

Item	Students (n = 15)	Lecturers, all (n = 10)	Lecturers with advisees (n = 7)
Attention to academic matters	4.93	4.60	4.86
Attention to non-academic matters	3.93	4.20	4.29
Overall advising experience	4.73	4.10	4.43

Note. The student non-academic item referred to "lecturers" in general, whereas the academic item referred specifically to the academic advisor; therefore, these two student items are not strictly comparable.

Qualitative Findings

Students' accounts of advising were predominantly positive and academic in nature. Advisors reviewed mid- and end-of-semester results with them: "when a grade did not reach the passing standard, we were asked what made the material hard for us and were given solutions and ways to study well." Others recalled advice against overnight cramming and managing their study time. Some accounts went beyond academics. One student was inspired when an advisor shared a personal story of how they had come so far, another said the advisor "often reminds me of my purpose in studying," and one described the advisor as "a place to share things I cannot share with other friends."

Students also described the WPE practices they experienced without necessarily knowing the label. One wrote, "Honestly, I had never heard of [WPE] at all, but the learning experience at [the University] has been very, very good," and another reflected that lecturers "seem to already apply [WPE], without my realizing it." Spiritual integration was concrete for some: "we were given Bible verses related to dentistry, where we were taught to care for others, so that money is not the only measure for serving, but 'love' from within ourselves." Students who knew the term linked it to orientation and small-group activities (Welcome Grateful Generation or WGG and Life Enrichment Grace or LEG), and one suggested that WPE "be introduced more often and applied in lectures."

Lecturers' responses frequently referred to their limited familiarity with WPE and their needs for support in applying WPE. One wrote, "I still don't know in detail what [WPE] contains; I only know this program exists at [the University]." Requested support included "training from the beginning, because I had never known about it before," practical guidance on "how to package [WPE] in lectures," communication training, training of trainers, a faculty retreat, and access to a psychologist "so as not to respond wrongly to the expressions or emotions that students show." Reported challenges included integrating WPE into course content, being "too focused on delivering material," and approaching students from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Discussion

The findings suggest that whole person education in FKG is substantively present, particularly in its spiritual/character core, and that students and lecturers largely agree on this. The notable divergence is not

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an overclaim by lecturers but an underclaim: on non-academic mentoring, lecturers doubted themselves more than students' perceptions would justify, and their open-ended responses asked for orientation, practical tools, and psychological know-how. To understand why this pattern appears, it helps to recognize that this study captured three transitions occurring simultaneously. FKG was a new institution, its lecturers were novices in academic careers, and its students had just left secondary school. Each transition has a recognizable psychological character, and their coincidence makes FKG an unusual setting. The survey did not measure psychological constructs directly; therefore, the interpretations below are offered as lenses on the data rather than as tested explanations.

Two non-psychological explanations for the direction of the mentoring gap should be acknowledged first, because the data cannot separate them from the psychological account. Self-assessment is often expected to be self-enhancing. However, in this study lecturers rated themselves more modestly than their students did. One reason may be that the two groups used different references: students rated their lecturers collectively, so a few highly engaged lecturers may have raised the student mean, whereas each lecturer rated only him/herself individually. Another reason is that norms of modesty in self-report may lower lecturers' ratings of a role that involves students' personal lives. The lenses below explore a third, psychological, explanation, namely that lecturers new to both the institution and the WPE framework may lack confidence in a role for which they feel unprepared, while recognizing that the first two explanations may also contribute to this phenomenon.

A New Faculty: Socialization Without Precedent

Newcomers to an organization reduce uncertainty by learning roles, norms, and expectations, largely from established insiders (Cooper-Thomas, 2009; Gallagher & Sias, 2009; Kowtha, 2018). Successful newcomer's adjustment is associated with role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance (Bauer et al., 2007, 2020). In an established faculty, a new lecturer learns what a good academic advisor does by watching senior colleagues and absorbing an existing culture. In FKG, there were almost no such insiders. The lecturers were, in effect, socializing one another, and practices such as non-academic advising had no local precedent to copy from. Under these circumstances role ambiguity is likely: expectations exist in institutional documents, but the concrete behaviors that meet them are unclear (Schrubbe, 2004).

The data are consistent with this interpretation. Lecturers' attention to academic matters was high and uniform since academic advising has a clear script: reviewing grades, planning studies, and advising on study habits. Non-academic attention, which has no comparable script, was lower and varied much more between students, although the two student items were not worded in parallel (see the note in Table 2). Lecturers' own requests were requests for role clarity: "explanation and practical ways to apply it," "how to package [WPE] in lectures," and training "from the beginning." A new faculty is also an opportunity for improvement. The norms established by its first lecturers for their first cohort are likely to shape the faculty's tradition. Thus, deliberate investment in shared advising practices now may have an outsized long-term effect.

Novice Academics: Self-Efficacy, Doubt, and the Weight of a New Role

Lecturers in a Faculty of Dentistry are typically formed first as clinicians rather than as educators. Self-efficacy, a person's belief in their capability to carry out a specific task, is built primarily through mastery experiences, that is, successfully performing the task oneself (Bandura, 1977). Among teachers, efficacy beliefs are domain-specific and especially malleable early in a career (Bandura, 1977; Morris et al., 2017; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teachers' beliefs about their own efficacy are domain-specific and are especially malleable early in a career, when mastery experiences are few (Akhter et al., 2022; Garvis et al., 2012). This offers a coherent explanation for the shape of lecturers' self-ratings. On the honesty and integrity item, all ten lecturers gave themselves the maximum score. Professional ethics are central to dental professional training and identity, so lecturers could draw on existing mastery. Non-academic mentoring, by contrast, is a task for which dental education provides little preparation, and it received the lowest self-rating of all 16 items. Lecturers were confident in aspects where their professional formation had equipped them and uncertain where it had not. This matters within the WPE framework, which locates whole person formation not in the transfer of knowledge but in the sharing of life between educators and students (Universitas Kristen Petra, 2023). Non-academic mentoring is precisely where such sharing takes place.

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Two additional psychological factors may deepen this uncertainty. The first is the burden of new responsibilities. Advising a student about personal difficulties carries the risk of saying the wrong thing, and this risk was visible in one lecturer's request for access to a psychologist "so as not to respond wrongly to the expressions or emotions that students show" (Preece et al., 2005; Stevenson, 2010). This is the voice of a lecturer who takes their role seriously enough to worry about doing it poorly. The WPE guide itself names heavy administrative workloads, and accreditation and ranking pressures as conditions that leave lecturers with little capacity for other dimensions of teaching life (Universitas Kristen Petra, 2023). Such pressures are likely to weigh on lecturers who are simultaneously establishing a new program. The second is the tendency of capable early career professionals to doubt their competence despite evidence to the contrary, described as the impostor phenomenon (Bachi, 2025; Clance & Imes, 1978; Imran et al., 2023). The present data cannot show whether impostor feelings were present. However, the combination of modest self-ratings, students' favorable ratings of the same practice, and explicit statements of not yet knowing enough is consistent with this. This is practically significant because low self-efficacy is a predictor of diminished effort and persistence (Green, 2004; Ikukawa, 2024). Lecturers who doubt their ability to mentor may gradually withdraw from that non-academic role, even though students currently value that role as important to them.

Professional Identity and the Role of Shared Faith

Lecturers' self-doubt about non-academic mentoring can also be read through their professional and religious identity. Dentistry, like other clinical professions, forms practitioners primarily around technical competence and codes of conduct rather than pedagogical or pastoral skill (Masella, 2007), so lecturers may reasonably feel under-prepared to mentor students on non-academic matters in any formally trained sense. At the same time, because this is a Christian institution, lecturers and students share a common frame of reference as believers that does not depend on such training. A lecturer who reports not fully understanding what whole-person education entails in pedagogical terms may still experience caring for students' non-academic wellbeing as a natural extension of personal faith, practiced rather than formally taught. This is consistent with an observation that Christian faculty in applied professions sustain integrated practice more through ongoing spiritual formation than through formal instruction, and with Condrey's (2024) argument that a Christian educator's pastoral responsibility toward students does not wait on pedagogical expertise (Condrey, 2024; French, 2023). Read this way, lecturers' modest self-ratings may reflect genuine uncertainty about how to formally teach whole-person values, even as their everyday practice already draws on a personal, faith-based commitment to caring for students as whole persons.

First-Year Students: Transition, Adjustment, and the Need for an Anchor

All the responding students were in their first year, having transitioned directly from secondary schools into a demanding professional program. This transition to university involves separating themselves from familiar communities and integrating into new academic and social systems. This period is associated with an elevated risk of disengagement and coincides with the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood, when identity, independence, and direction are still being formed (Armstrong, 2015; Athanasiadou et al., 2024). Students in this position have a heightened need for a stable adult point of reference, and the academic advisor is well placed to fill that role (Powers et al., 2021; Sullivan-Vance, 2023).

Students' responses to open-ended questions were read as accounts of this transition. Advisors helped them replace secondary school habits, such as overnight cramming, with steadier study routines, and they reviewed disappointing examination results with them. Advisors also reminded students "of [his/her] purpose in studying," and one student described the advisor as "a place to share things I cannot share with other friends." For students in the midst of adjustment, even modest non-academic gestures may be experienced as substantial, which may partly explain why students rated lecturers' mentoring more highly than lecturers rated themselves. First-year students also lack a reference point: with no earlier experience of university teaching, they may compare their lecturers to their secondary school teachers; a comparison likely to favor university lecturers and contribute to the ceiling effect. However, the needs were not uniform. One student rated non-academic attention at 1 and another at 2, and one lecturer observed that students "are still passive and do not yet dare to talk about matters outside academic matters". Students who are reluctant to talk about their difficulties may be exactly those who are missed when advising has no clear routine for non-academic issues (Sams et al., 2003; Zilvinskis et al., 2020).

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These ratings should also be read as an early baseline. Dental education is widely reported to be highly stressful, particularly for students moving into preclinical and clinical training (De Souza Ferreira et al., 2022; Elani et al., 2014; Swetha et al., 2023). Therefore, the non-academic demands on advisors are likely to grow as this first cohort progresses.

Two Newcomer Groups Meeting

Taken together, FKG presents a meeting of two newcomer groups: lecturers who are uncertain of their capacity to mentor and students who are eager for and appreciative of guidance. This meeting currently works in students' favor as it helps them to prepare for the future. Lecturers' modesty coexists with genuine effort, and students' gratitude reflects that effort. The same configuration poses a risk. If lecturers' doubts are not addressed, lower self-efficacy may lead to less non-academic engagement at the very point in the preclinical and clinical years, when students' needs increase. A parallel gap exists in the vocabulary. Lecturers are still forming their own understanding of WPE, and half of the students did not know the term. Therefore, WPE in FKG currently functions largely as an implicit curriculum. Students benefit from it without language to reflect on it, and lecturers practice it without confidence that they are doing it right.

This reading aligns closely with the WPE guide's principle that lecturers must be formed before they can form students (Universitas Kristen Petra, 2023). The guide places the start of this formation at the time lecturers first serve at the University, which for FKG's lecturers is now. The same principle indicates what that formation should include. Beyond conceptual orientation, novice lecturers need mastery experiences in the non-academic role: supervised practice, case discussions of real advising situations, peer mentoring among lecturers, and clear referral pathways to professional counselling so that the burden of responsibility is shared (Arendse, 2025; Turner et al., 2015). Faculty development programs of this kind have been shown to strengthen teachers' skills and confidence (Steinert et al., 2016). Timing matters. The findings suggest that the most valuable window for such investment is now, while FKG's norms, lecturers' self-beliefs, and students' expectations are all still being formed.

Limitations

This study examines a specific faculty at an initial stage, where all students belonged to the first cohort, and all lecturers had less than two years of tenure. Consequently, the findings should not be extrapolated to other faculties or to subsequent stages of the FKG. The group sizes were limited, and the single significant item-level discrepancy did not remain significant after adjusting for multiple comparisons. The psychological interpretations presented in the Discussion section —organizational socialization, self-efficacy, impostor feelings, and first-year adjustment—were not directly measured. Future research should employ validated instruments, such as teacher self-efficacy, the impostor phenomenon, and student adjustment scales, to evaluate these constructs. Lastly, all data were based on self-reported perceptions, and two of the authors are lecturers in the studied faculty, which may have influenced the responses despite the survey's anonymous format.

CONCLUSION

In a newly established dental faculty, students and lecturers perceived WPE practice in similar terms, especially in its spiritual/character core. The main divergence was that lecturers rated their non-academic mentoring lower than students did. Combined with lecturers' requests for orientation and training, this points to a gap in confidence and preparation, rather than in commitment. Students experienced WPE practices even when they did not recognize the framework by its name. These patterns are best understood as the meeting of three transitions: a new faculty without established norms, novice academics still building confidence in an unfamiliar role, and first-year students adjusting to university life.

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