

Research Paper

## Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education: Achieving Academic Excellence and Bolstering All-Round Development in the 21st Century with NEP- 2020

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### ABSTRACT

Multidisciplinary education is a form of learning that integrates various subjects to provide a comprehensive educational experience. This approach to education is designed to promote an understanding of how different fields are interconnected and can be utilized together to solve complex issues efficiently. By utilizing multiple perspectives from different disciplines, students can deepen their understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, multidisciplinary education fosters essential skills such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and teamwork. The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) has placed a strong emphasis on the incorporation of multidisciplinary education into the curriculum from the early stages of education. Through exposure to various fields of study, students can develop not only a deep understanding of their chosen field but also an appreciation for other knowledge systems. This, in turn, enables them to become more well-rounded individuals and prepares them for the challenges of the contemporary world. The lack of a multidisciplinary approach to education has been a major hindrance to the development of higher education in India. With the introduction of NEP-2020, there is now an opportunity to address these crucial challenges through multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary educational approaches. With this in mind, the researcher aimed to illustrate the significance of incorporating multidisciplinary education in the context of NEP-2020 and emphasize how this approach can equip students with the necessary skills to navigate the complex challenges of the 21st century.

**Keywords:** NEP-2020, Multidisciplinary and Flexible Education, Academic Excellence, All-Round Development

Education in the past was confined to narrow and rigid perspectives, merely a definition rather than a means to develop critical thinking skills. However, the introduction of the National Education Policy (2020) has brought about a significant shift in this outlook. Emphasizing the importance of "how to think" rather than "what to think" has placed the responsibility of learning on the learners themselves, shifting it from the traditional role of parents and guardians. The three C's - curiosity, courage, and commitment - serve as the prerequisites to wholesome learning, with curiosity acting as the

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driving force for the other two. In the past, the lack of a multidisciplinary approach to teaching in higher education was a major challenge. Students were forced to choose a subject or stream based on limited options, often not aligning with their interests. This highlighted the need for a revamp of the Indian education system, which has been addressed by the National Education Policy 2020. With its focus on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary educational approaches, NEP-2020 aims to bridge the existing knowledge gaps and promote holistic and integrated learning. This policy recognizes the paramount importance of education and its potential to shape the world and seeks to make it more accessible, diverse, and fruitful. In today's post-modern world, multidisciplinary education is crucial, and NEP-2020 advocates for a harmonious and integrated approach to education to meet the demands of the 21st century.

### ***Objectives***

1. To scrutinize the NEP 2020's recommendations for multidisciplinary education.
2. To understand why NEP-2020 prescribed multidisciplinary and holistic education.
3. To understand the challenges associated with the implementation of a multidisciplinary approach at the national level.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The content analysis method, which is mostly qualitative, has been adopted. The data for the research work was collected using primary sources like Policy Document, NEP-2020, and Secondary sources like Newspapers, Websites, Research articles, and Books.

### ***Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education***

Education has long been considered a crucial factor in achieving success in life. However, as we continue to evolve and expand our understanding of learning, it is imperative that our methods of education evolve as well. One such approach that has gained traction in recent years is the multidisciplinary and holistic model. This model not only breaks down traditional disciplinary boundaries but also promotes a flexible learning environment for students. It allows them to explore a variety of subjects and fields, from sciences and mathematics to humanities, languages, and social sciences, all while developing integrated competencies, including intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral. Gone are the days when students may question whether they can pursue mathematics and psychology simultaneously. With a multidisciplinary and holistic curriculum, this decision is solely based on their interests and potential career goals. This approach not only encourages a well-rounded understanding of the world but also fosters critical and creative thinking through the examination of a topic from multiple perspectives. As education continues to evolve, the implementation of a multidisciplinary and holistic approach is crucial for providing a well-rounded and adaptable education to our students.

The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) has introduced the concept of inter-disciplinary education as a comprehensive approach to all disciplines, to promote knowledge harmony and integrity. Education holds significant importance in the lives of individuals as it has the potential to bring about positive change in the world. The NEP-2020 is a comprehensive policy aimed at enhancing education by increasing accessibility, promoting a holistic approach, encouraging multidisciplinary engagement, and ensuring fruitful outcomes. In the post-modern era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the value of multidisciplinary education is undeniable. The NEP-2020 has placed a strong emphasis on integrated and transdisciplinary education. It emphasizes the need for a paradigm change from stand-alone or single-disciplinary

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institutions to multidisciplinary institutions. NEP-2020 recommends, “Large multidisciplinary universities and colleges will facilitate the move towards high-quality holistic and multidisciplinary education. Flexibility in curriculum and novel and engaging course options will be on offer to students, in addition to rigorous specialization in a subject or subjects. This will be encouraged by increased faculty and institutional autonomy in setting curricula. Pedagogy will have an increased emphasis on communication, discussion, debate, research, and opportunities for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking,” (NEP—2020). According to the National Education Policy (NEP-2020), a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to education should be adopted for the development of all human capacities, including intellectual, artistic, social, physical, emotional, and moral abilities. This approach should be implemented in all undergraduate programs, including those in professional, technical, and vocational fields. We can expect to see a shift towards a more holistic, multidisciplinary education that incorporates arts and humanities in institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) which are traditionally known for their focus on engineering. Students of arts and humanities will also be encouraged to gain knowledge in scientific fields, while all students will be encouraged to integrate vocational subjects and soft skills into their studies. To facilitate multiple entry and exit points and facilitate unique combinations of fields for study, innovative and adaptable curricular designs will be developed. As per the NEP, all Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) must establish and strengthen departments in a broad range of subjects, including Languages, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Indology, Art, Dance, Theatre, Education, Mathematics, Statistics, Pure and Applied Sciences, Sociology, Economics, Sports, Translation, and Interpretation, among others. Furthermore, HEIs are required to include credit-based courses and projects in areas such as environmental education, value-based education, and community engagement in their curricula. The undergraduate degree program will typically span three to four years, with multiple pathways for graduation. These pathways will be accompanied by appropriate certification, such as a certificate after one year of study in a field that integrates professional and vocational areas, a diploma after two years of study, or a bachelor's degree after three years of study. However, priority will be given to a four-year multidisciplinary bachelor's program. To enable the issuance of degrees from HEIs based on credits earned, the concept of an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) will be introduced. This system will digitally record academic credits obtained from various accredited HEIs. Additionally, students who successfully complete a rigorous research project in their major area(s) of study, as specified by their HEI, may qualify for a "with Research" degree as part of a four-year curriculum. Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) will also be established as model public universities, offering comprehensive and multidisciplinary education on par with prestigious institutions such as the IITs and IIMs. These universities will adhere to the highest global standards of educational excellence. To further encourage research and innovation, incubation centers will be established, industry-academic partnerships will be strengthened, and interdisciplinary research, including in the humanities and social sciences, will be promoted. It is essential that we continuously learn and adapt to keep pace with the ever-changing world and effectively prepare for any challenges that may arise. Therefore, it is the responsibility of HEIs to lead the way in advancing these efforts.

### ***Why Multidisciplinary Education?***

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) recognizes the importance of a liberal education, characterized by its holistic and multidisciplinary approach, in shaping and preparing students for a rapidly changing world. This entails an understanding and appreciation of the interconnectedness of different fields of knowledge and inquiry. However, the traditional

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approach to undergraduate education in India has been largely focused on single-disciplinary learning over the past seven decades since independence. This begs the question as to why NEP- 2020 deviates from this long-standing practice. The answer lies in the need to cultivate well-rounded and adaptable individuals who can thrive in an increasingly interconnected and global society. By encouraging a more liberal and multidisciplinary approach to education, NEP-2020 aims to equip students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and perspective to excel in a constantly evolving job market and contribute meaningfully to society. It is imperative that all education systems ensure the comprehensive mental growth of learners through the provision of a diverse and interdisciplinary approach. A liberal education (multidisciplinary and holistic) allows individuals to cultivate both their creative and analytical faculties, leading to a more fulfilling and enjoyable learning experience. Unfortunately, throughout history, this type of education has been largely inaccessible to the majority of students due to its high cost. The report from the Kothari Commission (1964) acknowledged the presence of this inequity and declared that "some level of study in the field of science should be incorporated into all courses within the humanities and social sciences at the university level, while simultaneously enriching the teaching of science by including elements from the humanities and social sciences". The viewpoint has been endorsed and expanded upon by the NEP-2020.

The Yash Pal Committee Report (2009) also has drawn attention to the critical need for multidisciplinary education in today's society. The report notes "there is a need to expose students, especially at the undergraduate level, to various disciplines" (Yash Pal, 2009, p. 21). By emphasizing the importance of multidisciplinary education, the report has called for a paradigm shift in traditional educational practices.

As the world continues to face unprecedented challenges, it is crucial for graduates to possess a diverse set of skills to succeed in their future careers. This is where a liberal education comes into play, providing students with a combination of transferable and uniquely human skills. With the rise of pandemics, climate change, and disruptive technologies such as AI, the ability to adapt and thrive in ever-changing work environments has become essential. Failure to adapt could result in the obsolescence of people. A liberal education not only equips students with practical skills, but also fosters critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability, all of which are necessary for navigating the challenges of the modern world. By incorporating the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, a liberal education creates well-rounded individuals who can think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, and adapt to new situations. Graduates with a liberal education have the skills and mindset to not only succeed professionally but also contribute to the betterment of society. Intending to address these demands of the modern world, NEP-2020 emphasizes the need for experiential learning and encourages multidisciplinary education. This shift from a theoretical approach to a more practical one not only enhances employability but also cultivates a deeper understanding of societal issues and the ability to come up with effective solutions. Furthermore, NEP-2020's emphasis on digital literacy reflects the increasing importance of technology in every aspect of our lives and ensures that students are prepared for the digital age.

***Can a multidisciplinary approach to education better prepare students for the complex challenges of the 21st century?***

Yes, a multidisciplinary approach to education can better prepare students for the complex challenges of the 21st century. The challenges of the modern world are often multifaceted

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and require a holistic understanding of various disciplines to effectively address them. A multidisciplinary approach to education provides students with a diverse range of knowledge and skills, allowing them to tackle complex problems from multiple angles. In a multidisciplinary approach, students are exposed to different subject areas and perspectives, allowing them to see the interconnectedness of different fields of study. For example, students studying environmental science may also learn about the economic, political, and social factors that contribute to environmental issues. This interdisciplinary approach helps students develop a deeper understanding of complex issues and provides them with a wider range of tools to address them. Moreover, the modern workplace often requires employees to work in teams with individuals from different backgrounds and skill sets. A multidisciplinary education can better prepare students for this type of collaboration, as they have experience working with individuals from different disciplines and are comfortable with integrating diverse perspectives into their problem-solving approach. Overall, a multidisciplinary approach to education can better prepare students for the complex challenges of the 21st century by providing them with a diverse range of knowledge and skills, promoting a holistic understanding of complex issues, and preparing them for the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the modern workplace. Overall, multidisciplinary education in India is crucial for preparing individuals to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, equipping them with the skills and mindset required to adapt, innovate, and address the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century.

### ***Challenges Associated with Implementing a Multidisciplinary Approach in Education***

As India seeks to embark upon a new phase of education through the implementation of the NEP-2020, one of its central tenets is the implementation of a multidisciplinary approach. Multidisciplinary education has been gaining momentum in the educational landscape, with its potential to foster critical thinking, innovation, and adaptability in students. However, the successful implementation of this approach continues to face several roadblocks. One major hindrance is the limited availability of resources in many educational institutions. Trained faculty and modern equipment are often lacking, hindering the development and delivery of multidisciplinary courses. The idea that this type of education can be accomplished with existing curriculum and resources is a mere myth. Furthermore, the lack of necessary infrastructure, including collaborative learning spaces and technology, also poses a challenge. Another significant factor is the allocation of time and effort required for multidisciplinary education. Unlike traditional education, which focuses on a single subject matter, this approach aims to nurture the whole person. As a result, designing a curriculum that caters to the individual needs of students can be time-consuming and demanding. Furthermore, the resistance and opposition from conventional educational institutions and systems, which have long been rooted in subject-specific and compartmentalized learning, represent a notable challenge. The logistical challenges of scheduling classes and ensuring that students have access to all essential courses in a multidisciplinary program must also be addressed. Finally, a lack of awareness or understanding among students, parents, and other stakeholders regarding the benefits and significance of multidisciplinary education complicates its implementation further.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The NEP-2020 is an incredibly innovative and groundbreaking document. Successfully implementing the vision of NEP-2020 around holistic and multidisciplinary education will be challenging but important. The NEP-2020 aims to make India a developed nation by advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4's objectives. It seeks to widen the

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purview of education in India and address weaknesses in the current educational system. It will require aligning curriculums, providing flexibility, and encouraging collaboration between disciplines. Significant efforts are also needed for teacher training, digital infrastructure, and overcoming resistance to change. A multidisciplinary education can help students develop skills like collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and lifelong learning which are crucial for the 21st century. However, implementing it well requires focusing on skill-based learning outcomes, not just coverage of topics. While the benefits are clear, holistic education also requires more resources like qualified teachers, time, funding, and infrastructure. This raises challenges around scaling such initiatives across the country given existing resource constraints within the education system. Careful planning will be needed. The NEP 2020's vision of a holistic and multidisciplinary education system holds the potential to better prepare students for a complex, interconnected world. However, its effective implementation across India requires addressing challenges around curriculum reform, flexibility, digital access, teacher development, and resource constraints. With the right planning and efforts, this approach can help develop well-rounded, creative graduates equipped to face the future.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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