

Multidisciplinary Learning in NEP 2020 and Gandhian Educational Thought

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a paradigm shift in the Indian education system by promoting holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary learning. In parallel, Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy, popularly known as NaiTalim or Basic Education, emphasizes experiential learning, integration of work with knowledge, and the holistic development of body, mind, and spirit. This research paper critically examines the convergence between NEP 2020 and Gandhian educational thought with special reference to multidisciplinary learning. The study highlights that both frameworks reject rigid subject boundaries and advocate for integrated learning experiences that connect knowledge with life and work. The paper concludes that Gandhian philosophy provides a strong ideological foundation for understanding and effectively implementing multidisciplinary education envisioned in NEP 2020.

Key words: *NEP 2020, Multidisciplinary Learning, Gandhian Educational Thought*

INTRODUCTION

Education in India has undergone significant transformation from traditional rote-based learning to a more flexible and learner-centric approach. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark reform that aims to restructure the Indian education system by promoting holistic, experiential, and multidisciplinary education. Long before NEP 2020, Mahatma Gandhi proposed an educational model known as NaiTalim (Basic Education), which emphasized learning through productive work, integration of knowledge with life, and development of head, heart, and hands. Gandhi believed that education should not be compartmentalized into rigid disciplines but should develop the overall personality of learners. In this context, the present study explores how multidisciplinary learning in NEP 2020 aligns with Gandhian educational philosophy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Verma (2024) examines the transformative vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 with special emphasis on value-based and holistic education. The study highlights that NEP 2020 aims to shift Indian education from rote memorization to a more integrated and experiential learning system, where multidisciplinary education plays a central role. According to the author, NEP 2020 emphasizes the development of ethical reasoning, creativity, and critical thinking, which are essential for holistic personality development. The study further argues that NEP 2020 indirectly reflects Gandhian ideals by promoting education that connects knowledge with life and social responsibility. However, it also points out that implementation remains a challenge due to infrastructural limitations and teacher preparedness.

Kulal et al. (2024) critically analyze the National Education Policy 2020 and highlight its strengths and limitations. The authors argue that NEP 2020 introduces significant reforms such as multidisciplinary higher education institutions, flexible curriculum structures, and integration of vocational education. These reforms are aimed at producing globally competent and skill-oriented learners. The study also emphasizes that NEP 2020 promotes **holistic learning ecosystems**, where students can study across disciplines without rigid subject boundaries. However, the authors caution that the success of multidisciplinary learning depends on institutional readiness and effective policy execution.

Srivastava et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive review of value education research in India. Their findings indicate that moral and ethical education has always been a central concern in Indian educational discourse, but its systematic implementation remains weak. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating values into curriculum design and pedagogy, rather than treating them as isolated subjects. The authors suggest that experiential learning methods such as group activities, community engagement, and reflective learning are effective in developing values among students. This aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary education.

Singh (2025) explores the relationship between Gandhian educational philosophy and NEP 2020. The study argues that Gandhi's NaiTalim strongly aligns with NEP 2020's vision of multidisciplinary and experiential learning. According to the author, both frameworks reject rigid disciplinary boundaries and emphasize the integration of work, knowledge, and values. The study highlights that Gandhian education focuses on holistic development of head, heart, and hands, which is similar to NEP 2020's goal of producing well-rounded individuals. However, Singh notes that NEP 2020 is more economically oriented, while Gandhi emphasized moral transformation.

Lahon and Sahoo (2025) analyze NEP 2020 from the perspective of value education and human development. The study emphasizes that NEP 2020 integrates constitutional values, ethics, and life skills into the curriculum framework. The authors argue that multidisciplinary learning is essential for developing socially responsible and emotionally balanced individuals. The study further highlights that experiential learning and vocational education are key components of NEP 2020, which reflect a shift towards life-oriented education systems. However, it also notes the need for trained teachers and institutional reforms for effective implementation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the concept of multidisciplinary learning in NEP 2020.
2. To examine Gandhian educational thought with special reference to NaiTalim.
3. To analyze the relationship between NEP 2020 and Gandhian philosophy.
4. To explore the relevance of Gandhian ideas in implementing multidisciplinary education.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY LEARNING IN NEP 2020

NEP 2020 introduces a major reform in higher education by promoting multidisciplinary and holistic learning. Students are allowed to choose subjects across streams such as Arts, Science, Commerce, and Vocational education.

Key features include:

- Flexible curriculum structure
- Multiple entry and exit options
- Integration of vocational and academic subjects
- Emphasis on critical thinking and experiential learning
- Removal of rigid disciplinary boundaries

NEP 2020 aims to develop learners who are not confined to a single discipline but are capable of **interconnected and holistic understanding of knowledge systems**.

GANDHIAN EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy is based on **NaiTalim**, which focuses on:

- Learning by doing
- Integration of manual work and intellectual development
- Holistic development of personality
- Education for self-reliance and social responsibility

Gandhi rejected the separation of intellectual and vocational education. According to him, education must develop:

- Head (intellectual ability)
- Heart (moral values)
- Hands (practical skills)

This approach naturally supports a **multidisciplinary and integrated learning system**, where knowledge is not divided but interconnected with life activities.

CONVERGENCE BETWEEN NEP 2020 AND GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY

There are strong similarities between NEP 2020 and Gandhian educational thought:

Holistic Development: Both emphasize the overall development of learners rather than only academic success.

Integration of Subjects: NEP 2020 promotes multidisciplinary learning, while Gandhi advocated integration of knowledge with practical work.

Experiential Learning: NEP 2020 includes experiential and activity-based learning, similar to Gandhian "learning by doing."

Skill and Vocational Education: Both stress the importance of vocational education and dignity of labour.

Life-Centered Education: Education in both frameworks is linked to real-life experiences and social responsibility.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Although NEP 2020 reflects Gandhian ideals, there are certain differences:

- Gandhi emphasized **moral and ethical transformation**, while NEP 2020 focuses more on employability and skill development.
- NaiTalim was community-centered and self-sustaining, whereas NEP 2020 operates within a modern institutional and global framework.
- Implementation of Gandhian ideals requires strong value orientation, which may not be fully realized in policy execution.

Despite these differences, Gandhian philosophy provides a **foundational ethical and philosophical base** for NEP 2020.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- Curriculum design should integrate subjects across disciplines.
- Teachers must act as facilitators rather than mere instructors.
- Vocational and academic education should be given equal importance.
- Moral and value education must be strengthened.
- Schools and universities should encourage experiential learning methods.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that NEP 2020's vision of multidisciplinary learning is deeply rooted in Gandhian educational philosophy. Mahatma Gandhi's NaiTalim provides a strong ideological framework for understanding holistic and integrated education. While NEP 2020 modernizes and expands this vision in the context of globalization and technology, its core philosophy remains closely aligned with Gandhian thought. Therefore, effective implementation of NEP 2020 can be strengthened by revisiting and adopting Gandhian principles of education.

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