



## “Experiential Learning for Holistic School Education As Envisaged in NEP 2020”

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

The fourth goal of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations is to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. The global education development agenda reflected in SDG 4 was adopted by India in 2015. India is committed to creating equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, for the physical, mental and social well-being of her people. The Indian education system needs to be revamped in order to fulfill the goals and targets of the 2030 ‘Agenda for Sustainable Development’.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was formulated in the context of the challenges presented by the volatile world we live in. As the first policy for education in India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, NEP 2020 proposes aligning the education system to bring it in harmony with the goals of modern education, including SDG 4.

The knowledge and communication explosion in the last few decades combined with breathtaking advances in technology such as growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning and big data, have utterly transformed what students need to learn and the way they are expected to learn.

Rather than content mastery based on rote learning, students now need to know ‘how to learn’ and extrapolate those learning skills to meet the demands of higher education and the job market. NEP 2020 emphasises that holistic education is needed wherein children learn reading, writing, numeracy, develop critical thinking and problem solving, and simultaneously develop their social, emotional and spiritual intelligence and dispositions. The researchers propose to analyse the NEP 2020 policy document to shed light on whether Experiential Learning would help in integrated learning to ensure the holistic education of learners as envisaged in NEP 2020.

**Keywords:** Integrated learning; Experiential learning; Holistic education.

### Introduction

The fourth goal of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations is to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. All the world leaders agree that education is a vital enabler for sustainable development<sup>1</sup>.

The global education development agenda reflected in SDG 4 was adopted by India in 2015.

India has to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all by the year 2030.

The population of India<sup>2</sup> in 2023 was projected at 139.2 crores.

<sup>1</sup> The crucial role of education in achieving sustainable development was noted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, through Chapter 36 of its outcome document - Agenda 21; in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, in 2012 and in the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in 2014 in Japan.

The overall literacy rate in India has improved and risen to 74.04% according to the 2011 National Census statistics. That still leaves a large section of the population illiterate, making India home to the largest illiterate population in the world.

### **Education and Development**

Education is vital for the development of the country based on the principles of equity and social justice. Access to quality education helps in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed for economic empowerment and upliftment. This is true for everyone, particularly so for women, marginalised people, people with disabilities, people who are vulnerable for any reason whatsoever, whether social, political, regional or economic.

India is committed to creating equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, for the physical, mental and social well-being of her people. The Indian education system needs to be revamped to fulfill the goals and targets of the 2030 'Agenda for Sustainable Development'.

### **Holistic Education**

Swami Vivekananda passionately declared, "Within man is all knowledge - it requires only an awakening." "Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas." Swami Vivekananda's words affirm that true education refers to holistic education wherein development of mental prowess and physical development go hand in hand.

'True education would develop iron nerves with an intelligent brain – and the whole world would be at the feet of such learners,' according to Swami Vivekananda.<sup>3</sup>

### **Holistic Education in Ancient India**

Since ancient times, the saints, philosophers, Gurus and Acharyas of India have always propounded that the ultimate aim of education is man making, of bringing out the divine present within each human being.

References in ancient Indian literature such as Vedic literature and Tamil literature show that education in India has always been holistic. During the pre-independence period, Indian social reformers and thinkers stressed the need for education that catered to the holistic development of the learner.

### **Holistic Education in Modern India**

Modern India needs holistic education that builds character, develops a strong moral compass that points unerringly to true north, inculcates ethics, compassion and rationality while building up skills and knowledge for economic empowerment through gainful employment.

Holistic education in its broadest sense, aspires to create human beings who understand themselves and the world they inhabit, who seek knowledge, but are careful to check the authenticity of knowledge.

Holistic education teaches learners to care not just for their own well-being, but also the well-being of others, to be critical yet compassionate. It teaches learners to develop the ability to tolerate differences and acknowledge that opposite points of views may co-exist, to care for the environment and the legacy that we pass on to future generations, to shun prejudice, hatred and bigotry.

Holistic education helps learners realise that the world is composed of different cultures, with people who have completely different ways of living, yet that people can live together harmoniously.

### **National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP 2020)**

There have been many Policies on Education in India in the Post-Independence period that have impacted our education system and the way schools, colleges and other institutions of education function. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was formulated in the context of the challenges presented by the VUCA<sup>4</sup> world we live in, wherein technological and knowledge upheavals and disruptive innovations have forever changed the way human beings live, the way they learn and earn their livelihoods.

As the first policy for education in India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, NEP 2020 aims to address the imperatives of an India that is poised to be the most populous nation and one of the three largest economies in the world. The

<sup>2</sup> As per the Report on Population Projections published by National Commission on Population, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and submitted in the Lok Sabha by the Home Minister, India's population is projected at 139.2 crores as of July 1, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Talks With Swami Vivekananda." Page 24; 21st Reprint, 1939

<sup>4</sup> VUCA – Volatile, Uncertain, Changing, Ambiguous

Policy proposes aligning the education system to bring it in harmony with the goals of modern education, including SDG 4.

NEP 2020 draws on the profound philosophies and aims of education given by noble Indian philosophers, saints and reformers.

NEP 2020 emphasises that education must teach children reading, writing, and numeracy, develop critical thinking and problem solving abilities, and also simultaneously develop their social, emotional and spiritual intelligence and dispositions.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The researchers analysed the NEP 2020 policy document to gain clear insights into the strategies needed to ensure holistic education of children.

The analysis brought out the following questions:

- "How would the shift from rote learning to skill development and application-orientation, as envisaged in NEP 2020 be implemented?"
- "How would schools facilitate a move away from rigid subject boundaries towards integrated learning, as intended by NEP 2020?"

### **Research Position**

The researchers hypothesised that Experiential Learning would help in integrated learning through skill development and application orientation to ensure holistic education of learners as envisaged in NEP 2020.

### **Delimitation of the research**

The NEP 2020 proposes holistic education at all levels, right from children in the tender age group of 3 to 5 years of age to young men and women aged 18 years and above, pursuing college degrees and higher education.

This research is delimited to the study of experiential learning as a means of ensuring holistic school education as envisaged in NEP 2020.

### **Research Design**

The researchers would thoroughly analyse the National Education Policy, 2020 document to find out if the position that 'Experiential learning would help in integrated learning through skill development and application orientation to ensure holistic education of learners as envisaged in NEP 2020' would hold.

### **Analysis of NEP 2020 Education and Holistic Development**

Education must equip the learners with a knowledge base that can be drawn upon throughout their lives. It should also inculcate life skills that help them navigate their careers and lives in this ever-changing, interdependent, even chaotic world that we inhabit. This is where holistic education comes into the picture as it addresses the different aspects of human personality. Holistic education attaches equal importance to all the dimensions of the growth and development of children, including the physical, intellectual, aesthetic, creative, emotional and spiritual aspects for their integrated development.

The International Commission<sup>5</sup> on 'Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' had opined that, "Education must contribute to the all-round development of each individual - mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values."

### **Supporting Holistic Learning**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 whole-heartedly supports holistic learning from the earliest level of schooling to the higher levels of education.

The NEP 2020 explains this by explicitly stating that there is the need to develop "life skills like teamwork, cooperation, social skills, courteous behaviour, learning proper communication, being responsible citizens who have respect for diversity and care about sustainability of the planet's resources."

The National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP 2020) further articulates emphatically, that for India to flourish in the present times, "Our teaching-learning system from pre-primary school to higher education level must

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<sup>5</sup> International Commission on the Development of Education (UNESCO Report 1996:94)

focus on imparting education in an integrated learning format that creates individuals who have intrinsic reverence for life, who are physically, mentally and morally sound, possessing exemplary knowledge and skills in the chosen disciplines, but serving as the treasure of humanitarian values such as compassion and peace, realising the purpose of life and purposeful connections between the local community and natural world and imbibing high ideals and values of our age-old great Indian culture and tradition.”

### **Holistic Education**

The National Education Policy, 2020 in India represents a significant paradigm shift in the country's approach to school education. NEP 2020 envisages a holistic and multidisciplinary approach focusing on the overall development of students. Recognising the importance of school education, NEP 2020 aims at establishing a strong foundation for children in the formative years. It encourages conceptual understanding and promotion of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The policy emphasizes the integration of technology including virtual reality and augmented reality in education to enhance the learning experience, the use of digital tools in the teaching-learning and assessment process.

### **Integrated Learning**

Instead of different subjects being confined to water-tight compartments and assessment that rewards rote memorization, NEP 2020 advocates a multidisciplinary approach with flexible curriculum that creates personalized learning paths for students who have the choice of learning subjects suited to their own interests and aptitudes.

Assessment methods would be more comprehensive and continuous with formative assessments and project-based evaluations being used to gauge overall development of the students. NCERT has been entrusted with the task of identifying required skill sets and including mechanisms for their transaction in the National Curriculum Framework for early childhood and school education.

### **Teachers as Facilitators and Mentors**

NEP 2020 aims at evolving classrooms in which the teachers are facilitators and mentors and they encourage students to learn with real understanding of concepts through exploration, experimenting and applying knowledge practically. Collaborative learning and hands-on activities would help to create inclusive and stimulating learning environment in the classroom. The NEP recognizes the need for continuous professional development for teachers to equip them with the skills needed to implement experiential learning methodologies.

### **Curricular Framework**

NEP 2020 has created a curricular framework for school education in a **“5 + 3 + 3 + 4” design:**

- Pre-school consisting of three years of Pre-school and Primary Schooling consisting of Grades 1 and 2 for children from 3 to 8 years of age.
- Preparatory Schooling comprising Grades 3, 4 and 5 for children in the age group of 8 to 11 years.
- Middle Schools covering Grades 6, 7 and 8 for children in the age group of 11 to 14 years.
- Secondary Schools for Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 with Grades 9 and 10 in the First Phase and Grades 11 and 12 in the Second Phase, covering students in the age group of 14 to 18 years.

### **Content Delivery**

Today everyone has ready access to comprehensive, up to date information on almost all subjects, enabled by smart phones and widespread internet connectivity. So the curriculum content can be reduced in each subject to its core essentials. Subject content would focus on key concepts, ideas, applications, and problem-solving. This would enable critical thinking, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based and analysis-based learning.

### **Skill Development**

The NEP 2020 envisages a transformative shift in the Indian education system, moving away from rigid subject boundaries towards integrated learning and interconnected educational experiences. There is an emphasis on skill development and application-orientation education. Modern Indian classrooms would work towards integration of digital tools in teaching and learning.

## Rooted in Indian Culture

Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet, philosopher, and Nobel Laureate, emphasized the holistic development of individuals through a harmonious blend of intellectual, artistic, and spiritual pursuits. NEP 2020 strongly sets forth the idea of infusing Indian culture and ethos for holistic education at every level.

Learning is a lifelong process for everyone whether we are students, teachers, parents, leaders, educators or citizens of the modern global village.

## Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a pedagogy that prioritizes practical hands-on experience through active interaction with the environment for acquisition of knowledge, skills, comprehension of concepts and ideas, by encouraging introspection and critical thinking. Hoover and Whitehead (1975) defined experiential learning thus: “Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally processes knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement.”

Experiential learning teaches learners to think critically, improves their decision-making and problem-solving abilities and develops useful skills and meta-learning capabilities. In experiential learning students **learn by doing, reflecting, thinking, and applying.**

Students engage in concrete experience **(Do)**, duplicate it and include additional data **(Reflect)**, develop hypotheses which are consistent with experiences and knowledge **(Think)** and state presumptions or clarification of the issue. **(Apply)**

By kindling curiosity and enthusiasm, experiential learning associates learning with enjoyable and positive experiences and motivates students to explore and discover on their own. Different learners have different learning styles.

Experiential learning provides opportunities for differentiated learning thus promoting personalized education.

## Experiential Learning and Holistic Education

Experiential learning necessitates planning before the teaching learning process takes place. It requires patience and strong commitment on the part of teachers and administrators. There are inherent difficulties in creating classrooms that enable experiential learning with barriers of language, culture, socio-economic backgrounds of learners and teachers creating obstacles that could impede experiential learning. Being participative, interactive and applied, experiential learning enables learning in the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains. The learning objectives have to be specified and feedback and reflection mechanisms put in place for experiential learning to be successful.

Traditional classroom learning often relies on lectures, textbooks, and passive absorption of information. But the experiential learning approach emphasizes ‘learning by doing’ through direct experience, hands-on practical activities that connect theory and practice and reflection on those experiences. Only then would it be possible to engage the learners and sustain their attention and involvement to make the learning experiences meaningful and ensure retention of what has been learned.

## NEP 2020 and Experiential Learning

The knowledge and communication explosion seen in the last few decades combined with breathtaking advances in technology such as growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning and big data, have utterly transformed what students need to learn and the way they are expected to learn. Rather than a narrow focus on content mastery based on rote learning, students now need to know ‘how to learn’ and extrapolate those learning skills to effectively meet the demands of the job market to earn their livelihoods.

NEP 2020 aims at adopting experiential learning at all stages of education. Teaching and learning will be more interactive so that the classroom environment is congenial for creative, collaborative, and exploratory activities that lead to deeper learning. Art integration and Sports integration have been visualised to form the basis for learning of concepts across subjects.

## Holistic Education through Experiential Learning in NEP 2020

Holistic education as envisaged in NEP 2020 aims to address the cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and creative dimensions of a child's development. **Experiential learning aligns well with this approach as it encompasses a range of activities and strategies that go beyond traditional classroom learning, fostering a comprehensive and interconnected educational experience.**



### **Interpretation of Research Analysis**

- Experiential learning develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills as students analyse situations, make decisions, and solve problems, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
- Experiential learning needs a lot of planning and coordination between teachers of different subjects and administrators to ensure effective learning and utilisation of resources – human and material.
- Experiential learning requires teachers to relinquish their traditional role as a 'Sage on the stage' and become facilitators and mentors who nudge the learners to make sense of experiences through active participation, reflection and application of knowledge in different scenarios.
- Experiential learning for students implies that teachers have been trained for the purpose. Workshops, refresher courses which provide experiential learning experiences for the teachers themselves will help them truly understand its benefits and integrate it into the daily teaching learning process.
- Experiential learning needs teachers, administrators and even parents to let go of the urge to complete the syllabus at any cost, sometimes at the expense of meaningful learning.
- Although completion of the prescribed syllabus for each class or grade is important, it cannot over-ride the necessity for the learner to gain real learning.
- Many a times, the urge to 'complete the portion before the examination' subdues the experiential learning process.

### **Scope for Further Research**

Further research could look into experiential learning at different levels of school education such as primary, middle, secondary and higher secondary school levels. Other areas may include experiential learning in professional courses of education like law, engineering, management education and teacher education.

### **Concluding Remarks**

A change in mindset and attitude adjustment is essential to weed out the extreme importance attached to marks and grades obtained in assessment processes and term end examinations on the part of all stakeholders in education. One mindfully implemented reform measure at a time can pave the way for such a mindset shift.

Willingness to accept partial success or even failure has to be encouraged and assiduously cultivated for successful implementation of experiential learning in Indian middle schools.

The aversion to anything that does not fit the accepted standards of success has to be overcome through well-thought out strategies and teaching-learning experiences for all.

There is a relentless 'Let us finish everything such that students get the highest marks in the examinations' approach widely prevalent in Indian education. Such thinking puts paid to all efforts to implement experiential learning in the Indian classrooms and has to be uprooted mindfully.

All these would go a long way in ensuring holistic education of children as envisaged in NEP 2020.

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