

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Demystifying Approaches of Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education for Diverse Career Opportunities: NEP 2020

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Abstract

Objectives: To explore the roles of a Holistic Approach and Multidisciplinary education for diverse career opportunities with reference to its introduction in NEP 2020 for the placement of students and orient them in accordance with the requirements of the stakeholders. **Methods:** Amity University Uttar Pradesh conducted 52 Focus Group Discussions having 6 to 7 Principals in a group pan India. The selected principals of schools that had secured state/district rank based on Board results were invited to participate in an online focus group discussion. Their future action plans were deliberated through group discussions and the collected data was analyzed qualitatively. **Findings:** Deliberations and questions arose at the group discussions regarding the various Action Plans of educational heads for the introduction of Holistic and Multidisciplinary education in their institutions brought to light that many of the implementations suggested were in line with the execution of the major implementations already undertaken at Amity university. The focus group discussions brought forth the fact that several schools have a robust system of Career Counselling to achieve the Goals enlisted in NEP 2020. The panelists also suggested the need to have strong career counselling at the institutional/ university level to settle the psychological and emotional wellbeing as they shift from school to colleges/ universities. **Novelty:** The present study brought to light the practices followed and nurtured at Amity University in line with the tenets of NEP 2020 and draws a conclusion on the feasibility and prospectus of NEP 2020 in bringing forth the recommendation to the level of implementation. Flexibility in the choice based credit system, addressing the diverse career needs, courses designed as per the demand of the industry in diverse streams, making education more well-rounded through the introduction of value added courses, life skills, and robust mentor-mentee system are all effectively carried out at Amity University.

Keywords: Holistic Approach; Restructuring System; Multidisciplinary Learning; Career Opportunity; Value-added Education System

1 Introduction

National Education Policy 2020⁽¹⁾ is an exhaustive document that aims at providing a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education thus improving the education sector making it more fruitful and inclusive. The post-modern 21st century demands multidisciplinary approach to Education. NEP 2020 places a lot of emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary Education⁽¹⁾. The document says, “Pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable”⁽¹⁾. “The National Education Policy 2020⁽¹⁾ states clearly the prevalent culture of rote learning present in education system till today. This one fact hinders in achieving all other pedagogical goals leading to problems faced by learners in their holistic development”⁽²⁾.

Multidisciplinary and holistic learning is an ancient method used in Indian education system as well as the other parts of the world. This is the reason that such type of education system was advocated by scholars like Kautilya, Banabhatta, Plato, and Aristotle among many others. One can trace the evidence of such an education system in ancient Indian literature and practices. The students of Vedic times had to study Mathematics, Science and Geometry and lessons on morality, ethics, soft skills and value education, to develop their vocational skills along with professional skills. The introduction of Multidisciplinary Education is a welcome change in the NEP 2020⁽¹⁾. The approach to integrate Arts and Humanities with STEM had large vistas opening up for discussions and deliberations. It is envisaged that Mastery of curricula across fields, increases awareness and engagement and the very Joy of learning with the introduction of Multi-Disciplinary Education. A holistic education paves way for entry into the student’s choice of professional, vocational and technical disciplines. The choice based subjects in the school curriculum provide for in-depth learning for the students and also develop a well-rounded personality. With the introduction of this approach, the students get an opportunity to hone their skills in the areas of their interest and pursue them further to mastery and perfection. The subjects chosen would provide more avenues for the students to opt-in higher education and make use of the multiple exit options with appropriate certification. Multidisciplinary education helps the students deepen their skills as they understand to systematically select subjects as one interrelated whole rather than unrelated subjects that were offered in traditional education as part of the curriculum. As a part of the holistic approach and its philosophy, a student is educated beyond core academics providing him wholesome and holistic education. This helps the students to discover their identity and understand the meaning of life through holistic methods of teaching. A positive school environment and wrap-around support to the students along with an offer of a choice based subject selection would help in developing a happiness curriculum which is the way forward in the years to come. The policy mainly focuses on the holistic development of students by ensuring access, relevance, equity, quality, and strong foundational learning⁽³⁾. The mechanistic education gets counter acted with the introduction of holistic and multidisciplinary education. The 20th century saw the introduction of the self-motivated growth philosophy of Maria Montessori, Emil Molt, and Rudolf Steiner wherein the whole person education gained momentum. Community School, Experiential Learning, interdisciplinary subjects are methods of holistic education that helped in developing a student’s attitudes and attributes⁽⁴⁾. The flexibility of subjects would also bring about a transformational change in the teaching-learning and evaluation process.

Pathak, (2020)⁽⁵⁾ in his article on Holistic Education, Critical Thinking and Multidisciplinary Approach has raised some critical questions, looked at the social dynamics of education, and evolved a set of possibilities from the social context of learning. He puts forward how the academic machinery works and has elaborated the meaning attached to the concept from multiple perspectives, that is, of the students, teachers, parents, and the larger society. Quoting NEP 2020, Pathak has explained the need for integral education that would promote critical thinking. He further advocated that pedagogy needed to evolve to make education more holistic, inquiry-driven, learner-centered, flexible, experiential, discovery-oriented and enjoyable. The researcher shuns the idea of making students exam warriors and not to limit a student’s educational experience to merely the prescribed textbooks and guidebooks with “success mantra”. Reflecting upon the obstacles and challenges to make education holistic, multidisciplinary, experiential and enjoyable which are the so called cherished ideals, the author suggests an environment brimming with dialogue, reciprocity and trust⁽⁵⁾.

Yadav (2020)⁽⁶⁾ in her article on NEP 2020: Towards a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education, backed NEP 2020 for its comprehensiveness and has stated that the implementation of the policy would bring about inclusion, holistic development of the students as well as cater to the multidisciplinary approach to education⁽⁶⁾. Comparing the NEPs of 1968 and 1986, she has clearly elaborated on the lack of multidisciplinary education in both the policies and further brings to light that multidisciplinary education providing a flexible approach was first introduced by the UGC through CBCS⁽⁶⁾. Yadav puts forth apprehensions about the lack of infrastructure, funds, type of autonomy, etc. at the implementation stage of holistic and multidisciplinary education. Tracing the importance given to the concept in ancient Indian education in the form of the Gurukul system of education and as advocated by scholars like Banabhatta, Kautilya, Plato and Aristotle among the others, the reinstating of the holistic and multidisciplinary approach in NEP 2020 is considered a welcome change. The author appreciating the policy

has suggested the need for a strong will on the part of the government, facility for funds, infrastructural need especially in rural areas, regulatory mechanism, cell to address grievances as essential requirements for an effective implementation of the policy.

Aithal and Aithal (2020) in a study on Analysis of the Indian National Education Policy 2020 towards Achieving its Objectives has the importance of a well-defined and futuristic education policy as it is education that leads to economic and social progress⁽⁷⁾. The objectives of the study were (1) To highlight and overview the policies of the newly accepted higher education system NEP 2020. (2) To compare National Education Policy 2020 with the currently adopted policy in India. (3) To identify the innovations in new national higher education policy 2020. (4) To predict the implications of NEP 2020 on the Indian higher education system. (5) To discuss the merits of Higher Education Policies of NEP 2020. Having undertaken a conceptual discussion, comparing with the existing policies, identifying the innovations made using focus group discussion method, the NEP 2020 is analyzed using predictive analysis technique. The concluding remarks of the study throw light on the importance of NEP 2020 as a way forward in improving GER. The study suggests strict monitoring of quality through biennial accreditation based on self-declaration of progress through technology-based monitoring. It also instills hope in the Indian higher education system that would be moving from teacher centric to student centric, information centric to knowledge centric, marks centric to skills centric, examination centric to experimental centric, learning centric to research centric, and choice centric to competency centric and thereby fulfill the objectives of NEP 2020 by 2030⁽⁸⁾.

Sundaram (2020)⁽⁹⁾ in the study on National Education Policy 1986 Vs National Education Policy 2020 – A Comparative Study concludes that NEP 2020 has much scope for a multidisciplinary approach with digital learning, autonomy to curriculum, courses and paves way for holistic development of student-centric learning⁽⁹⁾.

2 Objectives

1. To study the planning of educators and teachers to follow interactive and holistic approach for maximum learning.
2. To study the vision of the schools in organizing the multidisciplinary activities for promoting students' learning.
3. To bring forth and map the recommendations of NEP 2020 that are already put into practice at Amity University Uttar Pradesh.

3 Methodology

Online Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with Principals of reputed schools were conducted by Amity University Uttar Pradesh. The principals were drawn from different schools from all over India. Focus Group Discussion forums were organized to deliberate upon the recommendations of NEP 2020. It was a Dual –Moderator Online FGD. The steps involved in the FGD were to select the Principals, select the moderators and the field teams, develop format for recording responses, train the field teams, conduct the FDG and finally transcribe, analyze and interpret the consolidated responses. At Focus Group Discussions, the Panelists were asked about their opinions, perceptions, ideas and attitudes towards holistic and multidisciplinary education. The FGD offered an in depth and nuanced discussion on the topic. The future action plans of the Principals were deliberated and were analyzed qualitatively.

4 Results and Discussion

The Focus Group Discussions brought forth the nuanced ideas of the Principals on Holistic Approach and Multidisciplinary Education for Diverse Career needs. They shared the practices followed in their respective schools and also enlisted the advantages of the same. All the Principals were single throated in their opinion that the reforms in the NEP 2020 is a big leap towards bringing a better workforce who would be more empowered and industry ready. This is in sync with the views expressed by Pathak A (2020)⁽⁵⁾ in his article on Holistic Education, Critical Thinking and Multidisciplinary Approach who opined that an integral education system would promote critical thinking and widen the student's educational experience empowering them towards success. The principals expressed their concern as to whether the infrastructure could be scaled up commensurate the requirements of the policy⁽⁵⁾. This has been echoed by Yadav (2020)⁽⁶⁾ in his write up on towards a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education, wherein he appreciated the policy and impressed upon the need for huge infrastructural development to roll out the policy⁽⁶⁾. Amity University has diverse streams that caters to the choice based credit system facilitating students to opt for courses from a casket of courses most suited to the interest of the students. The curricular syllabus is designed and bench marked with the best of institutions offering the same and with the state of the art of infrastructure. The faculty drawn from the length and breadth of India provide the best learning opportunity to the students paving way for student centered mode of learning.

Some of the thoughts that emerged in the discussion are as follows: The methodology of bringing varied disciplines and integrating them in the curriculum provides for better appreciation of the diversity of the subjects, facilitating communication and leadership skills and involvement of all the stakeholders. In the present century there exists a requirement of graduates who have mastery in the subject of their choice along with the required skills of the 21st century to make themselves viable for the plethora of opportunities knocking at their doors. In order to serve the requirements of the futuristic world an amalgamation of humanities, technological and soft skills would stand in good stead and serve the requirements that arise. The multidisciplinary approach helps the students appreciate their roles and responsibilities paving way for a deep understanding of issues involved and meeting the trials and tribulations they encounter on their path⁽¹⁰⁾. The FGD also deliberated on the need to impart quality education and monitoring quality in consonance with the requisite standards. The need for biennial accreditation has been discussed by Aithal and Aithal (2020) in a study on Analysis of the Indian National Education Policy 2020 towards achieving its objectives. The focused group in conformity with NEP 2020, suggested a curriculum where the students gain insights through dialogue, social interaction, a variety of learning experiences and knowledge across disciplines and even better attitudes and habits leading to wholesome development⁽⁷⁾. This needs the teacher training to be taken to a level where teacher trainees are equipped to provide integrated instruction and the teacher training institutions need to be upgraded to provide such professional training in multidisciplinary tools and training techniques⁽⁷⁾. There needs to be a collaborative approach between schools and training institutions to provide more exposure to teachers to make them adept in multidisciplinary teaching⁽¹¹⁾.

True to the suggestions put forth at the FGD, it is worth mentioning that Amity University Uttar Pradesh offers industry specific courses to make students industry ready falling in line with the recommendation of continuing with vocational education. The university brings forth more integration into the various courses offered under different streams to cater to the need and inclination of the students making learning purposeful, and joyful. Various programmes collaborate with industries in the vicinity to provide internships and apprenticeships to the students. The professionally qualified counsellors help the students to make appropriate selection of courses and vocation. Amity University being a research driven university falls under research intensive university and opportunities are given to the students to work in incubators to come up with research designs and start-ups. The curricular syllabi are revised to incorporate the latest know-how and to cater to the multiple entry exit and the four-year programmes. The university possesses state-of-the-art infrastructure to accommodate the needs of a holistic and multidisciplinary education. The continuous feedback from stakeholders like parents, academia, students, alumni and industry help to keep the courses offered up-to-date and futuristic. Continuous in-service training and opportunities are given to the faculty to develop their knowledge and the newest information in the chosen field. The shift from Teacher- centered to Student-centered education has helped the students to develop 21st century skills which are very pertinent in the current world scenario. While the Holistic Approach helps to cultivate psycho social and interpersonal skills, the Multidisciplinary education enables the learners to think critically, have pragmatic attitude and ideas to select subjects. This paves way for opening up to various career opportunities, transcending barriers.

The Principals were optimistic in bringing forth the changes as envisaged in NEP 2020 as there are ample opportunities catering to upskill the teachers as per the local needs. Principals in the discussions were appreciative of the Digital India Programme and the Skill India Mission, the flagship Programmes of Government of India, which would help in empowering the society. This also would directly be a boon in implementing NEP 2020 at all levels.

At Amity University, the digital infrastructure already in place even before the onslaught of the pandemic. Hence online or blended learning platforms were available to be explored by the students as well as teachers. The Principals in the discussions opined that the pandemic has helped them to take stock of the systemic changes they need to bring about in their institutions. It has also facilitated futuristic actions needed based on the experiences gained during the pandemic.

The study also helped to demystify the myths associated with holistic and multidisciplinary education. Its analysis is as stated below Table 1

Table 1. Demystifying myths of holistic approach and Multidisciplinary education- An Analysis

S No	Myth	Myth Debunked
1	Multidisciplinary education will happen with the existing curriculum. Multidisciplinary education will give instant jobs.	No, curriculum has to be re-examined and reconsider what has to be accomplished. No, it is of no doubt that it makes the students more viable to career opportunities but for excelling and mastering in the field of interest, passion is important.
3	The multidisciplinary education would lead to learning more subjects and hence a burden to the students.	No, there would be blending of Subjects and resultant synergy. The brain has a capacity for learning that is virtually limitless, which makes every human a potential genius.

Continued on next page

Table 1 continued

4	Multidisciplinary education would become "Master of all trades, Jack of none", smattering knowledge, across disciplines.	No, it would only help students acquire more skills of their choice and be industry ready opening up to diverse career avenues and also creating vistas of educational opportunities.
5	Multidisciplinary education would lead to distractions.	No, proper planning, execution and keeping a check on the progress of the learners would help the students wean away from distractions if any.
6	Opting for multidiscipline will be difficult for students than the traditional core subjects.	No, every child is endowed with multiple intelligence and can grasp multiple subjects according to the interest and the available opportunity that promotes understanding of a wide variety of subjects that support more of their intelligences and help them become successful.
7	Students become indecisive when it comes to multidisciplinary education.	No, the students learn to know what they want, get to know their strengths and weaknesses and would be able to take decisions independently thereby developing critical thinking and problem solving. Diversity of thought will be developed in the learners with the successful implementation of multidisciplinary education.

5 Conclusion

Based on systematic analysis of the qualitative data taken from principals and correlating and mapping the deliberations with the system of education provided at Amity University, the current study offers a framework for surveying, understanding and discussing the Holistic education. Holistic and Multidisciplinary education is a disruptive ideology that gives more autonomy to the students⁽¹²⁾. The role of teachers in the design and execution of curriculum is of the highest importance and the efficacy of any educational reform vests largely with the teachers. Adoption of diverse streams to fulfill the interest of the students providing them opportunities to choose from a variety of courses suiting their interest puts in place the major recommendation of NEP 2020, i.e., Multidisciplinary education. The freedom to choose courses from a basket of courses paves way for a holistic development of the students thereby developing their mental, emotional, physical, and social skills. This helps the students to identify their uniqueness and align it with the world outside. The innumerable opportunities to participate in co-curricular activities made available to the students at Amity University guarantees holistic development of the students preparing them to hone the requisite skill sets for future success. It could offer more flexibility and learning support than the traditional formats. Technology offers teachers the opportunities to become more collaborative and extend learning beyond the classrooms, the practical nuances of any policy become fruitful only with an interaction with the policy-makers and the teachers. In a nut shell, NEP 2020 will certainly be bridging the deep-rooted loopholes in the traditional system of education.

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