



Holistic Development in School Education: A Conceptual Study Based on NEP 2020

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Abstract

This study investigates Holistic Development in School Education per National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, proposing an implementation framework. Holistic development includes cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, ethical, and creative dimensions, prioritizing NEP 2020's vision of equitable education that aids overall student growth and lifelong fulfillment. This development underpins wellbeing, facilitating further learning. Achieving universal quality education hinges on understanding holistic development in school contexts, aligning policy with practice. The research explores theoretical foundations, defining components, dimensions, and indicators while analyzing NEP 2020 concerning these aspects. Holistic development draws from child development and cultural psychology, inspired by theories from Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner. It assumes an interactive relationship among cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, reinforcing overall learning, behavior, and wellbeing. Grounded in Child Development Theory, the study aligns holistic development with Educational, Developmental, and Clinical Psychology, together with Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning, fostering wellbeing, character, and citizenship. However, challenges exist, particularly the lack of a comprehensive framework for Holistic Development in School Education and various policy instruments under NEP 2020, along with limited progress on core requirements. By articulating an understanding of Holistic Development and compatible policy mapping, the study aims to assist educational stakeholders in achieving NEP 2020's vision of just, equitable, inclusive, and humanistic Holistic Development for all learners. (Aithal & Aithal, 2019)

Keywords: School Education, Holistic Development, Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning.

1. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 proposes a shift towards holistic development, grounded in foundational theories of child development and learning. In line with this vision, the



draft Learning Outcomes Framework for School Education specifies six categories of Learning Outcomes. To address the Outcome gap and fulfil “Education for All” ideals, a framework for Holistic Development in Schools is recommended. Holistic Development encompasses cognitive, social-emotional, physical, ethical, and creative dimensions. These aspects are inter-related: synergistic development across all five domains fosters greater learning and well-being. Holistic Development aligns with “whole child” and “well-being” approaches and uses principles from Educational and Developmental Psychology, Humanistic and Positive Psychology, and systems thinking. Given the current emphasis on inclusion and equity, the proposed framework prioritises remaining constructively aligned with, rather than adding to, the Learning Outcome Framework. Holistic Development furthers NEP 2020’s objectives of reducing the burden of backpack learning, making education flexible, and addressing New India’s aspirations (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).

2. Theoretical foundations of holistic development

Holistic development is addressed in the contemporary educational system in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Within the prevailing educational psychology, the approach accounts for aspects of learning, wellbeing, and the interplay among them. The mainstream educational psychology research considers cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of human development. The potential of holistic experience to reciprocally enhance learning and wellbeing is recognized though sufficient studies examining its dynamics remain scarce.

Construct articulating holistic development corresponds to the unified call of fundamental Psychology, Education, and Physical and Health Education. The mindfulness of emotional intelligence and psychosocial wellbeing, whose theoretical consolidation took place from the 1900s to the 1960s, is reflected in the foundation of Learning, Mind, and Heart, with the emergence of a social phase of brain research in the 1990s amplifying its contemporary relevance. Holistic development is observed as closely associated with the systemic perspective that is presently achieved in science but remains poorly investigated at the educational-experience level. The prevailing educational-experience paradigm of Wellbeing, Happiness, and Quality of Life emphasises cognitive, emotional, and physical facets that are within the parameters of systemic articulation, thus establishing an additional link among foundational references. Such mainstream elaboration frames a distinctive referral to holistic development, which is systematically learnt at the elementary level but falls into excess in advanced stages.

3. The National Education Policy 2020: principles and implications for holistic development

The National Education Policy 2020 introduces new principles and aims for school education, several of which directly connect to holistic development. Accordingly, the policy embarks on three major areas of educational reform, connects systemic challenges with holistic outcomes, and articulates several principles and approaches relevant to classroom practice.



As outlined in a previous discussion, NEP 2020 seeks to transform the education system of India by addressing several systemic challenges. While the policy identifies various issues and barriers, it goes on to describe three key areas of reform: the National Curriculum Frameworks for School Education, Multilingualism and the National Education Technology Forum, and Vocational Education. Each component relates to holistic development, yet efforts to cultivate inclusion, equity, flexibility, and value-oriented education emerge as particularly relevant. These tenets collectively frame a vision of education that extends beyond cognitive learning to encompass the broader life and learning experiences of children. The policy articulates distinct yet interrelated principles and approaches, such a balance between timeless and contemporary knowledge, that further elaborate the central aspiration of holistic development. (Aithal & Aithal, 2019)

4. Domains of holistic development in school: cognitive, social-emotional, physical, ethical, and creative facets

Formal schooling is intended to foster holistic development of learners through diverse and interconnected cognitive, social-emotional, physical, ethical, and creative experiences. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes this expectation and identifies these dimensions as critical holistic facets: “Education across all levels and types shall aim to bring about holistic development of students, namely, cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development...” (National Education Policy, 2020).

The NEP elaborates on these dimensions by listing indicators essential to each. Overlapping significantly with the widely recognized notion of holistic development, they correspond directly to the cognitive, social-emotional, physical, ethical, and creative learning domains articulated by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in its National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for School Education (Menon, 2019). This framework is therefore suitable for educational practitioners who seek to cultivate holistic development in formal schooling.

Bolstering these advantages, the NCF explicitly connects each facet of learning to classroom instruction and suggests indicators for measuring progress. These practical links help teachers identify priority areas for focused interventions. Building on these foundations, holistic schooling is defined as “a systemic approach that integrates educational policies, school practices, and classroom strategies to nurture cognitive, social-emotional, physical, ethical, and creative development”.

5. Curriculum design and instructional strategies to foster holistic development

Curriculum design aligns with key policies, principles, and recommended areas. To foster holistic development, design should be integrated, sequenced, and differentiated (Batra, 2021). Holistic content is best incorporated in three 100-hour interdisciplinary modules, each comprising project-based, service-learning, and experiential-component activities that target all six domains of development. These integrative modules align with National Skill Qualification Framework levels 1–5; a module in grade 4 cultured behaviour, healthy lifestyle, and personal safety includes



social-emotional, physical, and ethical development activities; and one in grade 8 community health addresses social-emotional, ethical, and creative dimensions (Akubuilu, 2012).

Curricular guides recommend further interdisciplinary projects to develop 21st-century learning (coding, artificial intelligence, etc.), while service-learning projects enhance social responsibility, resource conservation, and community welfare. Experiential-project activities vary widely (neighbourhood observation, local business visits, contribution to newspaper, etc.) based on student interests, environmental and economic securities, and teacher encouragement. Cross-curricular and infusion-based approaches requiring separate, clearly defined development are desirable for other curricular areas, but integrated participation may still enhance effective exchange, variety, and fulfilment of expected outcomes.

6. Assessment practices aligned with holistic outcomes

Prospective and retrospective assessments play a significant role in enhancing holistic development, and are best complemented through feedback gathered from several sources. A distinguishing feature of holistic assessment lies in its allowance for multiple outcomes. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of human ability and wider scope offers practical advantages of working with holistic outcomes (Akubuilu, 2012) ; (Cobham & Jacques, 2006). Prepared accordingly, students acquire opportunities to select, perform, record, and reflect on work that reveals details about their ongoing quests to become self-actualizing. Such approaches provide assessors the indispensable latitude for making flexible inferences about students' learning from the outcomes furnished.

7. Roles of teachers, schools, families, and communities in nurturing holism

The realization of holistic development requires collaborative endeavors by educational authorities, school leadership, teaching personnel, families, and the community. Successful initiatives necessitate multi-tiered formats, where various players engage through specific provisions. Within the school framework, the prime obligation lies with educational authorities, school administration, and educators. Educational authorities need to articulate a clear vision for holistic development, designate flexibility in related planning, provide complimentary infrastructure, introduce relevant guidelines in support of holistic teaching, learning and assessment, recruit competent personnel, and establish detailed monitoring procedures that subtly uphold oversight. School heads confer and modulate the authority accorded to teachers, enabling them to personalize implementation strategies in accordance with the broader conceptualization and operational timeline (Maharjan, 2016).

8. Policy integration, equity, inclusivity, and access in holistic education

The substantial restructuring of the mainstream education system envisioned within NEP 2020 requires simultaneous attention to the policy's endorsement of holistic development and the centrality of equity, integrative classes, and multidisciplinary curricula. Holistic development must be interpreted in NEP 2020 as integrating the twin pillars of inclusivity and equity. Equity-oriented access is essential for ensuring holistic development. Equity-oriented access requires



the early allocation of sufficient, accessible, and appropriately targeted resources (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Integrative classes and a multidisciplinary perspective are crucial for countering the academic pangs associated with the school-to-school transitions that occur five times in school. Secondary and higher education institutions fail to take sufficient forward steps to ensure a successful forward raise.

9. Challenges, critiques, and implementation gaps

“The guidelines and concepts proposed by NEP 2020 in making child development more holistic, inclusive, integrated, and joyous in school education are not new” (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). People in India have monitored these challenges within their respective socio-cultural contexts and have always had concern for the whole-child development inside the school system as an education model. However, the constitutional provisions and declarations, different education policies, different commissions, and also several committee-prescribed recommendations regarding holistic development of children at pre-school, primary, secondary, and higher education stages have been in and out of the Indian socio-cultural milieu for a long time. And yet the evident and actual portrait of child development within these stages still remains void of wholistic concerns in the Indian education system for various reasons. Despite multiple policies, NEP 2020, and several concerns to date, the implementation gap of these areas remains an utter failure. Various strategies like accountability, surveillance education, testing, teacher preparation, training, academic development, teacher and school promotion, child and teacher development, financial consideration, and so on have not yet appeared as a complementary part of educational development. Other similar constraints, like multi-focus dimensions of child development and teaching, hypocritical attitude and time dedication toward genuine educational advancement, and the need for technical intervention or reference to guide the education toward holistic development of the child also emerge while scrutinizing the previous policies of the country.

10. Case studies and international perspectives on holistic school education

Within the current educational landscape, holistic education is globally recognized, prompting numerous research studies on holistic development. NEP-2020 advocates for a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices among nations. Case studies on children’s rights, particularly regarding poverty, illustrate the holistic education framework in NEP-2020, highlighting both similarities and lessons learned. In New Zealand, the government ensures that children receive foundational support for cognitive, creative, emotional, and physical growth in their first six years, emphasizing the right to live free from poverty. High-quality early childhood education is driven by principles of engagement, empowerment, and holistic development, which are deemed essential for societal growth. Iceland presents a different approach, as no mandatory education exists for children aged 0–6 years. Instead, a flexible environment allows for holistic exploration and development, as defined by the Council of Europe. Early childhood care in Iceland promotes holistic growth, ensuring children explore safe and respectful learning conditions. The importance of the early years lies in the



profound impact on cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, influenced by both nature and environment. Supporting holistic development in children aged 0-6 is crucial for ensuring their childhood is free from poverty and fear. Early childhood education focuses on personal development, emotional and social resources, family attachment, and the surrounding environment, contributing to various child outcome indicators, including physical and mental development, creativity, and morality. (Amita Raj Gargey & Amit Kashyap, 2017)(Menon, 2019)(Elton-Chalcraft & Cammack, 2019)

11. Towards a framework for monitoring and evaluating holistic development in schools

The importance of monitoring and evaluating holistic development in schools has been widely acknowledged—leaving the question of how best to do so. While countries such as Ireland and India have begun to address this issue at the policy level (Aithal & Aithal, 2019) , NEP 2020 presents an immediate opportunity to define a framework. In particular, a preliminary model for evaluating holistic development is proposed, drawing on a range of existing tools and frameworks. The proposed framework describes a logic model that outlines inputs, activities, and outputs, as well as their anticipated outcomes; a scorecard for summarising holistic development across several domains; and a protocol for monitoring progress over time.

Current frameworks and tools for monitoring and evaluating holistic education suggest three areas for consideration: indicators, data sources, and governance. NEP 2020 acknowledges the importance of clarity regarding intended holistic outcomes, but does not offer a detailed articulation. It remains crucial, therefore, to specify measurable indicators that define those outcomes according to the logic model, thereby supporting monitoring and evaluation. The model also highlights the importance of assessment data in tracking holistic development, which may be gathered through multiple sources. Finally, the proposed protocol indicates how the process of monitoring, evaluation, and review can be governed within the school system, clarifying the roles of different stakeholders and establishing deadlines for regular review.

12. Conclusion

The discourse on holistic development in education emphasizes cognitive, social-emotional, physical, ethical, and creative dimensions beyond traditional academic learning. Holistic — meaning whole or complete — acknowledges multifaceted human nature and promotes synergy among the interdependent facets (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Economic prosperity and individual success are no longer sufficient; education must also cultivate responsible citizenship and nation-building. Holistic development fosters learners' integrity, compassion, cooperation, problem-solving, resource management, healthy living, and wellness. Learning and well-being in one or two domains enhance those in others, furthering holistic progress. NEP 2020 recognizes the need for holistic development and outlines strategies for fostering it in school education.

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