



HOLISTIC EDUCATION AS A PATHWAY TO HUMAN EXCELLENCE: PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE IN NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a key role in unlocking an individual's full potential. It supports a person's physical, mental, social, and emotional development, fostering overall human growth. Today, the emerging concept of integrating, balancing, and promoting comprehensive development is called holistic development. For holistic development, holistic education is essential, as highlighted in the Indian New National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This paper aims to discuss the role of holistic education in Human Excellence, analyse its philosophical foundation, and explore its contemporary relevance under NEP 2020. Holistic education is a broader idea that seeks a balanced development of physical, cognitive, emotional, social, ethical, and spiritual aspects of personality. Its goal is to nurture creativity, innovative thinking, ethical values, empathy, and develop Human excellence. Human excellence is the quality of an individual that incorporates ethical & moral, intellectual & creative, spiritual, emotional, and practical life skills. Both Indian and Western philosophy provide the bases of holistic education. In this study, the researcher employed the content analysis methodology within the descriptive research approach. This study found a strong philosophical base of holistic education, NEP 2020 give special focus on it, "multidisciplinarity and a holistic education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and sports for a multidisciplinary world in order to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p.5) and its plays crucial role for human excellence. This study will help students, teachers, educational administrators, researchers, educational policymakers, and educators who are involved in education and society to understand the concept of holistic child development through education, as outlined in the pathways of NEP 2020 and its underlying philosophical foundation.

KEYWORDS: Holistic Education; holistic development; Human Excellence; NEP-2020; Philosophical Foundations; Contemporary Relevance.

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognised as a crucial process for developing the inner potential of students. From an Indian perspective, education (Shiksha) emphasises the development of the total personality, encompassing the head, heart, and hands. That's provided the concept of holistic education. Holistic education is a broader idea that seeks a balanced development of physical, cognitive, emotional, social, ethical, and spiritual aspects of personality. Its goal is to nurture creativity, innovative thinking, ethical values, empathy, and develop Human excellence. Human excellence is the quality of an individual that incorporates ethical & moral, intellectual & creative, spiritual, emotional, and practical life skills. In the Indian context, the Upanishads, Bhagavat Gita, philosopher Gandhiji, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, ideas in the basis of holistic education and in the Western context, idealism, naturalism, pragmatism, Marxism, etc., philosophy also. Therefore, realising its importance Indian new national education policy 2020 promoted it.

Concept of Holistic Education

Holistic education represents the concept of "wholeness"; it is the process of whole child development; it combines all aspects of development, these are cognitive, emotional, social, moral & ethical, physical and spiritual. "Holistic education is a comprehensive approach to teaching where educators seek to address the emotional, social, ethical, and academic needs of students in an integrated learning format" (American University, 2025). It is "an approach that prepares students for academic and life challenges. Key principles include self-discovery, healthy relationships and social skills, emotional intelligence, resilience, and an appreciation for beauty, transcendence, and truth" (United Nations International School of Hanoi, 2024).

OBJECTIVES

To analyse the Philosophical Foundations of Holistic Education.
To analyse the Contemporary Relevance of Holistic Education under NEP 2020.



To discuss the role of Holistic Education in flourishing Human Excellence

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative content analysis method. For the philosophical foundation of Holistic Education, the concept of the Bhagavad Gita, the basic education of Gandhiji, Rabindranath Tagore's educational viewpoint, Sri Aurobindo's "integral education", Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, Islamic philosophy and Western philosophical concepts are analysed. For Contemporary relevance, the researcher analyzed National Education Document NEP-2020 and discussed the role of Holistic Education for Human Excellence.

1. To analyse the Philosophical Foundations of Holistic Education.

The concept of Holistic Education originates from various philosophical traditions, both Indian and Western, which look for human development.

Indian Context

According to the Upanishads, education is *vidyā* that leads to self-knowledge (*ātma-vidyā*) and liberation (*mokṣa*). Knowledge is not purely instrumental; it is life-changing, it reduces ignorance (*avidyā*) and demonstrates the unity of the individual self (*ātman*) and supreme reality (*Brahman*).

The Bhagavad Gita outlined an educational ethic that combines knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and right action (*karma*). Its teachings on performing responsibility with confidence, maintaining self-control, and balancing wisdom with action that a holistic education balances intellect, emotion and conduct. The Gita's emphasis on inner discipline, practical ethics, and action-oriented learning supports the holistic education.

Mahatma Gandhi's Basic Education clearly defines education as a correlational process in which manual work, intellectual development and moral development are connected; these combined head, heart, and hand. The Nai Talim education gives importance to productive work like art, craft at the centre of education so that cognitive skills arise from meaningful work and community life; it therefore offers a practical template for holistic schooling that links vocation, values and social responsibility. Gandhi's original texts and collected essays remain primary evidence for this approach.

Rabindranath Tagore's educational experiments at Santiniketan act as a learning that is rooted in nature through experiential learning for all-around development. He proposed that education should develop freedom, creativity and global humanism rather than traditional rote learning. His writings in education and the Santiniketan practice demonstrate how aesthetic education, community life and contact with nature contribute to emotional and moral development, which are key objectives of holistic education.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of "integral education" that aims at the simultaneous development of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of the person. His works propose that education should transform life by evolving awareness, not only by transmitting knowledge. His philosophical concept is among the most explicit Indian blueprints for holistic education in theory and practice.

Swami Vivekananda's definition that "education is the manifestation of the perfection already in existing man" emphasises developing the learner's inner potential and making a perfect man. This concept supports child-centred, value-oriented education that is central to holistic Education.

Western Context

Idealism promotes a strong base for holistic education by cultivating the mind and spirit. It seems education is the process of self-realisation, through which a person attains truth, beauty, and goodness. Idealist philosophers such as Plato, Hegel, and educational thinkers like J. S. Brubacher (1969) have promoted that the true aim of education lies in nurturing moral and spiritual perfection.

Naturalism promotes experiential and child-centred learning. According to Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Montessori, education must follow the natural growth and development of a child. Rousseau said in his book *Émile* (1762) that education must follow natural law, allowing children the freedom to learn through exploration and experience; emphasis on discipline through natural consequence. Pestalozzi emphasised the role of sense perception and emotional connection in learning, while Maria Montessori's methods demonstrated education through self-directed, experiential activities.

Pragmatism promotes a dynamic and democratic dimension to holistic education. Charles Peirce, John Dewey, and William James main philosophers of pragmatism. It emphasises learning by doing and the reconstruction of experience by active engagement. Dewey (1916) in *Democracy and Education* asserted that education is not preparation for life but life itself. Pragmatism promotes holistic education by fostering reflective thinking, social interaction, and the integration of theory and practice.

Marxism promotes a socio-political foundation to holistic education by cultivating equity and justice. According to Marx and Engels (1848), education is a means of removing social inequality and promoting human emancipation. Paulo Freire (1970), inspired by Marxist philosophy, expanded this idea in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, arguing that education must develop critical consciousness that empowers learners to question and modify their realities. According to Marxism, education addresses not only personal development but also social transformation.

Existentialism strongly promotes holistic education by emphasizing the development of the whole person through individual uniqueness, freedom, and self-created meaning. It



advocates for student-centred learning that integrates intellectual inquiry with emotional depth, psychological resilience, and existential reflection, prioritizing personal growth over rote memorization or standardized approaches. By transforming education into a profound journey of self-discovery and integrated human development, it complements the broader holistic tradition.

Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophy views knowledge as an integrated pursuit and strongly advocates for holistic education, encompassing the intellectual, moral, spiritual, and physical development of the individual. Influenced by the Quran and Hadith, which emphasize the acquisition of knowledge as a religious duty and the importance of balancing worldly and spiritual life, thinkers like Al-Ghazali stressed the purification of the heart alongside intellectual learning and integrated ethics, spirituality, and rational inquiry to achieve human excellence. Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi advocated for a comprehensive curriculum that included sciences, arts, philosophy, and physical training, aiming to harmonize the body, mind, and soul. This tradition views education not merely as the acquisition of information but as a transformative process that fosters taqwa (God-consciousness), moral character, social responsibility, and inner peace—closely aligning with the goal of holistic education to nurture the whole person for personal fulfilment and social harmony.

2. To analyse the Contemporary Relevance of Holistic Education under NEP 2020.

Today's modern, technological, developmental era National Education Policy 2020 promotes Holistic Education that integrates all knowledge, skill and all domains of learning

- **Integration of knowledge:** It is the main principle of this policy that promotes the “multidisciplinary and a holistic education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and sports for a multidisciplinary world in order to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge”(Ministry of Education, 2020, p.5)
- **Universal access and provide opportunity for Holistic Education:** “A concerted national effort will be made to ensure universal access and afford opportunity to all children of the country to obtain quality holistic education—including vocational education - from pre-school to Grade 12” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p.10).
- **Holistic Education for the development of 21st century skills:** NEP 2020 focused on the development of contemporary skills that benefit our country and reducing poverty and unemployment stated, “The aim of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st century skills”(Ministry of Education, 2020,p12).
- **Focusing on developing all domains through Holistic Education:** NEP 2020 emphasize all domains of education on cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Stated “The need to integrate sports in education is well recognized as it

serves to foster holistic development by promoting physical and psychological well-being while also enhancing cognitive abilities”(Ministry of Education, 2020, pp.12-13).

- **Multidisciplinary subject choice for Holistic development:** This policy promotes multidisciplinary subject choice options for students' holistic development, especially in secondary education. Stated, “Holistic development and a wide choice of subjects and courses year to year will be the new distinguishing feature of secondary school education” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p.13).
- **Provide Holistic progress card for Holistic Development:** “The holistic progress card will form an important link between home and school and will be accompanied by parent-teacher meetings in order to actively involve parents in their children's holistic education and development”(Ministry of Education, 2020, p.18).
- **Holistic Education as a long-term approach for all disciplines:** This policy stated “...holistic education shall be, in the long term, the approach of all undergraduate programmes, including those in professional, technical, and vocational disciplines”(Ministry of Education, 2020, p.36).
- **All round personality development:** All round personality development including life skills, development of human value through value education, develop religious and constitutional awareness these all are aim of Holistic Education stated as “Value-based education will include the development of humanistic, ethical, Constitutional, and universal human values of truth (satya), righteous conduct (dharma), peace (shanti), love (prem), nonviolence (ahimsa), scientific temper, citizenship values, and also life-skills; lessons in seva/service and participation in community service programmes will be considered an integral part of a holistic education” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p.37).
- **Holistic education for professional development and make individual self-reliant:** This policy gave responsibility to higher education institutions for skill professional development by providing internship stated “... as part of a holistic education, students at all HEIs will be provided with opportunities for internships with local industry, businesses, artists, crafts persons, etc., as well as research internships with faculty and researchers at their own or other HEIs/research institutions, so that students may actively engage with the practical side of their learning and, as a by-product, further improve their employability” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p.37).
- **Developing the research mindset through Holistic Education:** NEP 2020 emphasize the development of a research mindset from undergraduate program and given special emphasis on the development research environment /ecosystem stated “the inclusion of research and internships in the undergraduate curriculum, faculty career management systems that give due weightage to research, and the governance and regulatory changes that



encourage an environment of research and innovation”(Ministry of Education, 2020).

- **“Towards a More Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education”(Ministry of Education, 2020):** NEP 2020 gives importance on holistic and multidisciplinary education as a requirement for all-rounded development of a person with intellectual, moral, social, and creative abilities. This policy promotes integration of arts, sciences, and vocational skills, community engagement, and value-based & lifelong learning that fosters human excellence, innovation, and national development.

These are all direct quotes from documents of the Indian Educational structure, that is the National Education Policy 2020 that which gives wide emphasis on providing Holistic Education for the holistic development of every child/student/individual in every corner of this document.

3. To discuss the role of Holistic Education in flourishing Human Excellence

“Human excellence is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the highest potential of an individual in various domains”(Rachiraju et al., 2025). It promotes balanced development and a meaningful life based on values. Aims of Human Excellence enhance the quality of working life, to reach a degree of Excellence in behaviour required to achieve the organisational objectives and to support the process of Continuous Improvement. Holistic education promotes human excellence. These are

- Holistic Education promotes all-around development of a personality, which is the main aim of human excellence.
- Holistic Education promotes the emotional intelligence of a person.
- Holistic Education fosters creative and critical thinking in a person.
- Holistic Education encourages moral responsibility.
- Holistic Education promotes life skills.
- Holistic Education maintains the balance between cognitive, affective, physical, and spiritual development of an individual. That means integration of all domains; that’s the main aim of human excellence.
- Holistic Education gives importance to hands-on activities, arts, nature immersion, and mindfulness over passive memorisation. That means developing the Experiential and Reflective Learning, which is the aim of human excellence
- Holistic Education promotes Equity and Inclusivity that recognises diverse learners and cultural contexts, ensuring equitable access for all.
- Holistic Education promotes ethical values like *ahimsa* (non-violence), sustainability, and global citizenship.

All these roles of holistic Education can promote human excellence that makes a human successful in every field of life

DISCUSSION

The Bhagavad Gita’s emphasis on balanced action and self-realization, Gandhi’s “Nai Talim” for self-reliance, Rabindranath Tagore’s nature-aligned creativity, Sri Aurobindo’s integral education, Vivekananda’s manifestation of an individual, the integration of faith, ethics, and physical development in Islam, and Western doctrines like idealism’s self-realization and all-round development of personality, naturalism’s physical development with nature and self-expression, pragmatism’s practical and social skills, Marxism’s egalitarianism, and existentialism’s existence precedes essence, all support the Holistic Education that integrated development of physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. This universal convergence aligns seamlessly with the NEP 2020’s multidisciplinary, value-based, and experiential learning approach, which, through its 5+3+3+4 structure, the inclusion of Indian knowledge systems (including yoga and ethical values), and the promotion of critical thinking, creativity, and global citizenship, aims to create resilient and innovative individuals capable of addressing 21st-century challenges such as moral vacuums and skill gaps. Recently noticed that implementation progress includes phased activities (e.g., Foundational Literacy Mission, PARAKH for holistic assessment, digital platforms like DIKSHA, and similar endeavors elsewhere), as well as upcoming reforms like the Digital University and the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill—2025, demonstrating a growing commitment to human excellence. However, challenges remain, including uneven implementation across the country, resource constraints, lack of trained teachers, the digital divide, and debates over cultural emphasis that could impact pluralism. The recommendations include improved research studies on outcomes, an inclusive curriculum that balances all perspectives, active teacher empowerment, and sustainable funding to connect ancient wisdom with modern needs, which will ensure that holistic education produces enlightened and compassionate citizens for social harmony and progress.

CONCLUSION

Holistic Education combined all aspects of development like physical, social, psychological, ethical & spiritual. The importance of holistic education in the overall development of students at all levels of education is immense. The philosophical bases of holistic education, rooted in idealism, naturalism, pragmatism, existentialism, and Indian spiritual thought, reveal that education must be the development of the inner self and a preparation for life in its fullness. Therefore, throughout the entire discussion of the NEP 2020 document, only holistic education has been given maximum importance. And it has also been seen that holistic education plays the most important role in human excellence.

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