



Structural Reforms under NEP- 2020 for Promoting Multidisciplinary Education and Breaking Traditional Barriers

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative shift in the Indian education system by promoting multidisciplinary and holistic learning. It aims to break the rigid boundaries between arts, science, commerce, vocational studies, and professional disciplines. This paper explores the concept of multidisciplinary education as envisioned in NEP 2020, its significance in the 21st century, the structural reforms proposed, implementation strategies, challenges, and its potential to reshape higher education in India.

Multidisciplinary education is essential in the 21st century because today's world is complex and rapidly changing. Modern problems like climate change, health crises, artificial intelligence, and economic challenges cannot be solved using knowledge from a single subject. Students need to develop a broad understanding of different disciplines along with skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and adaptability. Multidisciplinary learning helps learners connect ideas across fields, become more innovative, and prepare for diverse career opportunities in a global and competitive job market.

The structural reforms proposed in NEP 2020 form the backbone for implementing multidisciplinary education in India. By transforming institutions, introducing flexible degree structures, enabling credit mobility, improving governance, and promoting research and liberal learning, NEP 2020 seeks to break traditional academic barriers. These reforms aim to create a dynamic, inclusive, and future-ready education system that equips learners with diverse knowledge and skills essential for the 21st century.

Key words: - *Introduction, Evolution of NEP, Need for Multidisciplinary Education in the 21st Century, Multidisciplinary vs Interdisciplinary, Structural Reforms under NEP-2020.*

Introduction

Education in India has traditionally followed a compartmentalized structure where students choose a specific stream—science, arts, or commerce—early in their academic journey. This rigid separation often restricts creativity, critical thinking, and innovation. The National Education Policy 2020, introduced after 34 years, recognizes the need for a flexible, integrated, and multidisciplinary approach to learning. The policy envisions an education system that nurtures well-rounded individuals equipped with diverse skills, knowledge, and competencies.

The evolution of India's National Education Policy shows the country's efforts to improve education after independence. The first major policy was introduced in 1968 based on the Kothari Commission recommendations, focusing on compulsory education, the three-language formula, and national integration. The second policy came in 1986, emphasizing universal elementary education, women's education, and quality improvement. It was revised in 1992 to meet new challenges like globalization.

After many years, the National Education Policy 2020 was introduced as a major reform promoting multidisciplinary learning, flexibility, skill development, and holistic education suited to 21st-century needs. A comprehensive reform was introduced through the National Education Policy 2020, marking the third major policy shift in independent India.

NEP 2020 aims to transform the education system by promoting multidisciplinary learning, critical thinking, skill development, flexibility in curriculum, and the use of technology. It envisions an education structure that aligns with 21st-century needs while rooted in Indian values.

Evolution of India's National Education Policy

The evolution of India's National Education Policy shows a gradual transition from access-focused reforms to quality, innovation, and holistic development-oriented education.

- 1948–49 – University Education Commission (Radhakrishnan Commission)
Focused on restructuring higher education after independence.
- 1952–53 – Secondary Education Commission (Mudaliar Commission)
Suggested reforms in secondary schooling and teacher training.
- 1964–66 – Kothari Commission
Provided a comprehensive framework for a uniform national education system.
- 1968 – First National Education Policy (NEP 1968)
Introduced compulsory education, the three-language formula, and national integration.
- 1986 – Second National Education Policy (NEP 1986)
Emphasized universal elementary education, women's education, and quality improvement.
- 1992 – Revised National Education Policy (Programme of Action 1992)
Updated NEP 1986 to address globalization and new educational needs.

➤ 2020 – National Education Policy (NEP 2020)

Introduced major reforms such as multidisciplinary learning, flexibility, skill development, and holistic education for the 21st century.

Need for Multidisciplinary Education in the 21st Century

Multidisciplinary education is one of the central pillars of NEP 2020, aiming to eliminate silos and encourage cross-disciplinary learning. Multidisciplinary education refers to an approach where learners study and integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines rather than focusing on a single subject area. For example, a student of engineering can study philosophy or music, commerce student can learn data science or environmental studies, arts students can explore mathematics or computer applications.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions multidisciplinary learning as a key feature of the new education system in India. It aims to break the rigid separation between arts, science, commerce, and vocational subjects, allowing students to choose a flexible combination of courses based on their interests. NEP 2020 promotes holistic and broad-based education to develop well-rounded individuals with critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills. By encouraging learning across disciplines, the policy prepares students to meet the demands of the modern world and contribute effectively to society.

Multidisciplinary vs Interdisciplinary

Aspect	Multidisciplinary	Interdisciplinary
Focus	Multiple subjects taught side by side	Integration of subjects into one framework
Approach	Broad learning	Connected learning
Outcome	Diverse knowledge	Problem-solving across disciplines

Structural Reforms Supporting Multidisciplinary Education under National Education Policy- 2020

The successful implementation of multidisciplinary education requires not only curriculum changes but also major structural reforms in the education system. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 proposes comprehensive institutional and administrative restructuring to support flexible, holistic, and integrated learning. These reforms aim to transform higher education institutions into multidisciplinary centres of learning and research, breaking down rigid disciplinary boundaries that have traditionally dominated Indian education.

1. Transformation of Higher Education Institutions into Multidisciplinary Universities

The National Education Policy 2020 proposes a major transformation of higher education institutions to support multidisciplinary learning. Traditionally, Indian colleges and universities have functioned within rigid disciplinary boundaries, offering limited scope for students to explore subjects outside their chosen stream. NEP 2020 envisions that all higher education institutions will gradually evolve into large multidisciplinary universities and autonomous degree-granting colleges. These institutions will offer a wide range of programs in arts, science, commerce, technology, vocational education, and professional fields. This

shift aims to create an integrated academic environment where students can gain broad-based knowledge and develop diverse skills.

2. Institutional Restructuring through Clustering and Mergers

NEP 2020 recognizes that many small colleges in India lack adequate infrastructure, faculty strength, and academic resources to provide multidisciplinary education effectively. To overcome this challenge, the policy recommends restructuring institutions through clustering and mergers. Small and fragmented colleges will be combined into larger multidisciplinary clusters that can share resources such as laboratories, libraries, and teaching expertise. This reform is expected to enhance academic collaboration, improve institutional governance, and ensure that multidisciplinary education becomes accessible even in rural and underdeveloped areas.

3. Flexible Undergraduate Degree Structure

A key structural reform introduced by NEP 2020 is the redesign of undergraduate education into a holistic and flexible framework. The policy proposes three- or four-year multidisciplinary bachelor's degree programs with multiple entry and exit options. Students will have the freedom to choose courses across disciplines, allowing them to combine majors and minors according to their interests and career goals. This flexibility encourages exploration, reduces the pressure of early specialization, and supports diverse learning pathways. The four-year program also emphasizes research opportunities, strengthening academic depth alongside interdisciplinary exposure.

4. Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)

To support mobility across disciplines and institutions, NEP 2020 introduces the Academic Bank of Credits. This digital mechanism allows students to store the credits they earn during their academic journey and transfer them between institutions. The Academic Bank of Credits enables learners to take courses from different universities, online platforms, or multidisciplinary programs without losing academic progress. This reform promotes flexibility, encourages lifelong learning, and makes interdisciplinary education more practical and student-centred.

5. Establishment of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)

NEP 2020 proposes a new regulatory framework through the establishment of the Higher Education Commission of India. This single umbrella body is intended to replace the existing fragmented regulatory system and ensure more effective governance. By simplifying regulations and promoting institutional autonomy, HECI will support the development of multidisciplinary institutions. It will maintain academic standards, provide funding support, and ensure quality assurance through accreditation. This unified structure is crucial for the smooth implementation of multidisciplinary reforms across the country.

6. Promotion of Liberal Arts and Holistic Education

The policy strongly emphasizes liberal and holistic education as the foundation of multidisciplinary learning. NEP 2020 encourages institutions to integrate humanities, arts, ethics, environmental education, and value-based learning into all programs, including professional and technical courses. This approach reflects

the Indian tradition of broad knowledge systems seen in ancient universities like Nalanda and Takshashila. Liberal education helps students develop critical thinking, communication skills, cultural awareness, and ethical reasoning, thereby producing well-rounded individuals rather than narrow specialists.

7. Curriculum and Pedagogical Reforms

Structural reforms under NEP 2020 also include major changes in curriculum design and teaching methods. The policy promotes experiential learning, project-based education, internships, and research-oriented study. Students will be encouraged to apply knowledge across disciplines and connect classroom learning with real-world challenges. Multidisciplinary curricula will allow learners to choose elective subjects beyond their core area, thereby enhancing creativity and innovation. Such pedagogical reforms are essential for making education more practical, engaging, and relevant to contemporary needs.

8. Faculty Development and Collaborative Teaching

Effective multidisciplinary education requires teachers who are prepared to teach in integrated and innovative ways. NEP 2020 stresses continuous professional development programs for faculty and encourages collaborative teaching practices. Institutions will be expected to promote interdisciplinary research, team teaching, and academic cooperation across departments. Faculty members will play a crucial role in guiding students through flexible learning structures and supporting holistic educational outcomes.

9. Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs)

To serve as role models for multidisciplinary learning, NEP 2020 proposes the establishment of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities. These institutions will function at global standards, focusing on excellence in teaching, research, innovation, and interdisciplinary problem-solving. MERUs are expected to set benchmarks for other higher education institutions and contribute significantly to India's goal of becoming a knowledge-driven society.

10. Strengthening Research and Innovation through the National Research Foundation

NEP 2020 links multidisciplinary education closely with the promotion of research and innovation. The policy proposes the creation of a National Research Foundation to support high-quality research across disciplines. This foundation will provide funding, build a strong research culture in universities, and encourage interdisciplinary projects that address national and global challenges. Research-based multidisciplinary learning will enhance India's intellectual capacity and foster innovation in higher education.

Conclusion

Multidisciplinary education under NEP 2020 represents a paradigm shift in Indian education. By breaking traditional barriers between disciplines, it aims to create flexible, holistic, and future-ready learners. The policy envisions an education system that nurtures creativity, innovation, and critical thinking while preparing students to address real-world challenges. Although implementation may face obstacles, with strong institutional support and progressive reforms, multidisciplinary education can reshape India's higher education landscape and contribute significantly to national development.

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