



Original Article

Educational Values of the National Education Policy 2020: A Metaphysical Analysis

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 signifies a profound philosophical reorientation of Indian education by placing educational values, holistic development, and human excellence at the core of its vision. While existing studies largely focus on policy structure and implementation, limited attention has been paid to the metaphysical foundations underlying its value framework. This review article critically examines the educational values of NEP 2020 through a metaphysical lens, exploring its assumptions about human nature, knowledge, morality, and the ultimate purpose of education. Drawing upon Indian philosophical traditions, holistic education theories, and classical Western educational thought, the study analyses how NEP 2020 conceptualizes education as an integrative, transformative, and value-laden process. The aims of the study is to examine the educational values embedded in NEP 2020 from a metaphysical perspective, to analyse the philosophical assumptions about human nature, knowledge, and purpose underlying NEP 2020, to interpret NEP 2020 in the light of Indian philosophical traditions and Western educational thought and to assess how NEP 2020 conceptualizes value education and human excellence as intrinsic aims of education. The review reveals that NEP 2020 aligns education with ontological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human existence, positioning value education as intrinsic to learning rather than instrumental. The paper argues that NEP 2020 represents not merely a policy reform but a philosophically grounded vision of education aimed at self-realization, moral consciousness, and holistic human flourishing.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Educational Values, Metaphysics, Holistic Education, Indian Philosophy, Human Excellence

Introduction

Educational policy documents are deeply embedded with philosophical assumptions regarding *reality, human nature, and the aims of education* (Brubacher, 1982). The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) marks a decisive shift in Indian education by explicitly foregrounding values such as ethics, holistic development, creativity, and social responsibility (Government of India, 2020; Ministry of Education, 2020). Unlike earlier policies that emphasized access, literacy, and workforce preparation, NEP 2020 redefines education as a process of *human transformation and moral becoming*.

Philosophers such as Tagore (1917, 1929), Gandhi (1953), Aurobindo (1998), and Vivekananda (1963) viewed education as a means of unfolding human consciousness and ethical awareness. Similarly, Western thinkers like Rousseau (1762/1979) and Dewey (1938) emphasized learner-centered, experiential, and value-oriented education. NEP 2020 reflects a convergence of these traditions, suggesting that its educational values are grounded in a holistic and metaphysical understanding of the human person.

Objectives of the Study

The present review article is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the educational values embedded in NEP 2020 from a metaphysical perspective.
2. To analyse the philosophical assumptions about human nature, knowledge, and purpose underlying NEP 2020.

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3. To interpret NEP 2020 in the light of Indian philosophical traditions and Western educational thought.
4. To assess how NEP 2020 conceptualizes value education and human excellence as intrinsic aims of education.

Methodology and Review Protocol

1. Nature of the Study

The study adopts a qualitative, conceptual, and analytical review methodology that is suitable for philosophical and policy-oriented research (Brubacher, 1982). It does not involve empirical data collection but relies on interpretive analysis of primary and secondary sources.

2. Sources of Data

The review is based on:

- The official National Education Policy 2020 document (Government of India, 2020; Ministry of Education, 2020).
- Classical texts in Indian philosophy of education (Aurobindo, 1998; Vivekananda, 1963; Tagore, 1917, 1929; Gandhi, 1953).
- Western educational philosophy (Dewey, 1938; Rousseau, 1762/1979; Brubacher, 1982).
- Contemporary works on holistic education and human excellence (Ananda, 2019; Prabhu, 2015; Rachiraju et al., 2025; UNIS Hanoi, 2024).

3. Review Protocol

Sources were selected based on:

- Relevance to educational values, holistic education, and philosophy of education,
- Theoretical contribution to metaphysical or ethical dimensions of education,
- Academic credibility and frequent citation in education research.

The analysis followed a thematic synthesis approach, focusing on metaphysical themes such as holism, self-realization, moral consciousness, and human excellence.

4. Metaphysics and Education: Theoretical Grounding

Metaphysics provides the foundational framework for understanding education beyond its technical and instrumental dimensions. In educational philosophy, metaphysical inquiry addresses questions related to the nature of the learner, the purpose of education, and the status of values and knowledge (Brubacher, 1982; Smith, 2009; Nair, 2016). Educational systems grounded in metaphysical realism view values as intrinsic aspects of reality rather than socially constructed or externally imposed norms (Rokeach, 1973; Sharma, 2017).

Rousseau (1762/1979) conceptualized the learner as inherently good, emphasizing education as a natural unfolding rather than mechanical conditioning. This ontological assumption aligns with Indian philosophical traditions that perceive the human being as essentially complete, with education functioning as a process of awakening latent potential (Vivekananda, 1963;

Radhakrishnan, 1931). Piaget (1950) further reinforced developmental perspectives by emphasizing the progressive construction of intelligence within the learner.

Dewey (1938), while pragmatic in orientation, also rejected dualism by integrating experience, reflection, and growth, thereby reinforcing the inseparability of cognition and values. Later socio-cultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1978) strengthened this view by demonstrating that learning and value formation emerge through social interaction and cultural mediation.

NEP 2020 reflects a non-dualistic metaphysical orientation, rejecting rigid separations between intellectual and moral education, vocational and liberal learning, or theory and practice (Government of India, 2020; Ministry of Education, 2020; NCERT, 2020). The policy implicitly endorses the view that knowledge is value-laden and education is inherently ethical, resonating with both Indian spiritual philosophy and progressive Western thought (Brubacher, 1982; Dewey, 1938; Sharma, 2017).

5. Holistic Education as a Metaphysical Ideal

Holistic education represents the metaphysical core of NEP 2020, emphasizing the integrated development of the body, mind, intellect, emotions, ethics, and spirit (Ministry of Education, 2020; NCERT, 2020). This approach assumes that human existence is fundamentally interconnected and that fragmentation of learning leads to alienation and loss of meaning (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009).

Ananda (2019) conceptualizes holistic education as an approach that connects learning with life, values, and inner awareness. This perspective mirrors ancient Indian educational ideals where education was aimed at harmonizing the individual with society and the cosmos (Radhakrishnan, 1931). NEP 2020 echoes this tradition by advocating multidisciplinary education, experiential learning, and reflective practices that nurture both competence and conscience (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2000).

Globally, holistic education has gained recognition as essential for addressing complex social, ethical, and environmental challenges. The United Nations International School of Hanoi (2024) emphasizes that holistic education fosters emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, and global citizenship capacities that NEP 2020 explicitly seeks to cultivate. Metaphysically, this reflects the belief that education should develop the whole person, not merely produce economically productive individuals (Nussbaum, 2011).

Indian Philosophical Foundations of Educational Values

1. Vedantic and Integral Perspectives

Vedantic philosophy views education as a means of realizing the inner truth of the self. Vivekananda (1963) asserted that education is the manifestation of inherent perfection, implying that knowledge and values already exist within the learner. This metaphysical assumption is evident in NEP 2020's emphasis on self-discovery, mindfulness, ethical awareness, and inner discipline (Government of India, 2020; Radhakrishnan, 1931).

Sri Aurobindo's (1998) integral philosophy further expands this view by interpreting education as an

evolutionary process of consciousness. According to Aurobindo, education should nurture intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and spiritual faculties in harmony. NEP 2020 reflects this integral metaphysics through its emphasis on creativity, critical inquiry, interdisciplinary learning, and moral development (Ministry of Education, 2020; Nair, 2016).

2. Tagorean Humanism and Creative Unity

Tagore (1917) envisioned education as the cultivation of personality through freedom, creativity, and harmony with nature. His concept of creative unity (Tagore, 1929) rejects fragmentation of knowledge and emphasizes the interconnectedness of culture, ethics, and learning. NEP 2020's promotion of arts, culture, and multidisciplinary curricula reflects this humanistic metaphysics, recognizing education as a process of personal and cultural integration (Smith, 2009).

3. Gandhian Ethics and Nai Talim

Gandhi's philosophy of Nai Talim placed moral values, productive work, and social responsibility at the center of education (Gandhi, 1953). Education, for Gandhi, was a means of character formation and ethical living. NEP 2020 incorporates these ideals through experiential learning, vocational education, community engagement, and emphasis on dignity of labour (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2000). Prabhu (2015) argues that such integration reflects the Indian philosophical conception of education as a path to human excellence, not merely professional success (Sen, 2009).

Western Educational Thought and Value Formation

Western educational philosophy significantly contributes to NEP 2020's value framework. Dewey (1938) emphasized education as experiential growth, where values emerge through reflective engagement with real-life situations. NEP 2020's stress on competency-based learning, inquiry, and experiential pedagogy aligns with Dewey's pragmatic metaphysics, which views knowledge as dynamic and evolving (Shulman, 2004).

Rousseau's (1762/1979) learner-centric philosophy emphasized natural development, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation. NEP 2020 reflects this orientation through flexible curricular pathways, student choice, and reduced emphasis on rote learning (Ministry of Education, 2020; Piaget, 1950; Vygotsky, 1978).

Brubacher (1982) highlights that modern educational philosophies increasingly reject value-neutral education, it recognizes values as integral to knowledge and learning (Rokeach, 1973; Smith, 2009). NEP 2020 explicitly embraces this position by integrating ethics, constitutional values, and social responsibility across disciplines rather than confining them to isolated moral instruction.

Human Excellence, Value Education, and Ethical Consciousness

Human excellence constitutes a central metaphysical aim of NEP 2020. Rather than equating excellence with academic achievement alone, the policy envisions excellence as the balanced integration of intellectual competence, ethical awareness, emotional

maturity, and social responsibility (Government of India, 2020; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009).

Rachiraju, Niraj, and Venugopal (2025) conceptualize Human Excellence Quotient as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, ethical, and spiritual capacities. This framework complements NEP 2020's holistic vision and reinforces the metaphysical assumption that human fulfilment requires harmony among multiple dimensions of being.

Value education in NEP 2020 emphasizes empathy, respect for diversity, environmental consciousness, and global citizenship. From a metaphysical standpoint, these values are expressions of interconnected human existence rather than externally imposed norms. Education thus becomes a process of moral awakening and ethical self-formation, aligning with both Indian spiritual traditions and global humanistic ideals (Prabhu, 2015; UNIS Hanoi, 2024; UNESCO, 2000).

Challenges in Operationalizing Metaphysical Ideals

Despite its philosophically rich vision, NEP 2020 faces significant challenges in translating metaphysical ideals into educational practice. One major concern is teacher preparedness. Value-oriented and reflective pedagogy requires philosophical sensitivity, ethical awareness, and experiential teaching skills, which may not be adequately addressed in existing teacher education programs (Shulman, 2004; Sharma, 2017).

Another challenge lies in the risk of instrumentalization of values, where ethical education is reduced to measurable learning outcomes or compliance-based assessments. Such reductionism contradicts the metaphysical foundations of NEP 2020, which view values as lived realities rather than quantifiable indicators (Brubacher, 1982; Dewey, 1938; Rokeach, 1973).

Additionally, balancing cultural rootedness with pluralism remains a complex task in a diverse society. While NEP 2020 draws heavily from Indian philosophical traditions, its implementation must remain inclusive and dialogic to avoid cultural homogenization (Sen, 2009; UNESCO, 2000). Addressing these challenges requires reflective pedagogy, philosophical literacy among educators, and institutional commitment to holistic education.

Conclusion

This review demonstrates that the National Education Policy 2020 is deeply rooted in a metaphysical vision of education that transcends utilitarian and instrumental approaches. Drawing from Indian philosophical traditions and classical Western educational thought, NEP 2020 conceptualizes education as a transformative process aimed at self-realization, moral consciousness, and holistic human flourishing. Educational values in NEP 2020 are not peripheral objectives but foundational expressions of a worldview that recognizes the integrated nature of human existence. By aligning education with ethical, spiritual, and humanistic dimensions, NEP 2020 repositions education as a means of personal and societal transformation. Future research must focus on translating this philosophical vision into classroom practice



through teacher education, curriculum design, and reflective pedagogy.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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