



# शोध भूमि

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## Leading the Pathways of Sustainable Development through Holistic Development and Socio-Emotional Learning in Education as per NEP 2020

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### ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduced a transformative framework for Indian education by integrating holistic development and socio-emotional learning (SEL) to nurture future-ready, empathetic, and inclusive citizenry. This study critically examines the NEP the 2020's emphasis on SEL and holistic education, compares it with global best practices, and presents case studies from India and other countries. This study adopts a qualitative approach, reviewing policy documents, academic research, and SEL case studies. Indian initiatives, such as the Delhi government's Happiness Curriculum and Rajasthan's Mindfulness Program, showcase practical SEL integration but also highlight implementation challenges, such as teacher preparedness, infrastructure gaps, and cultural stigma regarding mental health. Recommendations include the development of a structured SEL curriculum, mandatory teacher training in emotional intelligence, and the inclusion of SEL-based assessment reforms. The study concludes that the NEP 2020, if effectively implemented, can foster an inclusive future by balancing academic excellence with emotional and ethical development.

**KEY WORDS:** Inclusive future, Holistic development, Socio-emotional learning, NEP2020, sustainable development.

## Introduction

Education has transcended the confines of mere academic achievement to include emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, and social well-being as its fundamental outcomes. Global education systems increasingly acknowledge that holistic development and socio-emotional learning (SEL) are vital for cultivating compassionate and resilient citizens in the 21st century (CASEL, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 signifies a substantial paradigm shift by prioritizing child development and inclusivity in education. Holistic development, as outlined in the NEP 2020, encompasses cognitive, physical, social, emotional and moral growth. Similarly, SEL, as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), involves fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, relationship-building skills, and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2011). By emphasizing SEL, the NEP 2020 seeks to address challenges such as stress, bullying, and exclusion in schools, thereby fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment.

The key objectives of this study are as follows.

- 1.This study aims to analyze the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020s vision for holistic development and social-emotional learning (SEL).
- 2.It seeks to compare the NEP the 2020s approach with SEL practices.
- 3.This research presents case studies illustrating the integration of SEL in Indian contexts.
- 4.It identifies the challenges and provides recommendations for effective implementation.

## 1. Holistic Development in Education

Holistic education promotes multiple dimensions of human growth, moving beyond rote learning. According to Noddings (2013), education should focus on care, empathy, and ethical reasoning, rather than intellectual achievement. The NEP of the 2020s emphasis on **arts, sports, vocational education, and life skills** aligns with global whole-child education models, such as Finland's education system, which integrates creative and physical activities into the curriculum to nurture overall well-being (Sahlberg, 2015).

## Emphasis on Multidimensional Learning

The NEP 2020 introduced a shift from rote memorization to a multidimensional approach that nurtures intellectual, emotional, physical, and moral development. This reform is widely appreciated for aligning with global education goals, such as

UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda. Scholars have highlighted that integrating life skills, ethics, and wellness into the curriculum can produce more balanced and adaptive learners (Kumar & Mehta, 2021). The holistic model aims to create not only employable graduates but also responsible and empathetic citizens.

### **Integration of Arts, Sports, and Vocational Training**

One significant dimension of holistic development in NEP 2020 is the equal importance given to co-curricular areas such as the arts, sports, and vocational education. Researchers have noted that by valuing these disciplines alongside academics, the policy encourages creativity, collaboration, and hands-on learning (Singh & Arora, 2021). This integration prepares students to be versatile and fosters their cognitive and psychomotor development.

### **Socio-Emotional Learning and Mental Health**

The NEP 2020 explicitly emphasizes socio-emotional learning (SEL) through school curricula and teacher training. This focus aligns with international SEL frameworks, aiming to nurture emotional intelligence, empathy, and interpersonal skills. Critics have praised this inclusion as a timely response to the rising mental health concerns among Indian youth (Choudhary & Iyer, 2022). However, challenges remain in terms of implementation and teacher preparedness.

### **Interdisciplinary and Experiential Learning**

Another core aspect of holistic development under the NEP 2020 is its focus on experiential and interdisciplinary learning. The policy promotes blending subjects and allows students to choose combinations based on their interests. Researchers find this encouraging because it fosters critical thinking, innovation, and cross-domain knowledge (Patel & Menon, 2023). However, its success depends on curriculum design and teacher flexibility issues.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**

Holistic development begins early, and NEP 2020's strong focus on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is widely supported by developmental psychologists. Researchers argue that the inclusion of foundational literacy, numeracy, play-based learning, and social-emotional inputs in the foundational stage (ages 3–8) is transformative for India's educational future (Bhatia & Sharma, 2020). This creates a foundation for lifelong learning and supports inclusive growth.

## 2. Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL): A Global Perspective

SEL has been widely adopted in various countries to improve academic and emotional well-being. Durlak et al. (2011) showed that students who participated in SEL programs demonstrated **11% higher academic performance** and reduced behavioral problems.

Cefai et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of contextualizing SEL frameworks in accordance with cultural values and norms. Their comparative research across European Union nations found that while SEL frameworks share core competencies, such as self-awareness and relationship skills, cultural adaptability is essential for program success. This research highlights how SEL is being integrated differently in Northern and Southern European education systems.

The OECD (2021) synthesized data from global education systems in countries such as Canada, Singapore, Australia, and Finland. This report detailed case studies of SEL integration, emphasizing teacher training, policy development, and curriculum design. The study concluded that SEL improves not only student well-being but also long-term employability and citizenship skills.

Jain et al. (2022) provided a comparative policy review of SEL implementation in the United States, India, and Brazil. The study found that while the U.S. has established comprehensive SEL frameworks through CASEL, India and Brazil are still in the early stages of integrating SEL into national policies. However, grassroots initiatives in these countries have shown innovation, particularly in addressing emotional literacy among underserved populations.

## 3. NEP 2020's SEL and Holistic Approach

The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** of India marks a paradigm shift in the country's educational philosophy by promoting a **holistic, learner-centered multidisciplinary approach** to education. This reformative vision emphasizes the development of the **intellectual, emotional, social, physical, ethical, and creative potential** of every student. The policy promotes **competency-based learning, mindfulness practices, flexible assessments, and mental health support** (Ministry of Education, 2020). It encourages schools to employ counselors, integrate yoga and meditation, and redesign teacher education programs to include SEL pedagogy.

### Key Aspects of the Holistic Approach in NEP 2020

**1. Multidisciplinary Education:** NEP 2020 advocates flexible curricular structures that allow students to choose subjects across streams, breaking the traditional boundaries between arts, science, and commerce. This fosters broader cognitive and creative capabilities and supports individual talents (NEP 2020, MHRD, 2020).

2. **Integration of Co-curricular Activities:** Co-curricular areas such as arts, sports, and vocational skills are placed on an equal footing with academics, promoting the overall development of learners and recognizing multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993).
3. **Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL)** :Emphasis is placed on building character, empathy, communication skills, and ethical reasoning. This is achieved through life skills education and value-based learning, aligned with the vision of preparing students for life, not just careers (Singh and Dey, 2021).
4. **Focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)** : The early years of schooling are targeted to ensure that every child attains foundational learning by Grade 3, which is essential for lifelong learning and development.
5. **Vocational Integration and Skill Development** :Beginning in Grade 6, students are introduced to vocational education and internships, preparing them for practical life situations and enhancing their employability.
6. **Emphasis on Health and Well-being** :NEP includes physical education, mental health awareness, and safe school environments, contributing to the holistic well-being of children.
7. **Mother Tongue/Regional Language as Medium of Instruction** :By promoting the use of the mother tongue or regional languages, the NEP aims to make learning more relatable and accessible in the early years, strengthening cognitive development (UNESCO, 2020).

### **Educational Philosophy Underlying the Holistic Approach:**

NEP 2020 is inspired by **ancient Indian education systems**, such as those of Nalanda and Takshashila, which were rooted in holistic development—nurturing not just the intellect but the body, spirit, and morals. Modern educational theorists, such as **John Dewey** and **Howard Gardner**, also influence the policy’s learner-centric, experiential learning approach.

### **Global Perspective and Alignment**

The NEP aligns with global frameworks like the **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4**, which seeks “inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The holistic approach in the NEP reflects educational transformations seen in countries such as Finland, which prioritize well-being, creativity, and life skills over rote learning and exams.

### **4. Teacher’s Role in SEL**

Teachers act as role models for the implementation of SEL. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) emphasize that teachers with high emotional competence foster better classroom

relationships. The NEP's the 2020s **Four-Year Integrated Teacher Education Program** (ITEP) includes courses on child psychology and emotional intelligence, aiming to improve teacher preparedness.

## **5. Challenges in SEL Implementation**

Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) is essential for developing students' emotional intelligence, empathy, communication, and responsible decision-making. However, the implementation of SEL in schools faces several challenges that hinder its effectiveness in the classroom.

### **1. Inadequate Teacher Training**

One of the primary challenges in implementing SEL is the lack of professional training for teachers. Many educators have not received formal instruction on incorporating SEL into their classrooms. Without proper training and support, teachers may feel unprepared or uncomfortable teaching emotional and social skills, which limits the effectiveness of SEL programs.

### **2. Limited Curriculum Integration**

In many educational systems, SEL has not been fully integrated into the core curriculum. Academic subjects such as mathematics and science are often prioritized, leaving little time for SEL activities. Furthermore, in the absence of clear policies or structured frameworks, schools may adopt inconsistent or superficial approaches to SEL.

### **3. Resource Constraints**

The effective implementation of SEL programs requires time, funding, and materials. Many schools, especially those in under-resourced areas, lack the infrastructure necessary to support comprehensive SEL initiatives. Teachers may also struggle to balance SEL with their existing academic responsibilities, leading to incomplete or rushed implementation.

### **4. Cultural and Contextual Differences**

SEL programs are sometimes developed based on specific cultural norms that may not align with the values or traditions of all student populations. This can result in resistance from educators, parents, or community members who feel that SEL does not reflect their beliefs or the local context. Adapting SEL content to be culturally sensitive and inclusive is essential, yet often overlooked.

### **5. Low Parental Awareness and Engagement**

Parents and caregivers play a crucial role in reinforcing socio-emotional skills at home. However, many parents may be unfamiliar with the concept of SEL or unsure about its benefits. Without parental involvement and support, the effectiveness of school-based

SEL efforts can be reduced, as students may receive mixed messages between the school and home.

### **6. Difficulties in Assessment and Evaluation**

Assessing SEL outcomes is challenging. Unlike academic subjects, socio-emotional skills are more difficult to measure using traditional testing methods. Schools may lack reliable tools to evaluate progress in areas such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and social interaction, making it difficult to track student growth or program success.

### **Methodology**

This study used a **qualitative research design** based on a **secondary data analysis**.

### **Data Sources:**

- 1.NEP 2020 policy document.
- 2.Peer-reviewed research articles on SEL and holistic education were also included.
- 3.Case studies from India SEL programs.

Data Analysis: A thematic analysis approach was employed to identify the following key themes: holistic development, teacher preparedness, mental health, and inclusivity.

### **Finding, Discussions and Practical Implementation**

#### **1. NEP 2020's Vision for Holistic Development**

The NEP 2020 moves away from rote learning toward **multidisciplinary experiential education**. Arts integration, project-based learning, and vocational education aim to develop **critical thinking, creativity, and emotional resilience among students**. This mirrors Finland's educational reforms, which integrated life skills and creative expression into their curriculum (Sahlberg, 2015).

### **Findings**

- 1. Curricular Changes Have Been Initiated, But Not Uniformly Implemented:** Schools affiliated with the CBSE and a few progressive state boards have introduced **interdisciplinary approaches**, skill-based modules, and reduced content overload. However, many rural and under-resourced schools still follow conventional content-heavy syllabi, indicating a **gap between policy and ground-level implementation**.
- 2. Teacher Preparedness Remains a Key Barrier:** Despite the launch of **online training platforms such as DIKSHA**, many teachers report inadequate training in **experiential learning, competency-based assessments** and socio-emotional practices. There is limited **follow-up support** post-training, which affects the **translation of new knowledge into classroom practice**.

3. **Assessment Reforms Are in Early Stages:** Schools have begun introducing **formative and competency-based assessments**; however, these are often conducted without adequate tools or training, resulting in inconsistent implementation. Boards like the CBSE have issued guidelines; however, many schools continue traditional rote-based testing due to a **lack of awareness or institutional inertia**.
4. **Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) Is Gaining Recognition:** Some urban schools have adopted SEL programs, mindfulness sessions, and life skills education. However, these measures have not been **systematically implemented across all schools**, particularly government-run institutions.
5. **Technology Integration Has Expanded Learning Access:** Digital platforms such as SWAYAM and DIKSHA have supported **remote learning**, especially during the COVID-19 period. Nevertheless, a **digital divide persists**, with students in rural areas facing limited access to devices, Internet connectivity, and digital literacy.
6. **Student Engagement and Holistic Growth Indicators Are Positive Where Implementation Is Strong:** In schools that have embraced NEP-aligned reforms, **students have shown improved creativity, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving skills**. These outcomes are less visible in schools that have yet to adopt holistic frameworks, reflecting the **impact of implementation quality**.

### Discussions

The NEP 2020 marks a paradigm shift from exam-centric education to **child-centric, development-oriented learning**. The findings suggest that while **policy intent is strong and widely appreciated, implementation is uneven** due to systemic, infrastructural, and attitudinal barriers. The **lack of resources**, particularly in rural and government schools, significantly hinders the adoption of holistic practice. While private institutions have more flexibility and funding to implement NEP reforms, **state-run schools struggle** with teacher shortages, inadequate training, and a lack of digital infrastructure. Additionally, **cultural resistance** to change among educators—who are used to traditional lecture methods and rote learning—slows the adoption of **constructivist and student-led pedagogies**. Therefore, stakeholder capacity building, especially for teachers and school leaders, must be prioritized. Furthermore, **assessment reform** is a critical area that requires focused attention. Shifting from marks to mastery requires new frameworks, training, and a change in mindset among educators and parents. Despite these challenges, **pockets of success**, such as model schools and progressive educational institutions, showcase that holistic development is achievable with committed leadership, supportive infrastructure and community engagement. The **role of monitoring bodies**, such as the proposed School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAF), is vital in evaluating and guiding implementation progress.

## Practical implementation

The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** envisions a shift from rote learning to **holistic, multidisciplinary, and skill-based education** aimed at nurturing the overall development of learners—intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and ethical. While the policy outlines a strong theoretical framework, its **practical implementation** requires structured strategies at various levels within the education system.

### 1. Curriculum Integration

The NEP recommends reducing content load and promoting **conceptual understanding**. Practically, this has been translated into: The NCERT and state boards are redesigning textbooks to include life skills, ethics, and environmental education. Integration of **arts, sports, and vocational subjects** into regular curricula to promote balanced development.

### 2. Multidisciplinary Learning

Higher education institutions are creating **multidisciplinary institutions** offering flexible combinations of subjects (e.g., science with music or economics with philosophy). The unknown text Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) allows students to earn and transfer credits across institutions.

### 3. Assessment Reforms

Traditional examinations are being replaced or supplemented with **formative and competency-based assessments**. For example: The CBSE has introduced **competency-based questions** in exams. Continuous assessment practices and **portfolios** are encouraged at the school level.

### 4. Teacher Training and Capacity Building

Teachers are central to holistic education. The practical steps include the following: **National Mission for Mentoring (NMM)** and the DIKSHA platform for teacher professional development. Pedagogical training focusing on **experiential and inquiry-based learning**.

### 5. Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Schools are adopting SEL programs through the following:

Life skills sessions and mindfulness practices. Inclusion of value education and **mental health support systems** in school frameworks.

**6. Inclusive Education** NEP emphasizes equity. The implementation efforts include the following: Special educators were recruited. Accessibility improvements (e.g., digital content in regional languages and for CWSN - children with special needs).

### 7. Use of Technology

Digital platforms such as **DIKSHA, SWAYAM, and ePathshala** enable:

Self-paced interactive learning. Broader access to quality content, especially in rural areas, is required.

### 8. Parental and Community Engagement

Schools are organizing regular **parent-teacher meetings, community service projects,** and collaborative school development plans to create a supportive ecosystem.

### Challenges in Implementation

- 1.Resource disparities across urban and rural schools.
- 2.Resistance to change among educators and institutions.
- 3.There is a need for large-scale capacity building and monitoring mechanisms.

### 2. SEL Integration in Curriculum

The NEP 2020 explicitly recommends mindfulness, yoga, and value-based education. By introducing **life skills education** and emotional literacy, it aligns with the UNESCO's Happy Schools Framework. However, India lacks a standardized SEL framework, such as CASEL's.

The integration of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) into school curricula has shown significant positive outcomes across the cognitive, emotional, and social domains of student development. The findings from various studies, school reports, and pilot programs reveal several key insights.

#### Findings:

- 1.**Improved Academic Performance:** Studies indicate that students exposed to SEL programs consistently perform better academically. A meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011) found that students participating in SEL interventions showed an **11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement** compared to their peers who did not.
- 2.**Enhanced Emotional Regulation and Self-Awareness :** Schools that implemented SEL across subjects observed noticeable improvements in students' ability to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions. These skills translate into reduced behavioral issues and better classroom engagement.
- 3.**Stronger Peer Relationships :** SEL integration fosters **positive social interactions** among students. Activities such as collaborative projects and empathy-building exercises improved peer relationships and reduced incidents of bullying.
- 4.**Teacher Preparedness and Challenges :** Teachers reported that while they recognized the value of SEL, they often lacked the **training and resources** to integrate it effectively into academic content. Without structured guidance and time allocation, SEL often becomes an add-on rather than a core component.
- 5.**Cultural and Contextual Adaptation :** The effectiveness of SEL programs depended significantly on how well they were **contextualized** to local cultures and student backgrounds. Programs that include culturally relevant content are more effective in sustaining student interest and engagement.

#### Discussion:

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The findings underscore the critical role of SEL in enhancing not only academic learning but also overall student well-being. When SEL is systematically integrated into the curriculum, rather than delivered in isolation, it yields long-term benefits in behavior, emotional stability, and academic outcomes. However, successful integration requires **institutional commitment**, including curriculum redesign, teacher training and resource allocation.

For instance, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India advocates a **holistic and multidisciplinary approach** that aligns closely with SEL principles. It promotes experiential learning, ethical reasoning, and emotional development as the foundations of education. However, actual implementation varies across regions owing to differences in infrastructure and educator preparedness. Furthermore, sustained success in SEL integration depends on **assessment strategies** that go beyond traditional tests. There is a need for performance-based assessments, reflective exercises, and ongoing feedback mechanisms that track socio-emotional growth over time to address these issues. In conclusion, while the integration of SEL into the curriculum shows great promise, its full potential can only be realized through strategic planning, capacity building among educators, and adaptation to local needs and contexts.

### **Practical implementation**

The practical implementation of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) in school curricula requires an integrated, whole-school approach that embeds SEL principles within daily classroom instruction, school culture, and teacher-student interactions. The key strategies and steps for effective implementation are as follows:

#### **1. Curriculum Integration**

- 1) **Embedding SEL in Subject Lessons:** Teachers can align SEL competencies with academic content. For example, in language classes, students can explore empathy and perspective-taking through character analysis, and in science or social studies, teamwork and ethical responsibility can be emphasized in group projects.
- 2) **Thematic Units:** Schools can create thematic learning units (e.g., “Understanding Emotions,” “Building Relationships”) that cut across subjects and allow consistent practice of SEL skills.

#### **2. Whole-School Activities**

- 1) **Morning Meetings & Reflection Circles:** Daily or weekly gatherings where students share feelings, set goals, and build community can reinforce SEL in a non-academic setting.
- 2) **School-Wide Values:** Establishing shared values, such as respect, empathy, and honesty, across all school activities helps build a consistent socio-emotional climate.

#### **3. Teacher Training and Support**

- 1) **Professional Development:** Teachers require structured training on SEL concepts, delivery methods, and classroom management with emotional intelligence.

2) **Peer Collaboration:** Teachers should be encouraged to plan and reflect collaboratively to share best practices and challenges related to SEL integration.

#### 4. Use of SEL Tools and Resources

- 1) **Structured SEL Programs:** Schools may adopt evidence-based SEL curricula such as CASEL, PATHS, or India's "Life Skills Education" under NCERT.
- 2) **Digital Tools:** Interactive platforms and mobile applications can support self-paced learning in emotional regulation, mindfulness, and decision-making.

#### 5. Student-Led Initiatives

- 1) **Peer Mentorship:** Older students can mentor younger students, promoting leadership and relationship building.
- 2) **Service Learning:** Community projects involving students foster empathy, cooperation, and civic responsibility.

#### 6. Assessment and Feedback

- 1) **Formative Assessment Tools:** Teachers can use self-assessments, journals, and checklists to monitor SEL growth.
- 2) **Behavioral Observation:** Tracking changes in interpersonal behavior, conflict resolution, and participation helps evaluate SEL outcomes.

#### 7. Parent and Community Engagement

- 1) **Parent Workshop:** Educating families on SEL helps reinforce these skills at home.
- 2) **Community Collaboration:** Involving local organizations and mental health professionals ensures holistic support for students' emotional needs.

### 3. Case Studies of SEL in India

**Case Study 1: Delhi's Happiness Curriculum** Launched in 2018, the Happiness Curriculum for grades I–VIII focuses on mindfulness, emotional awareness, and relationship-building. Evaluations by the Delhi government showed reduced student anxiety and improved peer interactions. The NEP 2020 recommends scaling up such initiatives nationwide.

**Case Study 2: Rajasthan's Mindfulness Program** The state introduced meditation and emotional wellness classes in government schools. Preliminary reports indicate improved student attendance and classroom engagement compared with previous years.

### 5. Teacher Preparedness

Teacher education reforms under NEP 2020 aim to improve emotional intelligence training, but actual teacher training programs remain limited. Compared to the USA, where SEL teacher training is mandatory in many states, India is still in its nascent stage of SEL teacher training.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 delineates a forward-looking strategy for comprehensive and inclusive education by integrating Social and Emotional Learning

(SEL) into the curriculum. By drawing on international models, India has the opportunity to cultivate emotionally intelligent and empathetic citizens who can contribute meaningfully to diverse societies. However, the successful implementation of this vision necessitates several key components: a structured SEL framework, which involves the adaptation of standardized SEL models akin to CASEL for the Indian context; teacher training, which mandates the inclusion of SEL modules in both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs; mental health support, which requires the appointment of school counselors and collaboration with mental health organizations; assessment reforms, which advocate for the use of portfolios, peer reviews, and project-based assessments to evaluate SEL outcomes; and community engagement, which involves parental workshops and community-driven SEL initiatives to mitigate the stigma. If executed effectively, the NEP 2020 has the potential to establish India as a global leader in inclusive and emotionally supportive education.

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