

Original Article

Educational Values of the National Education Policy 2020: An Axiological Analysis

Pinki Rani¹ Dr. Bharti Kumari²

¹Research Scholar, IIMTU

²Assistant Professor IIMTU

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) represents a significant normative shift in Indian education by foregrounding educational values as central to teaching–learning processes and institutional culture. While much scholarly discourse has examined NEP 2020 from structural, curricular, and implementation perspectives, limited attention has been devoted to its axiological foundations. This review article critically analyses NEP 2020 through the lens of axiology, the philosophical study of values by examining how the policy conceptualizes ethical, moral, constitutional, cultural, and human values in education. Drawing upon Indian philosophical traditions, value theory, moral education literature, and Western educational thought, the paper explores how NEP 2020 positions values not as supplementary outcomes but as intrinsic aims of education. The analysis reveals that NEP 2020 advances a value-centered vision of education oriented toward human dignity, social responsibility, democratic citizenship, and holistic well-being. The paper argues that NEP 2020 constitutes a normative educational framework that redefines quality education in terms of ethical consciousness and value-based human development.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Educational Values, Axiology, Value Education, Moral Education, Holistic Development

Introduction

Educational policies are fundamentally normative documents that reflect societal priorities, moral commitments, and visions of the good life (Carr, 2003; Biesta, 2010). Axiology, as a branch of philosophy concerned with values and value judgments, provides a critical framework for analysing educational aims, curricular priorities, and pedagogical orientations (Kneller, 1971). In this context, the National Education Policy 2020 marks a paradigmatic shift in Indian education by explicitly embedding values such as ethics, equity, social justice, respect for diversity, and human dignity within its vision (Government of India, 2020).

Unlike earlier education policies that largely emphasized access, expansion, and employability, NEP 2020 redefines education as a process of value formation and responsible citizenship (Ministry of Education, 2020). Indian educational thinkers such as Gandhi (1953), Tagore (1917), Vivekananda (1963), and Aurobindo (1998) consistently emphasized that education devoid of values leads to social imbalance and moral erosion. Similarly, Western philosophers including Dewey (1938), Peters (1966), and Noddings (2002) argued that education inevitably involves moral judgment and value transmission.

Against this backdrop, the present review examines NEP 2020 as an axiological document that articulates a coherent framework of educational values aimed at individual flourishing and social harmony.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyse the educational values embedded in NEP 2020 from an axiological perspective.
2. To identify the ethical, moral, constitutional, and human values emphasized in NEP 2020.

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Address for correspondence:

Pinki Rani, Research Scholar, IIMTU

Email: pinkisingh6532@gmail.com

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3. To examine the philosophical foundations of value education reflected in the policy.
4. To assess how NEP 2020 integrates value education with holistic human development.

Methodology and Review Protocol

1. Nature of the Study

This study adopts a **qualitative, conceptual, and analytical review methodology**, appropriate for philosophical and policy-oriented research in education (Carr, 2003). The analysis is interpretive and normative in nature, focusing on value assumptions rather than empirical measurement.

2. Sources of Data

The review draws upon:

- The official **NEP 2020 policy documents** (Government of India, 2020),
- Classical Indian writings on education and values (Gandhi, 1953; Vivekananda, 1963; Tagore, 1917),
- Western literature on axiology, moral education, and educational values (Peters, 1966; Dewey, 1938; Noddings, 2002),
- Contemporary scholarship on value-based and holistic education (Biesta, 2010; Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Lovat, 2011).

3. Review Protocol

Sources were selected based on relevance to:

- Educational values and moral education,
 - Normative and axiological dimensions of education,
 - Policy-oriented educational philosophy.
- Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring value categories such as ethical responsibility, social justice, human dignity, and democratic citizenship.

Axiology and Education: Conceptual and Philosophical Framework

Axiology, as a branch of philosophy, deals with the nature, origin, and justification of values, encompassing both ethics (moral values) and aesthetics (values of beauty and creativity) (Kneller, 1971; Frankena, 1973). In educational philosophy, axiology plays a foundational role in determining the aims of education, curricular priorities, and pedagogical orientations. Education, by its very nature, involves value judgments regarding what knowledge is worthwhile, what dispositions should be cultivated, and what kind of human beings society seeks to nurture (Peters, 1966; Carr, 2003).

Philosophers of education have consistently rejected the notion of value-neutral education. Dewey (1938) argued that all educational experiences carry implicit values, as they shape habits, attitudes, and modes of social participation. Similarly, Scheffler (1973) emphasized that curriculum selection inevitably reflects normative

assumptions about truth, goodness, and social responsibility. From an axiological standpoint, education is not merely a technical process of skill acquisition but a moral and cultural enterprise.

NEP 2020 reflects this axiological understanding by explicitly articulating values such as ethical reasoning, empathy, respect for diversity, constitutional morality, and environmental responsibility (Government of India, 2020). The policy situates values at the heart of education rather than treating them as peripheral or supplementary. This represents a significant normative shift from earlier policy frameworks that prioritized economic productivity and human capital development over ethical and moral formation (Tilak, 2016).

Furthermore, axiology provides a lens to interpret education as a means of value internalization rather than value imposition. Halstead and Taylor (2000) argue that authentic value education involves reflective engagement, dialogue, and lived practice. NEP 2020's emphasis on experiential learning, discussion-based pedagogy, and community engagement reflects this axiological orientation, suggesting that values are to be cultivated through meaningful participation in social and moral life.

Educational Values as Normative Aims of NEP 2020

NEP 2020 defines the purpose of education in explicitly normative terms, emphasizing the development of ethical, responsible, compassionate, and socially conscious individuals (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy foregrounds values such as truthfulness, integrity, cooperation, respect for diversity, and democratic citizenship, aligning education with broader societal and constitutional ideals.

From an axiological perspective, these values function as **intrinsic aims** of education rather than instrumental means to economic outcomes. Peters (1966) argued that education must be oriented toward worthwhile forms of life, not merely utility. NEP 2020 resonates with this argument by redefining "quality education" as education that nurtures moral character, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility.

The policy's focus on constitutional values—justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, positions education as a key institution for sustaining democratic culture (Government of India, 2020). This aligns with Dewey's (1916/2004) view of education as the foundation of democracy, where schools function as moral communities fostering shared values and participatory habits.

Additionally, NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusivity, equity, and respect for marginalized groups, reflecting an axiological commitment to social justice. Sen (1999) argues that education must expand human capabilities and freedoms, particularly for disadvantaged populations. NEP 2020's focus on universal access, gender equity, and inclusive education can thus be interpreted as expressions of a capability-based value framework.

Indian Philosophical Foundations of Educational Values

1. Gandhian Ethics and Moral Education

Gandhi's philosophy of education was fundamentally axiological, rooted in the values of truth (*satya*), non-violence (*ahimsa*), self-reliance, and social service (Gandhi, 1953). He viewed education as a process of character formation rather than mere intellectual training. Nai Talim emphasized the unity of knowledge, work, and ethics, rejecting the separation of moral values from everyday life. NEP 2020 reflects Gandhian axiology through its emphasis on experiential learning, vocational education, dignity of labour, and community engagement (Government of India, 2020). These elements suggest that values are to be cultivated through meaningful work and social responsibility rather than abstract moral instruction.

2. Vivekananda and Value Realization

Swami Vivekananda's educational philosophy centered on the development of strength of character, moral courage, and service to humanity (Vivekananda, 1963). He believed that education should awaken inner values and self-confidence, enabling individuals to contribute positively to society.

NEP 2020 echoes this vision by emphasizing leadership, ethical reasoning, resilience, and emotional well-being. From an axiological standpoint, this reflects the belief that values are inherent potentials to be realized through appropriate educational environments rather than externally imposed norms.

3. Tagorean Humanism and Cultural Values

Rabindranath Tagore viewed education as the cultivation of humanity through freedom, creativity, and harmony with nature (Tagore, 1917). His emphasis on aesthetic values, cultural rootedness, and universal humanism represents a holistic axiological framework.

NEP 2020's promotion of arts education, multilingualism, cultural heritage, and creativity reflects Tagore's value-oriented humanism. The policy recognizes that cultural and aesthetic values play a vital role in human

development and social cohesion (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Western Perspectives on Axiology, Moral Education, and Schooling

Western philosophy of education has extensively explored the relationship between education and values. Dewey (1938) emphasized that values emerge through reflective experience and social interaction, rather than authoritarian transmission. His pragmatic axiology views moral education as a continuous process of inquiry and growth.

Peters (1966) argued that education inherently involves moral initiation into socially valued practices, making value education unavoidable. Similarly, Kohlberg (1981)¹⁴ conceptualized moral development as a stage-based process facilitated by moral reasoning and democratic school environments.

Nel Noddings (2002) introduced the ethics of care as a foundational educational value, emphasizing empathy, relational responsibility, and emotional engagement. NEP 2020's focus on student well-being, mental health, and teacher-student relationships reflects this care-based axiological orientation.

Biesta (2010) further argues that education must balance qualification, socialization, and subjectification. NEP 2020 aligns with this framework by integrating skill development, value formation, and personal agency, thereby reflecting a comprehensive axiological vision.

Value Education, Human Flourishing, and Ethical Citizenship

NEP 2020 conceptualizes education as a means of promoting **human flourishing**, understood as the balanced development of intellectual, moral, emotional, and social capacities (Government of India, 2020). This aligns with Aristotelian axiology, which views education as central to cultivating virtue and well-being (*eudaimonia*) (Curren, 2010).

Value education in NEP 2020 emphasizes empathy, cooperation, environmental consciousness, and global citizenship. Lovat (2011) argues that values education contributes to improved well-being, social trust, and ethical behavior, supporting the policy's holistic vision.

The policy also foregrounds environmental values and sustainability, reflecting a growing recognition of ecological ethics in education (Sterling, 2001). By integrating environmental awareness into curricula, NEP 2020 acknowledges the moral responsibility of education toward future generations.

From an axiological perspective, these values reflect an understanding of education as a moral practice aimed at nurturing ethically responsible and socially engaged citizens rather than merely economically productive individuals.

Institutional and Pedagogical Challenges in Implementing Value-Based Education

Despite its strong axiological foundations, NEP 2020 faces significant challenges in implementation. One major challenge lies in teacher preparedness. Effective value education requires teachers to possess ethical sensitivity, reflective capacity, and philosophical understanding (Carr, 2003). However, teacher education programs often prioritize technical competencies over moral and ethical development.

Another challenge is the assessment of values. Reducing values to measurable indicators risks superficiality and instrumentalization (Biesta, 2010). Values such as empathy, integrity, and social responsibility are best assessed through qualitative, reflective, and formative approaches rather than standardized testing.

Institutional culture also plays a critical role. Halstead and Taylor (2000) emphasize that value education must be embedded in the ethos of schools and universities. Without supportive institutional practices, curricular emphasis on values may remain rhetorical rather than transformative.

Conclusion

This axiological review demonstrates that the National Education Policy 2020 represents a normative reorientation of Indian education grounded in a rich framework of educational values. Drawing upon Indian philosophical traditions and global scholarship on moral and value education, NEP 2020 conceptualizes education as an ethical and humanistic enterprise aimed at holistic development, democratic citizenship, and social responsibility.

Educational values in NEP 2020 are not peripheral aspirations but foundational principles that shape curricular design, pedagogy, and institutional purpose. By integrating ethical reasoning, cultural values, environmental responsibility, and human dignity into its vision, the policy redefines quality education in normative terms. The successful realization of this vision depends on reflective pedagogy, value-oriented teacher education, and institutional commitment to ethical practice. Future research should explore how these axiological principles can be meaningfully translated into classroom practices and educational leadership.

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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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