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## Reimagining Education through Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approaches: Insights from NEP 2020

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### Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 signifies a transformative shift in India's educational framework by emphasizing multidisciplinary and holistic learning. This paper examines the new paradigms introduced under NEP 2020, exploring the benefits, challenges, and strategies of embracing a holistic and multidisciplinary approach in the education system. In this study, an in-depth literature review method of qualitative research was used to collect data from various secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed academic journals, books, and reliable websites, etc. The data was collected from various databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, PubMed, JSTOR, etc. The study finds that holistic and multidisciplinary education under NEP 2020 enhances overall student development and promotes critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It improves learner engagement through flexible curricula and experiential learning approaches. However, significant challenges such as institutional rigidity, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate teacher training persist. Resistance to change and socio-economic disparities further limit effective implementation. The study highlights that targeted reforms and strong policy execution are essential for achieving the desired educational transformation.

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### Introduction

Holistic and multidisciplinary education has emerged as a transformative approach to teaching and learning, focusing on developing well-rounded individuals with the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical skills required to succeed in a rapidly changing and interconnected world (Tiwari, 2025) <sup>[19]</sup>. The National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 emphasizes holistic and multidisciplinary education to equip students with 21st-century skills (Jasani, 2024) <sup>[5]</sup>. According to NEP-2020, "Holistic and multidisciplinary education will focus on the integrated development of all human capacities, such as intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral." The concept of holistic education in NEP-2020 is not limited to achieving academic success alone, as it also encompasses the cognitive, emotional, psychomotor, social, and spiritual dimensions of human development (Kumar, 2021) <sup>[7]</sup>. The holistic learning process aims at achieving an all-round development of an individual in terms of intelligence, emotions, body, and social skills. The objective is to produce balanced individuals who not only have academic expertise but can also adjust themselves to different environments in their lives. On the contrary, multidisciplinary education seeks to combine various subjects to provide a broader perspective about complicated issues. In essence, it helps learners relate different subjects to each other and formulate new solutions to practical problems (Bashir & Wani, 2022) <sup>[3]</sup>.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the concept of holistic and multidisciplinary education in the context of NEP 2020, examine its advantages and disadvantages, and suggest ways to make its implementation successful. It is hoped that some useful conclusions can be reached through the literature review, which will further the discussion on the changes that can be brought about in the education sector in India through NEP 2020.

### Holistic Approach

According to NEP 2020, holistic education is defined as a system where the intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional and moral potentials of a student are developed in an integrated manner (Ministry of Education, 2020) <sup>[9]</sup>. It is derived from ancient Eastern philosophy and modern educational psychology. Along with conventional education, it includes character building, life skills, values, ethics and constitutional values. It presents a holistic view of human development (Joshi, 2023) <sup>[6]</sup>. Holistic education brings a complete paradigm shift from the conventional education system, where the focus was on cognitive development, and in the current system, individuals are prepared for their overall development and their contribution to the development of society. Holistic education is expected to prepare students with a broad and interrelated view of the world. Since the problems of the modern world are multifaceted and require a multidisciplinary approach to address them, the holistic education curriculum will be balanced and include a variety of subjects/disciplines that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Nandeshwar, 2023) <sup>[12]</sup>. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is also applicable in this context, as this principle supports the development of linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalistic intelligence. This principle is based on a shift from subject-based fragmented learning to integrated learning, which is more representative of the real world (Agarwal, 2022) <sup>[11]</sup>. In addition, the overall vision of NEP 2020 includes experiential learning, critical thinking, creativity, moral reasoning, and a sense of social responsibility.

### Multidisciplinary Approach

The concept of interdisciplinary learning, which is one of the fundamental pillars of NEP 2020, enables students to make connections between different academic subjects and develop an integrated perspective by transcending the rigid boundaries that exist between different disciplines (Mishra & Panda, 2021) <sup>[10]</sup>. Interdisciplinary learning can be practiced using numerous entry and exit paths, credit-based systems, and flexible combinations of subjects in the undergraduate curriculum (Gupta & Singh, 2023) <sup>[4]</sup>. Students are free to create their own learning paths based on their personal preferences and professional goals, without being confined to predetermined disciplinary boundaries (Gupta & Singh, 2023) <sup>[4]</sup>. Interdisciplinary learning encourages interdisciplinary exploration among students, which aims to

develop a holistic view of the world and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Nandeshwar, 2023) <sup>[12]</sup>. The importance of multidisciplinary education lies in the fact that it enables students to cope with an increasingly interconnected world

and succeed in their chosen professions by integrating information from different disciplines. Current issues such as climate change, health issues, the impact of technology, and social justice are such that they can be addressed through a collaborative process involving experts from different fields of knowledge. NEP 2020 seeks to achieve this goal by emphasizing multidisciplinary education, starting from the school level (Mishra & Panda, 2021) <sup>[10]</sup>.

### Objectives

1. To explore the benefits of reimagining education through a holistic and multidisciplinary approach drawing on insights from NEP 2020.
2. To understand the barriers of reimagining education through a holistic and multidisciplinary approach drawing on insights from NEP 2020.
3. To Identify Strategies for Reimagining Education through a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach Drawing on Insights from NEP 2020

### Methodology

**Method and Approach of the Study:** The current study uses a qualitative research method to explore the concepts of holistic and multidisciplinary education in light of the NEP 2020. According to previous research, a qualitative research method can be considered appropriate in this particular case, as it is designed to help better understand issues such as educational transformation, its concepts, perspectives, and recent trends. In general, the researcher will interpret and analyze the available knowledge to better understand it. The main method used in the current study can be described as a literature review. This means that the current analysis will be based mainly on existing scholarly work related to the topic of holistic development and multidisciplinary approaches in education.

**Sources of Data Collection:** The data for this study were collected from various secondary sources, so that the collected data is credible and reliable. The primary sources are:

- Scopus indexed Journals
- Peer-reviewed journals
- Google Scholar
- IEEE Explore
- Science Direct

These sources were chosen because they provide high institutional quality and diverse research across disciplines. The inclusion of Scopus and peer-reviewed journals helps to ensure the credibility of the institutional literature used in this study.

**Search Strategy and Keywords:** A systematic search strategy was employed to identify relevant literature. The

study utilized specific keywords to locate scholarly articles and research papers related to the topic. The major keywords used in the search process include:

- “Holistic development in education”
- “Multidisciplinary approach in education”
- “Benefits of holistic and multidisciplinary education”
- “National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)”
- “Challenges of holistic and multidisciplinary education”

**Data Analysis Procedure:** Data was collected through thematic analysis. This process included:

- Selected literature reading and analysis
- Emerging themes and concepts
- Categorizing the findings under three main headings, namely—benefits, constraints, and strategies.

Through the thematic analysis, it was possible to synthesize different perspectives to provide an overall picture of holistic and multidisciplinary education within the NEP 2020 framework.

**Ethical Considerations:** Since the study relied solely on secondary data, it did not involve any human participants. All aspects of ethics were followed, as all sources used were properly cited according to APA 7th edition guidelines.

## Discussion and Finding

### Objective 1: The Benefits of Reimagining Education through a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach Drawing on Insights from NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark policy that aims to transform the Indian education system to meet the needs of the 21st century. The main contribution of the NEP is its emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary education, which seeks to move away from the traditional rote-based education system and towards a more integrated learning experience. There are many benefits to rethinking education from this perspective.

- **Promotion of All-Round Development:** The greatest strength of holistic education is the overall development of students. While the conventional education system focuses more on the intellectual development of students, holistic education encompasses all four dimensions- emotional, social, physical, and moral. Such an approach ensures that children grow up as well-rounded individuals capable of handling both personal and professional challenges. Research has shown that the curriculum under the National Education Policy 2020 encourages a combination of cognitive, social, emotional, and moral dimensions, which helps in building a well-rounded personality (Sharma *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[17]</sup>. In addition, holistic education plays an important role in developing life skills such as tolerance, cooperation, and communication (Prabu, 2025) <sup>[14]</sup>.
- **Enhancement of Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills:** Interdisciplinary education encourages students to find connections between different disciplines, which improves their reasoning skills.

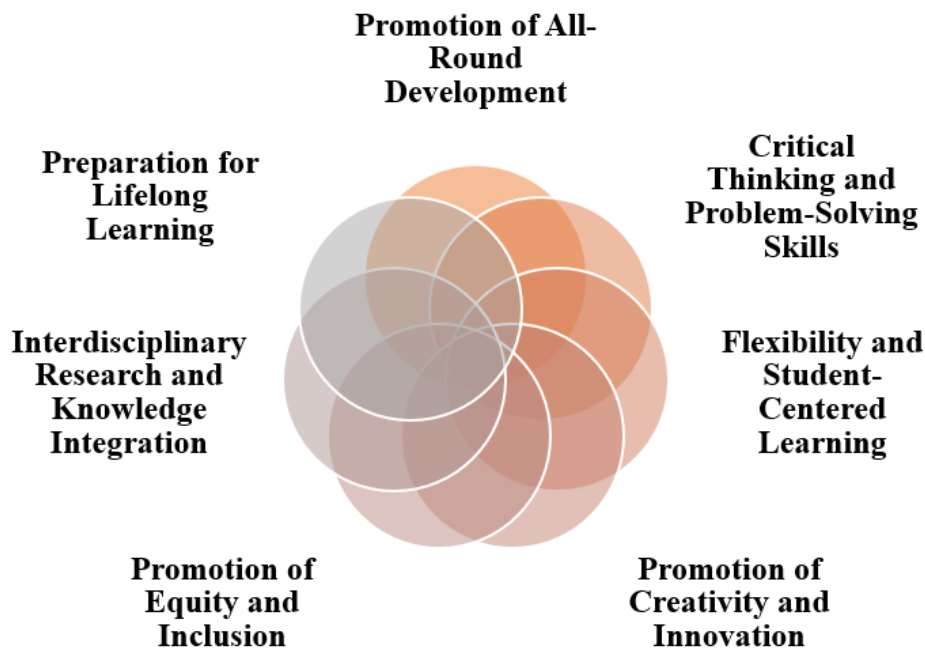
The difference between isolated and interdisciplinary education is that students can think about difficult situations from different perspectives. Interdisciplinary education encourages collaboration, communication, and analytical skills through different sources of knowledge (Bashir & Wani, 2022)<sup>[3]</sup>. This is helpful in addressing contemporary issues such as climate change, pandemics, and technology. Furthermore, NEP 2020 emphasizes research-based and practical learning, where students ask questions and come up with new innovations.

- **Flexibility and Student-Centered Learning:** NEP 2020 has brought a radical change in the curriculum in terms of flexibility in subject selection, where students are given the freedom to choose subjects from multiple streams. As a result, there are no rigid rules in separating streams like science, arts and commerce. It is through such flexibility that it is possible for students to receive education according to their needs. Numerous studies have shown that flexibility in the curriculum helps students to be more adaptable and focused, which has a positive impact on their academic performance and satisfaction (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup>.
- **Promotion of Creativity and Innovation:** A holistic and multidisciplinary approach is essential for creativity and innovation. By bringing together students from different disciplines and encouraging an inquisitive spirit, education serves as a medium for generating ideas and being creative. According to the NEP 2020, innovation is encouraged through research-based education, conducting interdisciplinary activities, and setting up innovation centers in educational institutions. Researchers have noted that the above strategy encourages creativity and helps students find innovative solutions to real-world problems (Sharma *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[17]</sup>.
- **Promotion of Equity and Inclusion:** Inclusive education is aware of the diversity of learners and strives to provide an inclusive learning environment for them. Inclusive education recognizes that students have diverse learning styles, socio-economic status, abilities, and interests. Through flexibility and individualization, NEP 2020 helps promote equity in education (Ministry of Education, 2020) <sup>[9]</sup>. Interdisciplinary education eliminates institutional hierarchies and gives equal importance to all subjects. Inclusive education promotes social cohesion and harmony among students, which in turn increases equity in society (Sarkar and Dave, 2024) <sup>[15]</sup>.
- **Interdisciplinary Research and Knowledge Integration:** Multidisciplinary learning improves the capacity to do research through the process of integrating information from various fields of knowledge. As NEP 2020 aims at creating multidisciplinary universities and research institutions, it eliminates the concept of siloing, a common phenomenon that isolates various academic

disciplines (Prabu, 2025) <sup>[14]</sup>. It is important to integrate knowledge to solve various global issues like sustainability, health emergencies, and innovations in technology, which call for integrated approaches to solutions. According to research findings, knowledge integration is necessary in tackling global issues (Tamrakar *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[18]</sup>.

- **Preparation for Lifelong Learning:** Multidisciplinary and holistic education helps to build a culture of lifelong learning. In today's changing environment, it is essential for an individual to constantly update their knowledge and skills. The emphasis of NEP 2020 on flexible learning pathways and credit transfer contributes to achieving this goal (Ministry of Education, 2020) <sup>[9]</sup>

## Benefits to Reimagining Education through a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach



**Fig 1:** Benefits to Reimagining Education through a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach Drawing on Insights from NEP 2020)

The National Education Policy 2020 plans to restructure India's education system to include holistic education in the 21st century. Some of its key features are emphasis on holistic education, development of critical thinking among students, flexibility in curriculum formulation, and development of creative and innovative ideas. The policy creates a holistic environment and recognizes the diverse needs of students. It also encourages interdisciplinary research and prepares individuals for lifelong learning, asserting that holistic knowledge is essential to address global challenges. According to the National Education Policy 2020, there should be a personalized education approach, which will require continuous development of skills in light of changing times.

### Objectives 2: The Barriers of Reimagining Education through a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach Drawing on Insights from NEP 2020

NEP 2020 is an evolving policy vision that seeks to revolutionize India's education system through holistic and multidisciplinary education. It aims to move away from the traditional education system that is rigidly structured according to various disciplines and subjects and towards a new system that adopts an integrated and holistic approach. These limitations are

- **Institutional and Structural Rigidity:** One of the major obstacles to adopting a holistic and multidisciplinary education system is the rigidity of the education system. Most higher education institutions in India are characterized by departmentalization, resulting in minimal interaction between different departments. Such departmentalization hinders any interdisciplinary collaboration and integration of ideas. The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of multidisciplinary universities, flexible curricula, and other reforms; however, the process of transforming the current structure into the proposed one requires extensive changes in administrative, curricular, and institutional arrangements, for which many institutions are unprepared (Nagamani *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[11]</sup>.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure and Financial Constraints:** Holistic and multidisciplinary learning can be facilitated through strong infrastructure, which includes well-equipped classrooms, laboratories, technology and collaborative learning areas. Due to their rural and semi-urban locations, many institutions lack adequate infrastructure. Lack of finance is another major constraint that prevents institutions from implementing creative teaching methods such as hands-on learning and

project-based learning. Financing is the main constraint in implementing NEP 2020 (Azam *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[2]</sup>.

- Shortage of Skilled and Trained Faculty:** A holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education requires teachers who are able to integrate information from different disciplines and provide student-centered learning. However, most teachers are experts in specific fields of study and may not be familiar with interdisciplinary teaching techniques. Moreover, there is no teacher training program to prepare teachers to use modern techniques such as experiential learning, project-based learning, and inquiry-based learning. This lack of preparation of teachers greatly affects the implementation of NEP 2020 (Tamrakar *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[18]</sup>.
  - Resistance to Change among Stakeholders:** Resistance to change can be considered another socio-cultural barrier to educational reform. Teachers, students, parents, and educators may have already adapted to traditional teaching methods that emphasize rote and test-based teaching. However, the introduction of a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach may seem intimidating, ambiguous, and difficult. Fear of overload, confusion, and reluctance to deviate from the current model are reasons for resistance to reform efforts (Azam *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[2]</sup>.
  - Curriculum Design Challenges:** Developing a curriculum that encompasses multiple subjects while maintaining institutional rigor is not an easy process. Current curricula are generally rigid, knowledge-centric, and theory-heavy. There is a need for a flexible curriculum in holistic education that will allow students to study multiple subjects. The problem arises from the lack of a framework within which such a curriculum can be developed. Institutions face the challenge of finding a balance between depth and breadth of knowledge integration (Sharma *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[17]</sup>.
  - Limitations of Assessment and Evaluation Systems:** The assessment methods adopted in India are predominantly test-based and emphasize rote learning rather than skill acquisition. Holistic and interdisciplinary education requires assessment processes that can measure the ability to think critically, innovate, collaborate, and solve problems. Unfortunately, there are no suitable instruments available to assess these qualities. This mismatch
- between learning outcomes and assessment methods poses a significant obstacle to implementing the recommendations of NEP 2020 Tamrakar *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[18]</sup>.
- Socio-Economic and Regional Disparities:** Socio-economic inequality in India poses a serious obstacle to inclusive education. Students from economically weaker sections are deprived of good education, appropriate technological equipment and learning opportunities. In the case of rural institutions, there are some additional obstacles, which include poor infrastructure, lack of skilled instructors and lack of familiarity with new age teaching methods (Azam *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[2]</sup>.
  - Language and Cultural Barriers:** The NEP 2020 encourages the adoption of regional languages as a medium of instruction alongside multilingual education. While such an approach contributes to inclusion, there are several obstacles to its implementation. The lack of adequate teaching materials in different languages and the shortage of teachers skilled in regional languages further complicate the issue. Moreover, ensuring uniformity in interdisciplinary knowledge across different linguistic backgrounds is a challenge, especially at the higher education level (Azam *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[2]</sup>.
  - Lack of Awareness and Stakeholder Engagement:** One of the major obstacles to the implementation of NEP 2020 is the lack of awareness among stakeholders about its policies and benefits. Many teachers, students, and parents are unaware of the content of NEP 2020, which is leading to misunderstandings. The implementation of NEP 2020 will require the cooperation of all stakeholders (Nagamani *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[11]</sup>.
  - Challenges in Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Collaboration across disciplines is essential for multidisciplinary learning. However, institutional fragmentation, hierarchical structures of learning, and different teaching methods pose major barriers to effective collaboration. It can be difficult for educators to coordinate interdisciplinary activities amid increased workload and limited incentive structures. Institutional commitment and the adoption of a collaborative learning culture may be the path forward (Tamrakar *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[18]</sup>.



**Fig 2:** The Barriers of Reimagining Education through a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach Drawing on Insights from NEP 2020)

NEP 2020 is designed to bring about a revolutionary change in the Indian education system through the practice of holistic and interdisciplinary education. The major obstacles to bringing about such a revolutionary change in the Indian education system are institutional rigidity, inadequate facilities, lack of qualified teachers, reluctance to change, difficulty in curriculum formulation, limited assessment methods, socio-economic differences, language barriers, lack of awareness and restrictions on interdisciplinary interaction. The rigid structure of educational institutions, financial constraints, traditional teaching methods and examination-based assessment system make it difficult to incorporate new strategies in teaching and learning. The successful implementation of NEP 2020 requires stakeholder involvement and flexible curriculum and assessment methods as well as thorough reforms in the system.

### Objectives 3: To Identify Strategies for Reimagining Education through a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach Drawing on Insights from NEP 2020

Reimagining the concept of education through a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, as proposed in the NEP 2020, requires the implementation of multiple strategies that will address the current problems of the education system with the aim of providing an innovative and adaptable learning process.

- **Institutional Restructuring and Policy Alignment:** One of the main strategies that can be considered for integrating holistic education in the education system is the restructuring of higher education institutions. According to the NEP 2020, there is a need to transform from subject-based universities to multidisciplinary universities and autonomous colleges. It is important to

design the administrative structure of the institutions in such a way that easy collaboration between different departments is possible. There is also a need for coordination between the central government and the state governments in policy formulation (Pal *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[13]</sup>.

- **Curriculum Reform and Flexibility:** Curriculum transformation is essential for holistic education. Educational institutions should have curricula that are flexible, modular and competency-based, allowing students to choose from a variety of courses across a range of study areas. Credit-based curricula such as the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) will enable students to earn and transfer credits from one institution to another. Such curricula will encourage students' holistic development by providing them with opportunities to gain experience, develop skills and learn values through their learning process (Saxena, 2023) <sup>[16]</sup>.
- **Strengthening Infrastructure and Digital Ecosystems:** Effective infrastructure is essential for the promotion of holistic education. Educational institutions need to develop infrastructure such as well-equipped classrooms, laboratories, libraries and digital facilities, which can facilitate interdisciplinary learning. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can encourage the effective use of digital facilities for the use of various types of teaching materials. ICT will also be helpful in the promotion of blended learning environments. Digital divide can also be addressed with the help of ICT by equipping students with digital skills and technology (Azam *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[2]</sup>.

- **Promoting Experiential and Skill-Based Learning:** Experiential learning is one of the main pillars of holistic education. Educational institutions can adopt experiential learning methods such as project-based learning, internships, field research and community service. Vocational education can also be included in the curriculum to help students acquire the necessary skills. According to NEP 2020, it is recommended to include skill-based courses that will be beneficial for the future of students in the industrial sector (Saxena, 2023) <sup>[16]</sup>.
- **Promoting Multilingual and Inclusive Education:** The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of multilingualism in education to improve educational outcomes and inclusion. Teaching materials should be prepared in regional languages and teachers should be trained to teach in different languages. The use of technology can be helpful in translating and preparing content. Inclusive measures must also be considered, keeping in mind different learning abilities, such as differently abled students (Ministry of Education, 2020) <sup>[9]</sup>.
- **Increasing Investment in Education:** There should be adequate allocation of funds to ensure that the recommendations of NEP 2020 can be successfully implemented. The government should increase spending on education and allocate more than 6 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to education, as stipulated in the NEP guidelines (Pal *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[13]</sup>. Funds should be allocated for infrastructure development, teacher development, research and digitalization.

Strategic reforms at all levels of education are essential to achieve the holistic and multidisciplinary education system outlined in the NEP 2020. Strategies that will make this move possible include: restructuring institutions for interdisciplinary studies, implementing flexible and modular curricula, developing physical and digital infrastructure, expanding experiential and skill-based learning, supporting multilingual and inclusive education, and investing in education, which should be increased to 6 percent of GDP. The aim is to ensure a flexible and inclusive education framework that will remove current bottlenecks in the education sector.

### Conclusion

The present study highlights that the concept of holistic and multidisciplinary education as per NEP 2020 can be considered as a paradigm shift in the Indian education sector. Going beyond the conventional concept of specialization and rote learning, this new policy emphasizes on developing a holistic personality who has cognitive, emotional, social and practical skills. According to the study findings, holistic and multidisciplinary education approach not only develops the above-mentioned skills but also enhances critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and engagement. As a result, students become prepared for life in the modern world. At the same time, there are some obstacles in the way of implementing this approach. Institutional conservatism, poor facilities, shortage of teachers and reluctance to change are some examples. The way to overcome the above-mentioned

problems is to adopt a strategic approach to implementing the NEP 2020, which includes curriculum reform, teacher training, infrastructure development, etc. In order to achieve the goals, set out in this policy, collaboration between different disciplines, emphasis on practical experience, and equal access to high-quality education for all are key elements. Finally, it should be emphasized that although the NEP 2020 is an excellent document, its implementation will require continuous work. Nevertheless, the successful implementation of this policy will make it possible to build a new educational paradigm based on a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to education.

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