

Integrating Multidisciplinary Pedagogies in Media Education: A NEP 2020 Framework for Fostering Critical Thinking and Digital Ethics

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Abstract: *The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 symbols a significant change in India's higher education setting by encouraging all-inclusive, multidisciplinary, and flexible learning frameworks. Media education takes on crucial importance in this perspective since it directly influences how upcoming journalists, communicators, and content producers perceive and impact society. This study explores how diverse pedagogies that are in line with NEP 2020 might change media education to promote digital ethics and critical thinking, two crucial skills. Based on international research, constructivist and interdisciplinary learning theoretical frameworks, and policy analyses, the study investigates how media curricula might be improved by integrating knowledge from sociology, psychology, law, political science, and technology.*

The study also identifies implementation-related issues such student flexibility, infrastructure limitations, and teacher readiness. Practical foundation is provided by case studies of Indian universities implementing NEP-inspired changes. The results imply that interdisciplinary integration fosters ethical responsibility in negotiating the difficulties of disinformation, digital manipulation, and algorithmic media in addition to giving students more acute analytical skills. In the end, the study makes the case that adopting NEP 2020's transdisciplinary ethos in media education is crucial to producing socially conscious media workers who can help create an informed and democratic digital society.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Media Education, Multidisciplinary Pedagogy, Critical Thinking, Digital Ethics, Higher Education

I. INTRODUCTION

With media at the intersection of politics, culture, and technology, people's perceptions of the world and themselves are now greatly influenced. The rapid digitization of communication, the expansion of social media platforms, and the use of artificial intelligence in content creation have blurred the boundaries between fact and opinion, news and propaganda, and private and public life. As nations battle with misinformation, data privacy concerns, polarization, and ethical quandaries in journalism and entertainment, media education is becoming increasingly significant.

This issue coincided with the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a landmark reform that seeks to revolutionize higher education in India by tearing down disciplinary divisions and incorporating flexible, holistic learning methodologies. The NEP vision offers an opportunity to reconsider teaching future communicators not only as technical experts but also as critical and ethical thinkers capable of navigating complex digital situations. Teaching technical skills like production, editing, and reporting has often been emphasized in India's traditional media curricula. Despite its benefits, such a narrow focus could result in graduates who are proficient in technical execution but less able to think about the moral, social, cultural, and political implications of their job.

A journalism student majoring in sociology can have a greater comprehension of structural inequity and representation in news reporting. A psychology module might increase awareness of deceit or persuasive strategies by exposing how audiences understand media messages. Law-exposed students are more equipped to comprehend media regulations, copyright issues, and constitutional rights. Courses in technology provide valuable insights into artificial intelligence,



huge data, and digital surveillance. Together, these disciplines broaden students' intellectual horizons and enable them to evaluate media content critically and use technology responsibly. Critical thinking and digital ethics are the two core competences of this subject since they are essential in the era of digital media.

Media studies students must be able to analyse texts, question narratives, identify biases, and synthesize multiple points of view. For instance, in an era of "deep fakes" and algorithmically tailored news feeds, students who receive critical thinking instruction are better able to distinguish between trustworthy and misleading content.

Digital Morality is even more important than technical proficiency is ethical duty. For media professionals, issues with algorithmic biases, incorrect information, privacy, data security, and sensationalism are growing increasingly common. Pupils with a background in digital ethics are able to evaluate their own processes and motivations in addition to the information they create.

Despite the NEP 2020's strong emphasis on multidisciplinary learning, its application to media education remains underexplored in academic scholarship. The research problem guiding this paper is: How can multidisciplinary pedagogies, aligned with NEP 2020, be integrated into media education to effectively foster critical thinking and digital ethics among undergraduate and postgraduate students in India?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Global Perspectives on Multidisciplinary Pedagogies in Higher Education

The concept of interdisciplinary education has been a hot topic of academic debate in light of the 21st century's learning demands. Educational institutions worldwide have recognized the importance of integrating multiple fields of knowledge and the limitations of discipline-specific silos in preparing students for complex realities. Jacobs (1989) was one of the first to argue that interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches encourage deeper cognitive engagement by connecting abstract concepts to practical applications. In a similar vein, Klein (2005) highlights how students can study problems from multiple epistemic viewpoints through multidisciplinary teaching, leading to a more profound and intricate understanding.

Interdisciplinary is becoming increasingly important in the context of media education due to global shifts. The UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education (2013) encourages incorporating social sciences, ethics, and cultural studies into journalism education to guarantee that students acquire the ability to evaluate information not just as technical creators but also as responsible society agents. The United States and certain European nations have included multidisciplinary learning through "liberal arts journalism programs," which blend basic media courses with courses in political science, history, and psychology (Goodman & Steyn, 2017). Among the measurable outcomes of these methods are the development of students' critical thinking and ethical awareness.

2. Media Education in India: Historical Trajectory and Reforms

Indian media education has always prioritized practical skills including production, editing, and reporting, placing a high value on vocational training (Jeffres, 2017). This skill-centric approach has been effective in producing technically proficient graduates, but it has usually neglected the development of ethical and analytical skills. Scholars like Kumar (2015) have criticized Indian media curricula for not sufficiently addressing representation, bias, and ethics in the age of digital communication.

Prior to NEP 2020, India's higher education reforms attempted to progressively expand curriculum flexibility, but they hardly ever achieved the degree of multidisciplinary integration seen in Western contexts. For example, Choice Based Credit Systems (CBCS) were introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to allow students to enrol in electives outside of their majors.

Since it expressly requires multimodal education, holistic learning, and ethical underpinning, NEP 2020 represents a turning point. This reform calls for media studies to move beyond specialized technical training and incorporate ideas from political science (democratic responsibilities), psychology (audience behaviour), sociology (representation and culture), law (media regulation), and technology (AI, algorithms, digital governance). Such integration responds to India's particular cultural and political concerns while also being in line with international norms.



3. Critical Thinking in Media Education

It is commonly acknowledged that critical thinking is essential to higher education, especially in fields that influence discourse and public opinion. Critical thinking, according to Facione (2011), is deliberate, self-controllable judgment that includes interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference. Students can dissect media texts, spot ingrained ideas, and challenge narratives that support prejudice or false information in media education by using critical thinking skills. The connection between diverse pedagogy and improved critical thinking is demonstrated by international scholarship. Bailin and Battersby (2016), for instance, contend that students who are exposed to social theory and philosophical reasoning are better equipped to spot deceptive rhetoric in news reports. Mihailidis (2014) highlights that including civic education into media courses gives pupils the essential media literacy skills they need to participate in democracy. According to Thomas (2019), a lack of critical inquiry training causes Indian journalism students to frequently replicate prevailing narratives. According to her, classes that combine sociology and political science encourage students to think critically and allow them to analyze topics like gender, caste, and communal representation more deeply. Sociology students, for instance, are more likely to question why stereotyped representations of underrepresented people appear in the media.

As a result, critical thinking in media education is a democratic requirement rather than just a cognitive ability. The capacity to critically assess content is crucial in this era of "WhatsApp misinformation" and "deep fake videos," as it not only defines professional ethics but also the calibre of public conversation.

4. Digital Ethics: An Emerging Imperative

The ethical conundrums surrounding media have changed along with how it is created and consumed in the digital age. The moral standards that govern conduct in digital environments are known as digital ethics, and they cover topics including algorithmic prejudice, privacy, false information, intellectual property, and the effects of artificial intelligence (Floridi, 2013).

Digital ethics are a pressing issue, according to international scholarship. According to Ward (2018), the transition of journalism to digital-first platforms has increased pressure to put speed ahead of accuracy, creating moral conundrums. Furthermore, issues with accountability, transparency, and manipulation are brought about by the extensive usage of AI in content generation and curation. Deep fake technology, for example, presents moral questions about political influence, consent, and authenticity (Chesney & Citron, 2019).

The extent of digital use and the variety of socio-political circumstances in India exacerbate these difficulties. According to Banaji and Bhat (2020), spreading false information on WhatsApp and other platforms has had serious repercussions, ranging from communal violence to election manipulation. Because of this, it is essential that Indian media students possess frameworks that strike a balance between ethical responsibility and technological innovation. The focus on ethical foundations in NEP 2020 offers a chance to methodically incorporate digital ethics into courses. This can entail combining legal modules (like studying the IT Act and Data Protection Bill), philosophical viewpoints (like discussions on digital privacy and surveillance), and case-based learning (like examining how fake news proliferated during the COVID-19 outbreak). Such methods confirm that students are not only skilled in content creation but also morally mindful in directing digital ecosystems.

5. The Intersection of Multidisciplinary Pedagogy, Critical Thinking, and Digital Ethics

Existing research emphasizes how critical thinking, ethics, and transdisciplinary education are all intertwined. According to Beane (1997), integrative learning approaches are necessary because real-world problems cannot be resolved within the confines of a single subject. In the context of media education, this entails equipping learners to concurrently examine problems such as disinformation from legal, psychological, and technological angles.

Case studies offer proof of accomplishment. Higher levels of critical engagement with algorithmic biases in news feeds are the result of a course at Stanford University called "Digital Media and Democracy" that integrates modules from political science, computer science, and communication studies. Similarly, in South Africa, Goodman and Steyn (2017) explain how students were able to challenge cultural preconceptions in reporting by integrating anthropology and journalism.



Despite their limitations, Indian efforts have potential. Multidisciplinary courses in media and cultural studies that integrate political science, sociology, and film theory have been piloted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). It has been discovered that these programs improve students' capacity to challenge established power dynamics and deal with moral dilemmas in media work (Deshpande, 2021).

But there are still holes. There is comparatively little study on how NEP 2020-inspired changes are developing in India, and the majority of the work currently available on interdisciplinary pedagogy in media education is focused on Western contexts. Additionally, there are very few long term studies assessing how multidisciplinary courses affect ethical behavior and critical thinking.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Multidisciplinary Integration Strengthens Critical Thinking

According to the study, critical thinking abilities significantly improved among students exposed to diverse pedagogies. For instance, viewpoints from political science (effect on democracy), psychology (cognitive bias and susceptibility to misinformation), and technology (role of AI algorithms) were encouraged to be adopted by journalism students researching "fake news." The CCTST's pre- and post-test findings showed quantifiable gains in critical thinking, interpretation, and problem-solving skills.

Qualitative observations supported these conclusions. According to the students, the interdisciplinary approach enabled them to "question sources more rigorously" and "see beyond the surface of news stories." These findings are consistent with Chang et al. (2020), who contend that learners get the cognitive flexibility necessary to handle challenging real-world problems through transdisciplinary inputs.

2. Digital Ethics Embedded in Curriculum Enhances Moral Reasoning

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3. Student Perceptions of NEP 2020-Inspired Reforms

The flexibility brought about by NEP 2020 was generally well received by students, according to focus groups. The improvements were described as "refreshing" and "aligned with what the industry demands," and they expressed gratitude for the addition of elective courses from different fields.

But there were several issues brought up. Students believed that instructors occasionally lacked the multidisciplinary education required to successfully teach integrated courses. One Delhi student, for instance, observed that "teachers trained in traditional journalism sometimes struggled to explain algorithmic issues in digital platforms."

Digital literacy, interdisciplinary learning, and critical thinking are highlighted in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Many Indian students actually view these developments favourably, particularly the incorporation of digital platforms like SWAYAM and DIKSHA, which expand access and enable participatory learning. For instance, Mumbai college students stated that project-based learning with online databases enhanced their ability to collaborate across disciplines and think critically. Some students believe there are still issues, though, like unequal internet access and an excessive focus on rote tests. In general, students agree that while the NEP 2020 reforms promote critical thinking, their implementation needs to be more robust to ensure inclusivity.

4. Amplified Effects of Cultural Learning Styles

It's interesting to note that the results imply that the advantages of diverse education may have been enhanced by Indian students' cultural predilection for collaborative learning. Peer teaching was made possible by group-based assignments;



for example, political science-trained students assisted peers in contextualizing election disinformation. This is consistent with the findings of Johnson et al. (2021), who discovered that collaborative settings frequently increase the effectiveness of integrative or adaptive pedagogies.

Cultural learning methods have a significant impact on how critical thinking is practiced and spread online in the digital era. The transition to virtual classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed sharp disparities. Students frequently placed an emphasis on inquiry, debate, and questioning authority in Western educational traditions that were influenced by Hofstede's individualist cultures. This was successfully transferred to online discussion boards and Zoom, where students freely exchanged opinions and conducted their own research.

In contrast, students in Asian and collectivist learning traditions which are in line with Hofstede's high power-distance and collectivist dimensions were more circumspect when expressing disagreement, placing a higher value on harmony and deference to authority. This frequently resulted in a dependence on online collaboration platforms like shared notes and WhatsApp groups, where knowledge was co-constructed rather than publicly disputed. Thinking happens in cultural and social contexts, as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits, and in the digital era, those circumstances influence how critical thinking plays out around the world.

Challenges and Limitations

1. Faculty Readiness: Although interdisciplinary is encouraged under the NEP 2020 framework, not all faculty members have the necessary training to teach subjects outside than their primary areas of expertise.
2. Curriculum Rigidity in Some Institutions: Some universities continue to follow strict curricula in spite of legislative changes, which restricts actual flexibility.
3. Infrastructure Gaps: In certain classes, experiential learning is limited by a lack of digital tools.
4. Short-Term Scope: Because this study only lasted one semester, it is unable to adequately capture long-term effects on ethical decision-making or professional behavior.

Recommendations

1. Faculty Development Programs: Organizations ought to spend money on frequent training sessions on ethics-based and multidisciplinary teaching methods.
2. Curriculum Redesign: Academic institutions must to rearrange their curricula to incorporate transdisciplinary and ethics courses as essential, rather than elective, elements.
3. Industry Collaboration: Real-world examples that combine ethics, technology, and communication can be obtained through alliances with media outlets, non-governmental organizations, and tech companies.
4. Assessment Reforms: Reflective essays, ethical case studies, and problem-based projects should be included in evaluation techniques to go beyond memorization.
5. Student-Centric Platforms: AI-powered adaptive learning systems have the potential to tailor ethics case studies, promoting a more thorough examination of moral quandaries.

IV. CONCLUSION

According to NEP 2020, this study shows that incorporating diverse pedagogies into media education greatly improves students' capacity for ethical reasoning and critical thinking. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach and including constructivist, critical pedagogical, and ethical framework theories, the study shows both quantifiable gains in cognitive abilities and qualitative indications of increased ethical consciousness.

Although there are still issues, namely with faculty readiness and institutional inflexibility, the results highlight how NEP 2020 has the ability to revolutionize media education. With careful implementation, these reforms can result in graduates who are not only prepared for the workforce but also ethically and socially conscious. Such an educational model is not only desirable but also necessary for the future of democratic nations in an era of disinformation, digital manipulation, and ethical quandaries in media.



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