



NEP 2020 and Art Integrated Education: Reimagining Holistic and Joyful Learning in India

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant departure from the largely content-driven, examination-centric character of Indian school education, calling instead for holistic, experiential and joyful learning. Among its most distinctive pedagogical recommendations is Art Integrated Education (AIE), a cross-curricular approach that uses visual, performing, literary and folk art forms as vehicles for teaching concepts across subjects rather than treating art merely as a separate, often marginal, discipline. This paper examines the philosophical rationale, policy provisions and implementation mechanisms of AIE under NEP 2020, drawing on the National Curriculum Framework 2023 and initiatives undertaken by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). It discusses the pedagogical and developmental benefits of AIE, the practical challenges schools face in adopting it, and offers recommendations for strengthening its implementation. The paper concludes that Art Integrated Education, if supported by adequate teacher training, resources and assessment reform, can serve as a powerful instrument for realising the constructivist and culturally rooted vision of NEP 2020.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Art Integrated Education, holistic learning, experiential pedagogy, Indian ethos, curriculum reform

Introduction

Education systems worldwide are moving away from rote memorisation toward approaches that nurture creativity, critical thinking and emotional well-being. In India, this shift found formal policy expression in the National Education Policy 2020, approved by the Union

Cabinet in July 2020, replacing the National Policy on Education of 1986. NEP 2020 envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes to transforming the nation into an equitable, vibrant knowledge society while developing every learner's cognitive, social, ethical and creative capacities. A recurring theme in the policy is the call to make classrooms less content-heavy and more skill- and experience-oriented, with the arts positioned not as an ornamental add-on but as a legitimate pedagogical tool woven into everyday teaching.

It is within this vision that Art Integrated Education emerges as a key pedagogical strategy. Rather than confining art to a separate periodic subject, AIE proposes that concepts in mathematics, science, social studies, and languages can be taught, reinforced, and assessed through drawing, music, drama, dance, storytelling, puppetry, and craft. This paper examines how NEP 2020 conceptualises Art Integrated Education, the mechanisms through which it is being operationalised in Indian schools, and the opportunities and challenges this presents for teachers, students and the wider education system.

NEP 2020: A Brief Policy Context

NEP 2020 restructures the school education system into a 5+3+3+4 curricular framework corresponding to the foundational, preparatory, middle, and secondary stages, replacing the earlier 10+2 structure. Across all these stages, the policy places strong emphasis on experiential learning, including hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, and story-telling-based pedagogy as standard practice within every subject, rather than as isolated activities. The policy also calls for a shift in classroom transactions and assessment toward competency-based learning, so that what is measured aligns with the creative and practical capacities the policy seeks to build, not only textbook recall.

Section 4.7 of the policy specifically identifies Arts Integrated Learning as a cross-curricular pedagogical approach that draws on various forms of art and culture as a basis for learning concepts across subjects. The stated intention is twofold: to make classrooms more joyful and participatory, and to embed the Indian cultural ethos into everyday learning by connecting academic content with local art, craft, music and heritage.

Understanding Art Integrated Education

Art Integrated Education is best understood as an inventive, constructivist pedagogy in which students illustrate, experiment with, and demonstrate curricular concepts through diverse art forms, rather than being taught art as an isolated skill. For example, a lesson on fractions might be taught through rangoli patterns, a lesson on the water cycle through role play or mime, or a history lesson on the freedom movement through a short skit or mural. The

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) describes AIE as an experiential learning approach that combines visual, performing and folk arts with academic content to create inclusive, engaging and reflective classrooms. The approach is deliberately open-ended and non-prescriptive, encouraging teachers to draw on regional and local art traditions so that learning remains contextually rooted rather than standardised.

The rationale for AIE rests on well-established principles of constructivist and multiple-intelligence theories of learning, which hold that learners construct understanding more durably when they engage multiple senses, make personal meaning of content, and express understanding in varied forms rather than through a single mode of textual recall. Embedding art into core subject teaching is therefore expected to improve conceptual retention, while also nurturing imagination, emotional expression, collaboration and self-confidence — outcomes that conventional lecture-based instruction rarely addresses directly.

Implementation Mechanisms and Provisions

Following the release of NEP 2020, CBSE issued guidelines mandating that affiliated schools incorporate Art Integrated Education across subjects at the primary and upper primary levels, later extending related initiatives to secondary classes. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 has reinforced this direction, positioning art education not merely as a standalone subject but as an integrated pedagogical approach spanning all disciplines. Implementation typically involves interdisciplinary projects combining academic content with an art form of the student's choice, use of technology and multimedia to support artistic expression, and structured lesson design — beginning with an ice-breaker activity, moving through group formation and theme allocation, presentation of the theme via an art form, and concluding with reflective discussion.

To support teachers, capacity-building programmes have been introduced through platforms such as DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), alongside subject-wise exemplar material to help teachers translate the policy's vision into classroom activities. NEP 2020 has also introduced the four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), designed to prepare teachers comfortable working across disciplinary and pedagogical boundaries, including art-integrated approaches, from the outset of their training.

Pedagogical Benefits

When implemented well, AIE offers several benefits. It makes classrooms more joyful and participatory, reducing anxiety associated with rote learning and high-stakes testing. It supports holistic development by engaging cognitive, emotional, social and psychomotor domains together, rather than privileging cognitive recall alone. It strengthens the link

between education and culture by letting students explore local and regional art forms, fostering appreciation of India's diverse artistic heritage. It also gives an inclusive entry point to learners with different strengths, including those who struggle with text-based instruction but thrive when concepts are expressed visually, musically or kinaesthetically. Finally, it cultivates competencies such as creativity, collaboration and critical thinking, increasingly recognised as essential beyond the classroom.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite its promise, early implementation research points to persistent challenges. Many teachers show a reasonably strong conceptual grasp of AIE's alignment with NEP's emphasis on interdisciplinary linkages and joyful learning, yet implementation remains uneven due to resource limitations, large class sizes, and inconsistent administrative support. Other challenges include difficulty assessing art-integrated outcomes within examination-oriented frameworks, unequal access to art materials and trained art educators across urban and rural schools, and the risk of AIE being reduced to a superficial activity where teacher training has been inadequate.

Recommendations

To strengthen the implementation of Art Integrated Education, several measures are worth considering. Pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes should embed AIE methodology as a core, rather than optional, component. Schools should develop subject-wise, stage-appropriate exemplar banks that teachers can adapt to local contexts and available resources. Assessment frameworks need to evolve so that art-integrated projects and portfolios are formally recognised as valid evidence of learning, consistent with the competency-based assessment envisioned in NEP 2020. Partnerships with local artists, craftspersons and cultural institutions can help schools access authentic art traditions without placing the entire burden on classroom teachers. Finally, periodic monitoring and sharing of good practices across schools, supported by platforms such as DIKSHA, can help translate isolated instances of good practice into system-wide mainstreaming.

Conclusion

Art Integrated Education represents one of the more ambitious and culturally distinctive pedagogical commitments within NEP 2020. Realising this vision fully will, however, require sustained investment in teacher capacity, resource provisioning, and assessment reform. If these enabling conditions are met, Art Integrated Education has the potential to meaningfully advance the broader NEP 2020 goal of holistic, multidisciplinary and joyful school education.

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