



Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda in the Context of National Education Policy 2020: A Thematic Document Analysis

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Abstract:

This study critically examines the educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and evaluates its contemporary relevance within the transformative framework of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. While Vivekananda conceptualized education as the manifestation of inherent human perfection—emphasizing character formation, self-reliance, and spiritual humanism rooted in Advaita Vedanta—current educational reforms advocate for holistic, multidisciplinary, and value-oriented learning paradigms to counter the hyper-commercialization of 21st-century schooling. Adopting a qualitative research design, this study employs thematic document analysis on a purposive sample of 27 primary and secondary sources (published 1985–2022), including policy documents, philosophical texts, and institutional reports. Utilizing a rigorous thematic coding protocol, the study identifies profound philosophical convergences between Vivekananda's “man-making” education and the foundational principles of NEP 2020, particularly regarding multidimensional development, vocational pragmatism, and the mainstreaming of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). However, the analysis uncovers persistent systemic frictions, notably entrenched examination-centric assessment practices, and severe deficits in teacher preparedness for value-integrated pedagogy. The study concludes that while Vivekananda's philosophy provides a robust normative and cultural bedrock for contemporary reforms, translating this philosophical alignment into pedagogical reality requires systemic structural dismantling beyond mere policy articulation.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda, Educational Philosophy, NEP 2020, Holistic Learning, Spiritual Humanism, Thematic Document Analysis, Educational Reform, Indian Knowledge Systems.

1. Introduction:

1.1 The Context of Modern Educational Crises:

Education operates as the primary ontological and epistemological mechanism for shaping the character, cognitive paradigms, and socio-ethical orientations of individuals. A nation's developmental trajectory is inexorably linked to its educational foundation, which must equip learners not merely with market-ready

skills but with the moral resilience to navigate complex global realities. In the twenty-first century, global education systems are navigating multifaceted crises. The proliferation of neoliberal educational paradigms has increasingly reduced learning to an economic transaction, characterized by a widening skills gap, the hyper-commercialization of institutions, an over-reliance on high-stakes standardized testing, and an alarming rise in student alienation and anxiety.

Against this backdrop, revisiting indigenous philosophical traditions offers a critical counter-narrative to utilitarian models of schooling. Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), an eminent Indian spiritual leader, philosopher, and social reformer, articulated a distinctive educational philosophy rooted in spiritual humanism. His vision serves as a historically rooted yet strikingly modern blueprint for holistic education.

1.2 Vivekananda’s Educational Paradigm in Historical Context:

To understand Vivekananda’s educational philosophy, it must be situated as a direct critique of the colonial British education system, formalized by Macaulay’s Minute of 1835. Vivekananda vehemently critiqued this system for its epistemic violence—producing a class of subservient clerks severed from their cultural roots, rather than autonomous, critically thinking nation-builders. For Vivekananda, true education was the “manifestation of the perfection already in man.” It was fundamentally an internal awakening rather than an external imposition of facts. His “man-making” and “character-building” education sought to synthesize the intellectual rigor of Western scientific inquiry with the profound spiritual and ethical grounding of Eastern philosophy (Vivekananda, 1989).

1.3 The Advent of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:

In India, the introduction of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) by the Ministry of Education marks the most significant systemic overhaul in over three decades. The policy explicitly aims to dismantle the rigid, rote-learning-dominated structures of the past, advocating for a holistic, multidisciplinary, and learner-centric approach. Crucially, NEP 2020 emphasizes the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), value-based education, and socio-emotional learning (SEL) to create a more equitable and culturally rooted educational landscape.

1.4 Rationale of the Study:

This paper investigates the contemporary resonance of Vivekananda’s educational thought, specifically evaluating its theoretical and practical convergence with the mandates of NEP 2020. By interrogating key policy dimensions—such as multidisciplinary learning, mother-tongue instruction, vocational integration, and ethical awareness—this study argues that Vivekananda’s philosophy provides the philosophical bedrock for these contemporary reforms. Ultimately, this research posits that while NEP 2020 mirrors many of Vivekananda’s core tenets, translating this philosophical alignment into pedagogical reality requires mitigating severe structural, institutional, and ideological barriers.

2. Conceptual Framework:

This study is anchored in the theoretical intersection of Spiritual Humanism and Holistic Education.

2.1 Spiritual Humanism: Unlike secular humanism, which centres human agency purely within the material world, Vivekananda’s spiritual humanism is rooted in Advaita Vedanta. It posits that every individual possesses inherent divinity and infinite potential. Education, therefore, is the process of removing the barriers to this inner realization. This framework emphasizes social service (Seva) not out of pity, but as a recognition of the divine in others, making social responsibility an integral outcome of education.

2.2 Holistic Education: A paradigm that seeks to engage all aspects of the learner—intellect, emotions, body, and spirit. In the context of NEP 2020, this translates to the policy’s push against hard separations between arts and sciences, vocational and academic streams, and curricular and extra-curricular activities.

3. Review of Related Literature:

Scholarly engagement with Vivekananda’s educational philosophy has expanded significantly, particularly intersecting with discourses on national reconstruction and pedagogical reform. A synthesis of the existing literature reveals several critical domains of inquiry.

3.1 Philosophical Interpretations: The “Man-Making” Vision

Indian scholars consistently interpret Vivekananda’s educational vision through the lens of character formation and self-realization. Rao (2019) conceptualizes his approach as a transformative, non-coercive process aimed at awakening inner potential, starkly contrasting with banking models of education. Banerjee (2018) identifies spiritual humanism as the core mechanism for harmonizing individual cognitive development with robust social responsibility. Education, in this context, is framed not merely as academic instruction but as a profound tool for awakening human dignity and fostering fearlessness.

3.2 Social Reform, Equity, and Vocational Pragmatism:

Vivekananda’s philosophy was not purely metaphysical; it possessed deep sociological implications. Scholars like Nanda (2007) and Chatterjee (2010) emphasize his pioneering advocacy for the education of women and marginalized castes, arguing that a nation cannot fly on one wing. This aligns with modern discourses on inclusive education and intersectional equity. Furthermore, Singh (2012) highlights the economic pragmatism in Vivekananda’s thought, noting his strong advocacy for technical and vocational training to ensure physical survival and self-reliance. This positions Vivekananda as a precursor to contemporary skill-development and vocational integration frameworks.

3.3 Vivekananda and Contemporary Policy Rhetoric (NEP 2020):

Recent policy-oriented literature increasingly links Vivekananda’s philosophy directly to the objectives of NEP 2020. Government frameworks emphasize holistic development, ethical awareness, and constitutional values—principles deeply resonant with Vivekananda’s ideals. Sen (2022) argues that the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) within NEP 2020 marks a definitive decolonial shift toward culturally rooted pedagogy. Sharma (2021) notes that the policy’s overt commitment to value education signals a philosophical continuity with Vivekananda. However, empirical studies (Mukherjee, 2018) demonstrate that while specialized institutions successfully operationalize these ideals, mainstreaming such models across public education faces severe hurdles, including curriculum overload and entrenched rote-learning practices.

3.4 Global Perspectives: Dewey, Freire, and Nussbaum:

Situating Vivekananda within global educational philosophy reveals fascinating parallels. John Dewey’s (1916) pragmatic framework of experiential growth and democratic participation shares Vivekananda’s holistic, action-oriented orientation. Similarly, Paulo Freire’s (1970) vision of education as the practice of freedom and the cultivation of critical consciousness mirrors Vivekananda’s view of education as empowerment, though Freire operates from a Marxist socio-political lens rather than a Vedantic one. Furthermore, Martha Nussbaum’s (2010) contemporary advocacy for cultivating moral imagination and empathy as a bulwark against purely profit-driven schooling echoes Vivekananda’s historical resistance to utilitarian, clerical education.

3.5 Identified Research Gaps:

Despite robust literature affirming Vivekananda's relevance, critical gaps persist:

- i. Much of the existing Indian scholarship remains descriptive and celebratory, lacking critical analytical rigour.
- ii. There is a scarcity of systematic, coded thematic document analyses directly comparing Vivekananda's philosophical texts with the granular policy mandates of NEP 2020.
- iii. There is insufficient critical interrogation of the structural tensions and implementation barriers between spiritual humanism and constitutional secularism in modern democratic classrooms.

4. Objectives of the Study:

To address the identified gaps in the literature, this study pursues the following objectives:

- i. To critically analyze the foundational tenets of Swami Vivekananda's educational philosophy.
- ii. To investigate the conceptual and thematic alignment between his philosophical vision and the mandates of the National Education Policy 2020.
- iii. To identify and analyze the systemic challenges, structural constraints, and ideological tensions in operationalizing value-based, holistic education in contemporary Indian institutions.
- iv. To propose pragmatic pedagogical and policy interventions for bridging the gap between philosophical articulation and classroom execution.

5. Methodology:

5.1 Research Design and Epistemological Stance:

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing Thematic Document Analysis (Bowen, 2009). Rooted in an interpretive epistemology, this approach was chosen because the study seeks to understand how meaning, philosophical alignment, and policy intentions are constructed within written texts. Document analysis is highly effective for tracing the historical continuity of ideas and evaluating policy rhetoric against philosophical benchmarks.

5.2 Data Sources and Purposive Sampling:

A purposive sample of 27 primary and secondary sources, published between 1985 and 2022, was selected to ensure a comprehensive triangulation of data. The corpus was explicitly curated to include:

- i. **Primary Philosophical Texts:** Select volumes from The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Advaita Ashrama), focusing specifically on his lectures on education, character building, and the future of India.
- ii. **Primary Policy Documents:** The official National Education Policy 2020 document (Ministry of Education, Government of India), along with associated National Curriculum Framework (NCF) drafts.

- iii. **Secondary Academic Literature:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs on holistic education, and institutional reports from value-oriented educational bodies (e.g., Ramakrishna Mission).

Sources were selected based on thematic relevance to value-based pedagogy, citation credibility, and direct conceptual linkage from NEP 2020 and the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.

5.3 Data Analysis Procedure:

The data corpus was analyzed using the rigorous, six-phase thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- i. **Familiarisation with the Data:** Repeated, active reading of the selected texts, accompanied by initial memoing to capture early impressions of potential alignments or clashes.
- ii. **Generating Initial Codes:** Systematic open coding of the entire data set. Text segments were tagged with semantic codes (e.g., rote learning critique, skill development, moral fortitude).
- iii. **Searching for Themes:** Collating diverse codes into potential broader themes by mapping relationships between Vivekananda's philosophical codes and NEP 2020 policy codes.
- iv. **Reviewing Themes:** Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. Refinement of themes to ensure they accurately reflect the tensions and convergences present in the literature.
- v. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Developing a detailed analysis of each theme, identifying the "story" that each theme tells within the context of the research objectives.
- vi. **Producing the Report:** Weaving the analytical narrative, supported by rigorous evidence from the texts, resulting in the findings section below.

5.4 Limitations of the Study:

Relying exclusively on document analysis, this study lacks empirical field data, such as ethnographic observations of classrooms or interviews with educators and policymakers. Consequently, the findings are conceptually interpretive and focus on structural and policy-level realities rather than ground-level micro-interactions.

6. Findings of the Study:

The systematic thematic document analysis generated five major analytical themes regarding the intersection of Vivekananda's philosophy and NEP 2020.

- i. **Conceptual Convergence on "Man-Making" and Holistic Development:** The most prominent finding is the profound philosophical convergence regarding the fundamental purpose of education. Vivekananda's assertion that education must not be a mere accumulation of undigested facts operates as the conceptual precursor to NEP 2020's explicit mandate for multidisciplinary education.

NEP 2020's structural dismantling of rigid boundaries between arts and sciences, and curricular and extra-curricular activities, perfectly mirrors Vivekananda's insistence on the harmonious development of the "heart, head, and hand." Both texts reveal a shared hostility toward compartmentalized learning, arguing that holistic education is essential for cultivating well-rounded,

socially responsive individuals capable of adapting to complex environments.

- ii. **The Centrality of Character Formation and Value Education:** Documentary evidence indicates that Vivekananda prioritized character-building over mere intellectual accumulation, viewing true education as the strengthening of willpower and moral integrity. He famously stated, “We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded.”

The analysis shows that NEP 2020 mirrors this by explicitly institutionalizing life skills, socio-emotional learning (SEL), and value-based education within its core curricular framework. The policy emphasizes “ethical, human, and constitutional values” such as empathy, tolerance, and scientific temper. However, the analysis of secondary institutional reports reveals a critical gap: while the rhetoric aligns perfectly, modern institutional rubrics still struggle to quantify, assess, or pedagogically deliver “character,” often marginalizing it in favor of easily measurable academic metrics.

- iii. **Pragmatism, Vocational Integration, and Self-Reliance:** A significant code that emerged across both data sets was “self-reliance.” Vivekananda was highly critical of an education system that left youth incapable of securing their own livelihood, advocating strongly for technical and agricultural education. He recognized that spiritual and moral development is impossible on an empty stomach.

NEP 2020 aligns strongly with this economic pragmatism through its heavy emphasis on vocational education, proposing that exposure to vocational crafts begin as early as Grade 6. The policy aims to overcome the social stigma associated with vocational training by integrating it smoothly into mainstream academia, directly echoing Vivekananda’s call to dignify labor and empower the masses economically.

- iv. **Pedagogical and Structural Frictions in Implementation:** Despite the philosophical alignment, the analysis uncovered massive systemic bottlenecks preventing the execution of this shared vision. The coded documents highlight recurring structural frictions:

- **The Assessment Paradox:** Both Vivekananda and NEP 2020 envision joyful, organic learning. However, the continued dominance of high-stakes, summative, standardized testing actively thwarts this vision, forcing educators to teach to the test rather than facilitating exploration.
- **Teacher Preparedness:** Vivekananda viewed the teacher not as a dictator of facts, but as a “gardener” who facilitates growth. NEP 2020 requires highly skilled, autonomous educators to deliver its multidisciplinary vision. Yet, analyses of current teacher education programs reveal a severe lack of in-service training equipped to handle integrated, value-based pedagogy.
- **Curricular Overload:** Exhaustive, highly prescriptive syllabi leave little room for the experiential, reflective, and service-oriented learning (Seva) that Vivekananda championed.

- v. **Negotiating Globalisation, Secularism, and Indigenous Rootedness:** A complex ideological theme emerged regarding cultural identity. Vivekananda advocated for national regeneration through deeply rooted cultural education, warning against the blind imitation of Western paradigms. NEP 2020 echoes this by heavily promoting Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), local arts, and mother-tongue instruction. Concurrently, the policy stresses 21st-century global competencies (AI, coding, global citizenship).

Furthermore, an underlying tension was identified between spiritual humanism and secularism. Vivekananda's "man-making" is intrinsically tied to a spiritual anthropology (the divinity of the soul). Conversely, NEP 2020 operates within a secular democratic constitution. The documents suggest that while NEP attempts to bridge this by promoting "universal human values," integrating the profound internal methodologies of Vivekananda requires careful secular translation to ensure inclusivity in diverse, multicultural classrooms.

7. Discussion:

The findings of this study establish that Swami Vivekananda's educational philosophy acts as a highly relevant, deeply indigenous normative framework for the National Education Policy 2020. However, the thematic analysis reveals that philosophical alignment on paper does not organically translate into structural realization in practice.

7.1 Countering Educational Neoliberalism:

The convergence on holistic development offers a vital humanistic corrective to the hyper-marketized, credential-driven models of contemporary education. Vivekananda's historical critique of colonial education remains uncomfortably relevant today. In contemporary India, rapid privatization, the proliferation of "ed-tech" monopolies, and an intense "coaching culture" threaten to reduce education to a purely economic transaction. NEP 2020's push for multidisciplinary and value-oriented learning is a direct policy response to this utilitarian crisis. By anchoring these reforms in Vivekananda's philosophy, Indian education can reclaim a sense of higher purpose beyond mere employability, viewing the student as a complex human being rather than human capital.

7.2 The Implementation Paradox and Assessment Overhaul:

The most pressing issue discussed in the literature is the implementation gap. How does a system execute "man-making" education within an infrastructure obsessed with competitive ranking? The persistence of the "mark-sheet" culture actively undermines the holistic aims of both Vivekananda and the NEP. To resolve this, structural reform must move beyond curriculum redesign. As Dewey (1916) posited, the structure of the school environment itself is the primary educator. Therefore, assessment mechanisms must be radically overhauled, prioritizing formative, portfolio-based, and peer-reviewed evaluations over rote summative examinations. Only then can the fearlessness that Vivekananda envisioned be cultivated.

7.3 The Role of the Teacher:

Both the analyzed texts and broader educational theory confirm that any reform relies entirely on the quality of the teacher. In Vivekananda's paradigm, the teacher must embody the values they wish to impart. Under NEP 2020, teachers are expected to be facilitators of complex, multidisciplinary inquiry. The current deficits in teacher training—where B.Ed. programs often focus on outdated psychological theories rather than practical, value-integrated pedagogical delivery—represent a major threat to NEP's success. Systematic, rigorous professional development that trains educators not just as subject-matter experts, but as empathetic moral facilitators, is urgently required.

7.4 Reconciling the Spiritual and the Secular:

Finally, the tension between spiritual humanism and constitutional secularism requires nuanced pedagogical diplomacy. Critics often conflate the introduction of Indian philosophical thought with sectarian religious instruction. However, as Banerjee (2018) notes, Vivekananda's Vedantic approach is fundamentally universal, emphasizing the underlying unity of all existence. Translating these spiritual-humanistic principles

into universal ethical values—such as environmental stewardship, empathy, and social justice—without diluting their transformative power or violating secular inclusivity is the immediate challenge for modern curriculum developers.

8. Conclusion and Policy Implications:

Swami Vivekananda's educational philosophy transcends its colonial historical context, providing a timeless, balanced blueprint for navigating the moral, technological, and socio-economic complexities of the 21st century. His vision of education as an empowering, character-forging, and culturally rooted enterprise finds deep resonance in the ambitious mandates of India's National Education Policy 2020.

However, this thematic document analysis concludes that integrating Vivekananda's ideals requires more than rhetorical acknowledgment within government documents. It demands the courageous dismantling of archaic, exam-centric structures and the rebuilding of an educational ecosystem that genuinely values the holistic development of the child. Revisiting Vivekananda is not an exercise in cultural nostalgia; it is a practical, urgent necessity for cultivating an education system that produces humane, resilient, and socially conscious global citizens.

Policy Implications & Recommendations:

To bridge the gap between philosophical intent and classroom reality, the following interventions are proposed:

- i. **Overhaul of Teacher Education:** B.Ed. and M.Ed. programs must explicitly incorporate experiential modules on socio-emotional learning, value-integrated pedagogy, and the practical application of Indian Knowledge Systems.
- ii. **Decentralized and Formative Assessment:** State and national examination boards must accelerate the shift away from high-stakes rote testing, adopting holistic, 360-degree multidimensional report cards that measure ethical, vocational, and practical competencies.
- iii. **Institutionalizing Seva (Service-Learning):** Schools and universities should be mandated and funded to integrate community service and localized problem-solving as credit-bearing, core components of the curriculum, directly mirroring Vivekananda's call for education as a tool for social upliftment.

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Citation: Mana. P. & Patra. Dr. G. C., (2026) “Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda in the Context of National Education Policy 2020: A Thematic Document Analysis”, *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-03(2), March-2026.