



## Human Values in Modern Education: A Philosophical and Ethical Perspective

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### Abstract:

*The rapid transformation of education in the twenty-first century, driven by globalization, digitalization, and market-oriented demands, has led to an increased emphasis on skills and employability, often at the cost of ethical and humanistic concerns. Recognizing this imbalance, national and global education policies—most notably India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and frameworks advocated by UNESCO—emphasize holistic, value-based, and learner-centered education. This paper explores the role of human values in modern education from a philosophical and ethical perspective, situating the discussion within the vision of NEP 2020 and global educational discourse. It examines fundamental human values such as truth, compassion, empathy, respect, responsibility, and social justice, and analyzes their relevance in nurturing ethical citizenship and social harmony. Through a conceptual and normative analysis, the study highlights how NEP 2020 advocates the integration of ethical reasoning, constitutional values, and moral development alongside cognitive and vocational learning. The paper further discusses challenges in implementing value-based education in contemporary curricula and pedagogical practices. It argues that aligning educational systems with human values is essential for developing morally grounded individuals capable of addressing global challenges. The study concludes that the integration of human values, as envisioned by NEP 2020 and global education policies, is central to achieving sustainable development, inclusive growth, and the preservation of humanity in modern education.*

**Keywords:** Human Values, NEP 2020, Value-Based Education, Ethical Education, Holistic Development, Global Education Policies..

### 1. Introduction:

Education has historically been understood as a transformative process aimed at the holistic development of the individual. Philosophical traditions across cultures have emphasized that the true purpose of education extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge and vocational skills to the cultivation of character, moral reasoning, and social responsibility. Thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Gandhi, Tagore, and Dewey viewed education as an ethical endeavor essential for nurturing responsible and humane citizens (Dewey, 1916).

In the contemporary context, however, education has increasingly become outcome-oriented and market-driven due to globalization, technological advancement, and economic competitiveness. Modern educational systems tend to prioritize employability, performance metrics, and technical competence, often at the expense of ethical reflection and humanistic learning. This instrumental approach risks reducing education to a utilitarian function, thereby marginalizing its moral and social dimensions.

The consequences of this value deficit are evident in rising social intolerance, moral indifference, environmental degradation, and weakened social cohesion. Despite intellectual and technological progress, societies continue to face complex ethical challenges that cannot be addressed through cognitive skills alone. From a philosophical perspective, education that neglects human values may produce individuals who are intellectually capable but morally disengaged. Human values such as truth, empathy, compassion, responsibility, and social justice are therefore indispensable for fostering ethical citizenship and sustainable social development.

Recognizing this need, contemporary education policies have begun to emphasize value-based and holistic learning. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly advocates the integration of ethical reasoning, constitutional values, and social responsibility within the educational framework (Government of India, 2020). Similarly, global initiatives led by UNESCO promote education for sustainable development, peace, and global citizenship. These policy orientations reaffirm that education must cultivate both intellectual competence and moral consciousness.

Against this backdrop, the present paper examines the relevance of human values in modern education through a philosophical and ethical analysis of NEP 2020 and selected global education frameworks. It argues that the integration of human values is essential for holistic development, ethical citizenship, and social harmony in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

## **2. Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To examine the philosophical significance of human values in education.
2. To analyze the ethical concerns arising from outcome-oriented approaches in modern education.
3. To assess the role of NEP 2020 and selected UNESCO frameworks in promoting value-based and holistic education.

## **3. Research Methodology:**

The study adopts a conceptual and philosophical approach, based on secondary sources such as philosophical texts, education policy documents, NEP 2020, UNESCO reports, and relevant scholarly literature. Textual and normative analysis are employed to critically examine the ethical dimensions of modern education and the relevance of human values in fostering holistic development and ethical citizenship.

## **4. Discussion:**

### **4.1. Education as an Ethical and Value-Oriented Process:**

The philosophical analysis strongly reaffirms that education is fundamentally an ethical and value-oriented process rather than a value-neutral or purely technical activity. Across philosophical traditions, education has been conceived as a means of shaping the moral, spiritual, and social dimensions of human life. Indian philosophical thought, in particular, places a strong emphasis on the ethical purpose of education. Mahatma Gandhi's concept of *Nai Talim* envisioned education as the harmonious development of the head, heart, and hand, where intellectual growth is inseparable from moral character, productive work, and social responsibility (Gandhi, 1937). For Gandhi, education was not merely preparation for employment but a lifelong process of self-purification, ethical discipline, and service to society.

Similarly, classical Western philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle emphasized education as the cultivation of virtue (*arete*) and moral excellence necessary for the good life and just society. In the modern era, John

Dewey further reinforced this ethical vision by viewing education as a social process aimed at fostering democratic values, reflective thinking, and responsible citizenship (Dewey, 1916). The convergence of these philosophical traditions underscores that education is intrinsically normative in nature. Consequently, the neglect of human values in contemporary education undermines its holistic and transformative purpose, reducing it to a mechanistic process detached from human flourishing.

#### **4.2. Value Deficit in Outcome-Oriented and Market-Driven Education:**

One of the central findings of the study is that the growing dominance of outcome-oriented and market-driven educational models has led to a significant erosion of ethical and humanistic concerns. Contemporary education systems increasingly prioritize employability, standardized assessments, institutional rankings, and technical competencies aligned with economic productivity. While such objectives respond to the demands of globalization, their disproportionate emphasis often sidelines moral education, critical reflection, and social commitment.

Gandhi offered a sharp critique of such utilitarian approaches, cautioning that education divorced from character formation and ethical values could become a source of moral decay and social inequality (Gandhi, 1947). He warned that the pursuit of material success without moral restraint fosters selfishness, exploitation, and alienation. This concern finds resonance in contemporary critiques of neoliberal education, which argue that excessive modification of learning reduces students to economic units rather than ethical agents capable of contributing to the common good (Nussbaum, 2010). The study thus finds that market-driven education risks producing individuals who are technically skilled yet ethically disengaged and socially indifferent.

#### **4.3. Social Crises as Indicators of Value-Neutral Education:**

The persistence of social intolerance, violence, corruption, environmental degradation, and declining social cohesion serves as a critical indicator of the limitations of value-neutral education. Despite remarkable advances in science and technology, societies across the world face deep moral and ethical crises. This paradox highlights the inadequacy of education systems that prioritize cognitive achievement and technical proficiency while neglecting moral development and ethical sensibility.

Gandhi emphasized that true education must be grounded in *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence), and compassion, arguing that intellectual progress without moral grounding ultimately leads to social destruction (Gandhi, 1937). From this perspective, contemporary social crises can be seen as consequences of an education system that fails to cultivate empathy, ethical judgment, and social responsibility. The findings align with the Delors Report, which emphasized learning to live together and learning to be as essential pillars of education for social harmony and peace (Delors et al., 1996).

#### **4.4. Human Values and Ethical Citizenship:**

The study further highlights that human values such as empathy, compassion, responsibility, respect for diversity, justice, and cooperation are indispensable for ethical citizenship and sustainable development. Ethical citizenship involves not only awareness of rights and duties but also the capacity for moral reasoning, concern for others, and commitment to social justice. Gandhi viewed education as a powerful means of preparing individuals for service to society, emphasizing self-discipline, simplicity, cooperation, and respect for human dignity as core educational values.

In pluralistic and democratic societies, value-based education plays a crucial role in fostering mutual understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Such values enable individuals to participate meaningfully in democratic processes and address social conflicts through dialogue rather than violence. This perspective closely aligns with UNESCO's emphasis on global citizenship education, which seeks to

nurture learners who are ethically aware, socially responsible, and committed to peace and human rights (UNESCO, 2015).

#### **4.5. NEP 2020 and the Shift toward Value-Based Education:**

The analysis indicates that India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant paradigm shift toward value-based and holistic education, resonating strongly with Gandhian educational philosophy. The policy emphasizes ethical reasoning, constitutional values, social responsibility, cultural rootedness, and holistic development across all stages of education. By advocating the integration of values into curricular and co-curricular practices, NEP 2020 moves beyond a narrow skills-based approach and reaffirms education as a moral and social enterprise.

The policy's focus on character formation, experiential learning, community engagement, and respect for India's cultural and ethical traditions reflects Gandhi's vision of education for self-reliant, socially committed, and morally grounded citizens. The findings suggest that NEP 2020 provides a meaningful policy framework for addressing the ethical deficits of contemporary education and restoring its humanistic orientation (Government of India, 2020).

#### **4.6. Global Education Frameworks and Ethical Consciousness:**

At the global level, education frameworks promoted by UNESCO further reinforce the ethical purpose of education. Initiatives such as Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) emphasize peace, human rights, environmental sustainability, intercultural understanding, and social justice. These frameworks recognize that global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and conflict cannot be addressed solely through technical expertise but require ethical awareness and moral commitment.

Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, universal brotherhood, and global humanism aligns closely with these global educational ideals. His emphasis on moral self-restraint, compassion, and responsibility toward all forms of life offers valuable ethical insights for addressing contemporary global crises. The convergence of Gandhian thought with global policy frameworks underscores the enduring relevance of Indian philosophical perspectives in shaping ethical education for the twenty-first century (UNESCO, 2017).

#### **4.7. Relevance of Human Values in the Modern World:**

The study ultimately concludes that the integration of human values significantly enhances the relevance, purpose, and effectiveness of education in the modern world. Drawing upon Gandhian philosophy and contemporary global frameworks, value-based education emerges as essential for preserving human dignity, promoting inclusive and sustainable development, and strengthening social harmony in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing society. Human values provide the ethical foundation necessary for meaningful learning, responsible citizenship, and long-term social progress.

By reaffirming the ethical mission of education, the study argues that human values are not supplementary or optional but foundational to the very idea of education. Education that integrates moral reasoning, compassion, and social responsibility is better equipped to address contemporary challenges and contribute to the creation of a just, peaceful, and sustainable world (Gandhi, 1947; Nussbaum, 2010).

#### **4.8. Role of the Teacher as a Moral Agent and Role Model:**

An important ethical dimension of education lies in the role of the teacher as a moral agent and role model. Philosophical traditions emphasize that values are not transmitted merely through textbooks or curricula but through lived experiences, dialogue, and example. Gandhi regarded teachers as guides who embody truth, simplicity, and moral integrity, believing that the personal character of the teacher significantly shapes the

moral development of learners (Gandhi, 1937). Similarly, Dewey emphasized the teacher's responsibility in creating ethical learning environments that encourage reflection, cooperation, and democratic engagement (Dewey, 1916). This underscores that value-oriented education depends not only on content but also on the ethical dispositions and practices of educators.

#### **4.9. Ethical Pedagogy and Experiential Learning:**

The ethical nature of education is also reflected in pedagogical approaches that promote experiential learning, critical inquiry, and reflective practice. Gandhian *Nai Talim* emphasized learning through productive work and community engagement, enabling learners to internalize values such as dignity of labour, cooperation, and social responsibility. Such pedagogical approaches move beyond rote learning and encourage moral reasoning through lived experience. From a philosophical perspective, ethical pedagogy fosters autonomy, empathy, and social awareness, enabling learners to connect knowledge with ethical action. This reinforces the idea that values must be integrated into teaching-learning processes rather than treated as separate or incidental components.

#### **4.10. Education as a Process of Humanization and Lifelong Moral Development:**

Education, when understood as an ethical process, is fundamentally concerned with the humanization of individuals. Philosophers argue that education should cultivate self-awareness, moral sensitivity, and a sense of responsibility toward others and the environment. Gandhi viewed education as a lifelong moral journey aimed at self-realization and service to humanity, rather than a finite phase confined to formal schooling (Gandhi, 1947). This perspective challenges narrow instrumental views of education and emphasizes its role in nurturing lifelong ethical consciousness. Education that prioritizes human values thus contributes to personal integrity, social harmony, and the continuous moral growth of individuals throughout life.

### **5. Key Recommendations:**

#### **1. Integrate Human Values Across Curriculum and Pedagogy:**

Human values such as empathy, responsibility, social justice, and respect for diversity should be systematically integrated across subjects and teaching-learning processes, rather than confined to isolated courses.

#### **2. Rebalance Educational Aims Beyond Market-Oriented Outcomes:**

Education policies and practices must balance employability and technical competence with ethical reasoning, character formation, and social responsibility, reaffirming education as a moral and humanistic enterprise.

#### **3. Strengthen Teachers' Role as Ethical Role Models:**

Teacher education and professional development should emphasize moral leadership, reflective practice, and value-based teaching, recognizing teachers as central agents in the ethical development of learners.

#### **4. Promote Experiential and Community-Based Learning:**

Pedagogical approaches inspired by Gandhian *Nai Talim*, including experiential, service-based, and community-engaged learning, should be encouraged to enable learners to internalize values through lived experience.

#### **5. Ensure Effective Implementation of NEP 2020 and Global Frameworks:**

Educational institutions should actively implement the value-oriented provisions of NEP 2020 and align

them with UNESCO's global citizenship and sustainability frameworks to foster ethical citizenship and social harmony.

## 6. Conclusion:

This study examined the relevance of human values in modern education through a philosophical and ethical analysis of classical educational thought, Gandhian philosophy, NEP 2020, and selected global education frameworks. The analysis reaffirms that education is inherently an ethical and value-oriented process aimed at holistic human development, integrating intellectual growth with moral reasoning and social responsibility.

The findings indicate that the increasing dominance of outcome-oriented and market-driven approaches has weakened the ethical and humanistic dimensions of education. While employability and technical competence are important, their disproportionate emphasis has marginalized moral education, contributing to contemporary social challenges such as intolerance, moral indifference, and weakened social cohesion. Drawing upon Gandhian *Nai Talim*, the study highlights the necessity of integrating the development of the head, heart, and hand to foster ethical citizenship.

The study further finds that India's National Education Policy 2020 and UNESCO's global education frameworks represent significant efforts to restore the ethical mission of education by emphasizing value-based and holistic learning. The integration of human values is therefore not supplementary but foundational to meaningful education. Value-oriented education is essential for nurturing ethical citizens, promoting social harmony, and ensuring sustainable development in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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**Citation:** Hrangkhawl, M., (2026) “Human Values in Modern Education: A Philosophical and Ethical Perspective”, *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-01(1), January-2026.