

---

---

# The Evolution of Art Education in India: Historical Roots and Contemporary Developments

Sushma Yadav

Assistant Professor in Art Education, Department of Education in  
Social Science and Humanities, Regional Institute of Education,  
NCERT, Mysuru.

**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18471379>**

**ABSTRACT:**

Art education in India has experienced significant progress, particularly with the implementation of new educational policies. Initially overlooked, early reforms like the Radhakrishnan and Kothari Commissions focused on broader educational challenges. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 marked a turning point, emphasizing art's role in creating joyful and meaningful learning. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 built on this, making visual and performing arts compulsory up to Class X to foster holistic learning. The NCF 2023 further promotes art-integrated education, encouraging creativity, cultural awareness, and teamwork through a flexible, multidisciplinary approach. These developments highlight how art education enriches learning by connecting students with their culture, environment, and broader life skills.

**KEYWORDS:**

Art education, British Rule, National Policy on Education,  
Performing Arts University, learning outcomes.



## General History

The educational system on the eve of independence was quite bleak as we became free from British Rule with a comparatively low level of attainment overall, and particularly in education. According to available figures, there were significant educational inequalities and substantial disparities between regions, urban and rural areas, men and women, and advanced and intermediate castes. In light of this situation, the government had constituted several education commissions and committees over the years to analyse the problems in Indian education and suggest the way forward.

The first such effort was made through the establishment of the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948–1949) for the integration of secondary and higher education, and the reorganisation of university education, according to the requirements of the country and its traditions. While it recommended the setting up of the University Grants Commission and developing personalities who would contribute to the nation's administration, industry and commerce, the Commission made no mention of fostering art-integrated education to build the above personalities.

According to the recommendations of the next reform body, namely the Kothari Commission (1964–1966), while its efforts were specifically directed to examine all aspects of the Indian education sector, from the primary level upwards, to evolve a standardised pattern of education in India, there was no specific guideline given for the implementation of its guidelines for specific subjects. Except medical and legal studies that were excluded from its purview, the guidelines were aimed at providing a national education policy, and not for subject-wise methodology to be followed.

A more inclusive and relevant educational approach came about with the setting up of the National Policy on Education (1986), with efforts directed to equalise educational opportunities, especially for women and the depressed communities. To this effect,

it set up the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA). More importantly, it had turned the sights of policymakers towards a child-centred approach at the primary level and launched ‘Operation Blackboard’. This change in approach laid the stepping stones for the National Education Policy of the country to be gauged through a practical look at education, albeit without singling out the role of the Arts in this layout till this period had been either suggested or implemented.

The first hints on the importance of the Arts in the education of the child were given due recognition with the implementation of the NCF guidelines in 2005. As part of the thrust on Experiential Learning, the approach of an Art Integrated education was recognised as a means for creating joyful classrooms. In addition, it had also pointed out that such a direction in our educational implementation policy would provide a space for imbibing the Indian ethos, via the integration of Indian Art and Culture in the teaching and learning process at every level. The overall benefits of this policy were acknowledged in that it would bring about the ‘complete development’ of the child’s personality. Then, when such a basis for educating the child was implemented, the NCF guidelines pointed out that the child’s knowledge base would be connected with life beyond the school boundaries and thus shift the methodology of educating children away from a rote method towards a child-centred curriculum.

It may also be noted that when a course of study is somewhat delinked from rigid academic-cum-rote methodology, there is provision made for flexibility within the teaching-learning curriculum, which in turn, makes provisions to life’s needs, a rational approach, and also provides a platform for the individual child to fulfil his aspirations. In the broader sphere, therefore, the NCF guidelines went a long way in promoting social justice through the implementation of democratic values and national integration. The said policy, therefore, was a decisive step forward in making

learners into well-integrated individuals, who were trained to measure their circumstances rationally and realise the need for self-expression alongside other physical needs of the child.

Just why the NCF 2005 was a relevant inclusion for its time was due to the swiftly changing overall national environment, where some focus was needed to be paid to the needs of rural school education. Above all, it made learning a thing of joy for the learner and thus banished the drudgery of senseless rote learning, by making learners understand that subjects were not tightly compartmentalised, but could be an inclusive methodology, which in turn, could embrace technology as a learning tool, and make studies burden-free.

But while the provisions of the NCF 2005 liberalised the approach to education, it still did not emphasise the importance of the Arts in the education system, meant to guide formal schooling. In most schools, children were encouraged to participate in cultural activities. These learning opportunities were mostly implemented to enhance the prestige of the school on occasions like Independence Day, Founder's Day, Annual Day, or during an inspection of the school's progress and performance. For other times, art education remained sidelined to the compulsory drawing/singing/dance period and was not an important component of the teaching-learning methodology being implemented in classrooms.

To bring to the forefront the government's intentions as to the implementation of the provisions of NEP 2020, the policy stated: "As a part of the thrust on experiential learning, art-integrated education will be embedded in classroom transactions not only for creating joyful classrooms but also for imbibing the Indian ethos through integration of Indian art and culture in the teaching and learning process at every level."

This approach was a sea change when the Arts were revealed as the conduit for formal education of the child, and had come about with the implementation of NEP 2020, where it was made clear that visual and performing practices needed to become an important

component of the curriculum. Hence, music, dance, painting, craft and theatre were to become a compulsory inclusion up to Class X. Even parents, guardians and administrators were to be sensitised in this regard, so that educational emphasis shifted from being merely a cut-and-dry instructional system to one that was experiential as well. This would overturn the concept of education as a process one is subjected to, and orient it to one that was experiential, making the work of educating the child a pathway to becoming aware of our civilisational and cultural roots.

Such a gargantuan attempt towards implementing this comprehensive framework entails re-imagining education itself, making it more holistic, flexible, and adaptable to the needs of the students, so they are up to the mark in acquiring 21st-century skills. For such a situation to be actualized, a detailed guide, popularly known as the NCF 2023, has been instituted. It is a detailed guide for our school education and follows the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 goals. The document was released in April 2022, when the Union Education Minister had stated that the NCF 2023 was the ‘Constitution’ to champion the changing demands of the 21st century and positively impact the future.

The above guidelines thus advocate a holistic education system, thereby changing how we teach, by reorienting the education paradigm to develop well-rounded personalities, through a flexible, multidisciplinary approach. This will entail moving the education system towards real understanding and towards learning how to learn... and away from the culture of rote learning as is largely present today. The aim of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st-century skills. It emphasises engaging children for learning through play, by means of art, craft, music, movement, materials, toys, poems, stories, outdoor play and their immediate environment. The framework is expected to have a wide-ranging impact on the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices across all stages and in schools

nationwide.

In its detailed layout, the NCF 2023 emphasises that in the primary stage, the child's learning should focus on the body, emotions, thinking skills, arts, words, and reading. Thus, teachers would observe children's social behavioural skills, and not just learning skills. At the preparatory stage, learning would be oriented to the world around the child and a fun learning environment would be maintained overall. In this graduated way, at the middle school level, learning would involve engagement with environmental education, concentrating on critical thinking and argumentation about public environmental issues. In the senior stage, specific standards of achievement would be assessed through a formal system. Thus, the whole process of learning is to become a platform for formal learning alongside opportunities for exploration and questioning.

**In light of the above, the changes in classroom learning must focus on:**

- a. Learn how to learn.
- b. Learn how to think critically and solve problems.
- c. Have less written content and more opportunities for experiential learning.
- d. Make learning enquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, flexible and enjoyable.
- e. Include basic arts, crafts, sports and fitness.
- f. Provide a well-rounded and fulfilling experience.

While these policy provisions are laudatory and game-changing to an extent, the above findings might suggest that the NEP 2020 Policy was a pioneering approach in that no efforts had been made in the previous years in this direction. But findings reveal that attempts were made towards an integration of the Arts in general classroom instruction before the NEP 2020 as well. A

prominent experiment was one conducted by Devi Prasad, an artist and studio potter. He was a staunch believer in the idea of empowering the minds of our children and advocated the creation of an enabling environment for the child to express the unsaid, the repressed, and the uncharted. As Devi Prasad conceptualised and implemented art education in the Nayee Talim programme at Sevagram, he had pondered on the spirit of true education.

But such stray attempts did not affect the overall teaching system. Teachers continued following a cut-and-dry presentation method. This was especially noticeable once children reached the middle school level and the pressure of completing regular lessons and preparing for exams, as well as learning a subject according to the laid down course, occupied most of the time for the regular classroom teacher.

Another of the predecessors of the current system implemented under the NEP Policy was the DBAE (discipline-based arts education) theory of education, which was practised in 1970, at the Getty Centre for Education in the Arts in America. This theory had proposed that art making (or ‘studio art’) entailed a thrust of creative expression. What this education policy had stressed upon was the fact that even among the youngest pupils, there was a need to integrate education with complementary disciplines such as art history, aesthetics, and art criticism. In consequence, it produced the desired result as it not only invigorated the ambit of art education per se, but also made teaching more exciting and relevant for the classroom teacher.

This brings us to the need to focus on the role of the Educator in this process. The teacher, as the primary educator, is the one who can implement and promote the above-mentioned inclusivity through her interaction. As stated in Weiner (2002), Thousand and Villa (2000), and Stain Back (1996), this collaboration requires the teacher to break down the barriers that have been created between subjects and emphasise learning outcomes in the context of

incorporating artistic mediums, such as music, dancing, reciting and more, into the subject matter. It involves:

1. An all-encompassing method of education, instead of compartmentalised subject learning.
2. Visual interactions with surroundings.
3. The capacity to adopt verbal and nonverbal forms of communication.
4. The capacity to recognise parallels and divergences.
5. Integration of artistic reinforcement.
6. Giving students more power through integrated learning.
7. Motivating pupils to adopt alternative perspectives.
8. Establishing a welcoming environment for all viewpoints.
9. Giving children the chance to make decisions.
10. Recognising the special strengths of every child.
11. Encouraging cooperation while still doing their own thing.

**By following the above-stated guidelines, teachers gave their pupils:**

1. The tools for critical assessment.
2. The ability to judge and understand what is taught in a personal way.
3. Instead of applying dry academic rules, teachers could innovate and reorganise the teaching methodology, which in turn became a challenge posed to the teacher.
4. This type of integration helped the rebellious learner who finds the disciplined, rule-based instruction uninteresting.
5. In this applicative style of learning, where pupils had to exercise their own power of judgement, learning proved an interesting diversion.

Besides the examples of an art-integrated learning approach adopted in the past, the actual evidence of the impact of the implementation of Art Integration in the Classroom has surfaced in recent times, as follows:

### **Evidence of the impact of the implementation of Art Integration in the Classroom:**

#### **1) General Outcomes**

1. In their art classes, where DBAE had been exposed among students, they not only found creative self-expression in art production but also explored works of art from the points of view of the three other disciplines. In art history, students discovered stylistic qualities characteristic of individual artists and schools of art, as well as meanings and values communicated by works of art across space, time, and cultural boundaries. Art criticism enabled students to talk and write about works of art, using critical inquiry to describe, analyse, interpret, and make informed value judgments. Aesthetic issues were raised in questions about the nature, definition, and significance of art.
2. As classrooms of today do not exist in isolation but as a means of unprecedented connectivity with the rest of the world, the teacher and the pupils had the opportunity to pay virtual visits to the best science and technology fairs, make a trip to NASA, or to the Louvre Museum in Paris, just as easily. All these opportunities help both teacher and pupil widen their horizons and learning, and make participation not just a class-limited exercise, but one which can be hooked on to areas of interest worldwide.
3. The New Education Policy 2020 has recognised the status of the Fine Arts in the cultural fabric of India. There is a tendency among our children to revel in Western arts, such as pop or hip hop, without knowing anything about Hindustani music's tarana presentation, or fast-beat Kathak dancing, or colourful tribal

artworks, which is a way of discovering the changes in the seasons, the crop growing cycle, and the source of our literature, to mention a few.

## 2) Specific Outcomes

1. In Karnataka, there are 16,000 schools and 800 colleges where the courses will have to be offered along the guidelines, besides those in about 25 universities. As none of the educational institutions are in a position to create a framework for such integrated studies, the onus was on universities such as the KSGH Music and Performing Arts University to cater to their requirements. According to their expert: “We have to not only churn out musicians but also scholars who will be the resource persons required to handle the course curriculum in future.”
2. Such a policy of integration has also received an approving nod from university Vice-Chancellors such as Dr. Nagesh V. Bettakote, who welcomed the NEP move, saying that it would break down the artificial barrier between subjects, which has been the trend in our education system. Thus, teachers of one subject will no longer remain totally cocooned within their own boundaries and find no reason for interaction with others.
3. In an article in ‘The Hindu’ of 21 August 2021, it was stated, “Earlier, they (pupils and their teachers/trainers) used to render songs or perform in functions, while a few evolved to present concerts. But now they also have opportunities to be employed as resource persons in schools and colleges.” Such a step would definitely be a game-changer for both students and teachers alike.
4. In a review conducted by See and Kokotsaki (2016) to investigate whether participation in the Arts has improved learning outcomes among children (aged 3–16 years), evidence was found that the integration of multi-arts activities in classrooms impacted learning outcomes such as:

- a) Music
- b) Spatial-temporal abilities
- c) IQ scores, reading and language skills

**The teacher, too, developed an explorative mindset, resulting in her pupils becoming:**

- a) Better observers of their surroundings
- b) Enjoying the learning process
- c) Becoming more adept at handling visual inputs and aids
- d) Becoming more interdependent

All the above resources have made learning more concrete and provided a joyful approach as well. It has also shown that the above measures at both the grassroots and the national level have given a positive boost to the growth of Indian education in the right direction.

### **Conclusion**

**From the above findings, we can make the following conclusions:**

1. It is clear that the integration of Art Education into the classroom is an effective way of reaching out to all learners and not just to the talented few students who are fond of Art.
2. With their integration with art and craft makers in their surroundings, pupils learn to connect closely not just with academia but also their environment and the artists and craftsmen within their surroundings. This experience enriches their understanding of our cultural heritage.
3. As a follow-up to the above mentioned, pupils learn to appreciate the significance of Art and Culture in general, becoming well-rounded and understanding citizens.
4. As regards this approach to education as laid down in the NEP 2020 guidelines, it is clear that it promotes well-being as well

as social justice among pupils, as they begin to work together, respecting each other's strengths and weaknesses, providing the related markers for a just and well-coordinated world order, as laid down by UNESCO.

5. This fresh look at education and research in India has opened up a diverse range of scholastic guidelines and findings, which have brought to the forefront the existing gaps in scholastic, cultural, and socio-political contexts, as regards the current status of school education in India.
6. The NEP 2020 policy guidelines will further enhance the development of newer Art-integrated learning experiences and innovations in future.
7. It has sensitised the entire educational makeover towards a transformational potential by engaging pupils and teachers within and outside the basic curriculum of studies.

---

---

**References:**

1. Education in India: Policy and Practice (Social Change in Contemporary India).
2. Jadhav, N. (2020). Future of The Indian Education System: How Relevant is the National Education Policy, 2020?
3. NEP 2020 – At a Glance for Educators: Towards Excellence.
4. National Education Policy Draft 2020.
5. NCERT, National Curriculum Framework 2005 Position Papers.
6. Report of the Education Commission, 1964–66.
7. NCERT, NCF 2023 School Education.
8. NCERT, NCF 2022 Foundation Stage.
9. Klosterman, M. L. and Sadler, T. D. (2010). Multi-Level Assessment of Scientific Content Knowledge Gains Associated with Socio-Scientific Issues-Based Instruction. International Journal of Science Education, Vol. 32, No. 8, pp. 1017–1043.

**Funding:**

This study was not funded by any grant.

**Conflict of interest:**

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

**About the License:**

© The Authors 2024. The text of this article is open access and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.