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Facilitating Self-Reliance by Fostering Autonomy to Generate Life and Career Skills

Mrs. Jyoti Ashish Vasavada
Asst. Professor, CASE Dept. Of Education, The MS University of Baroda, Vadodara

ABSTRACT

Self-proficiency and expertise, combined with the correct know-how, are the needs of future generation learners. The base for the same is cultivated at the school level. Research has proven that the attention span of students is becoming shorter day by day. Keeping them engaged in school is becoming increasingly challenging day by day. School life needs to be redesigned to make it more meaningful and to facilitate more self-proficient, responsible citizens in society. From childhood, if children are taught about various vocational skills and exposed to first-hand real-life experiences, then it will inculcate the dignity of labour as well as the characteristic of self-reliance. Automatically, interest is generated in the activities related to their choices. Students develop a keen and deep interest in their loved activities, as a result, they become resourceful and search out various possibilities of selecting a career if their choice and interest. Slowly, they start developing the skills required to perform their loved activities, and their base is becoming stronger day by day. The paper mentions the roadmap to provide such opportunities to students at the school level by allocating a special slot in the school schedule in the timetable and preparing and educating teachers to achieve these stated objectives. The kinds of varieties of exposure that can fulfill these objectives are discussed in the paper, which will generate various life skills and career skills, making students self-reliant, independent, and responsible for their own choices. At the end of the paper is concluded with a justification is provided related to the kind of significant duties and responsibilities that the formal system of education has. To fulfill the mission of NEP 2020 related to character building and preparing independent thinkers who will represent India at the global level with their own strategic plans designed for self, nation, and the world at large, to make it the best place to live

Key words: NEP 2020, School education, life and career skills, global Connection

Introduction

Transforming the current education system into an experience-based learning model is not only a need of the hour but a big challenge as well, because the learners will be Gen Alpha and Gen Beta with different and unique identities and characteristics, with very limited attention span, getting bored very easily, and needing innovative and new techniques, methods, incidents and products at every second moment of life.

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To realize self-reliance in learners via experiential learning, the emphasis is on making such learning experiences that are very close to reality, and where the students are to an active extent, and where the instructor acts as a facilitator, and basically, the learners develop their skills of independence and self-esteem through the whole process.

Let us now deal into the specific experiential learning principles for the development of self-reliance through the use of real-world examples:

1. Authentic Experiences Example: The student who loves cooking finds out that there are no community cooking classes at affordable prices. So, she sets up a bake-sale event to get the community involved and to raise funds, and she is the one who does all the planning and execution of the event herself from scratch. This practice not only assists her in becoming proficient in event management and acquiring leadership skills, albeit the most important attribute, i.e., the confidence to bring about the change in the community.

2. Active Engagement Example: In a chemistry class, students are conducting actual experiments mixing different chemicals instead of merely watching lectures. For instance, they are testing reactions and observing safety protocols firsthand. The hands-on experience really pushes them to be independent in the scientific guessing and problem-solving of the whole process.

3. Reflection and Self-Awareness Example: After a group project or community service, the students discuss to figure out what strategies were effective and what communication methods used were inappropriate

4. Ownership of Learning

Example: Students choose a cultural heritage to research deeply and create exhibits for a multicultural night. They decide on research questions, presentation formats, and additional elements like food samples or dances. This autonomy engages their interest and drives motivation to learn thoroughly.

Some Strategies engage students actively

Hands-On Activities

Example: In mathematics, students build and measure physical structures such as bridges using popsicle sticks to understand geometric concepts and weight distribution, developing confidence and practical problem-solving skills as they see the immediate impact of their choices.

Inquiry-Based Learning

Example: In environmental science, students carry out a local biodiversity survey by designing research questions, collecting field data, and analyzing results. This process puts them in charge of their learning and builds discovery skills fundamental to independence.

Real-World Connections

Example: During health education, students track daily eating and exercise habits, then

analyze their records to identify improvements, see practical connections to classroom lessons, and set independent, self-driven health goals.

Project-Based Learning

Example: Students collaborate to create a "school garden," managing everything from planning and budgeting to execution and maintenance, offering opportunities for leadership, teamwork, and ownership of long-term projects.

Field Trips and Outdoor Learning

Example: A class visits a local river to collect water samples, analyze pollution, and present environmental protection proposals to the community, directly applying knowledge outside the classroom and building advocacy skills.

Reflection Techniques

Example: After a group activity, each student writes in a reflection journal or creates a mind map of key learnings, encouraging deep personal insight, metacognition, and self-evaluation for future growth and improved self-reliance.

Role-Playing and Simulations

Example: In economics, students participate in a marketplace simulation, making buying and selling decisions, experiencing consequences, and learning risk management in a safe but realistic environment.

Community Service and Social Responsibility

Example: Students volunteer in neighborhood clean-up programs or local food banks, requiring initiative, organization, and social skills while making a direct positive impact, growing both confidence and empathy.

Making teaching-learning engaging and interesting for the students

1. Nature Walks and Exploration Students take guided walks outdoors to observe and identify plants, insects, and birds, fostering curiosity and environmental awareness.
2. Cooking and Baking Projects Students follow simple recipes to measure ingredients and prepare food, learning math, science, and patience practically.
3. Arts and Crafts Creation Hands-on art projects like making collages from recycled materials or creating puppets encourage creativity and fine motor skills.
4. Building and Construction Activities Using building blocks or craft sticks, students design and build structures, developing problem-solving and engineering basics.
5. Role-Playing and Storytelling Students act out stories, historical events, or create puppet shows, enhancing communication and empathy.
6. Science Experiments Simple experiments, such as mixing vinegar and baking soda or growing plants, allow students to experience scientific inquiry.

7. Team Treasure Hunts Organize scavenger hunts with clues involving math problems or vocabulary riddles for cooperative problem-solving outdoors.
8. Designing Board Games Students design their own board games with rules, combining creativity with strategic thinking and collaboration.
9. Time Capsule Projects Students collect items, drawings, and predictions to place in a time capsule to be opened years later, connecting past and future.
10. Shadow Puppet Theater Creating and performing with shadow puppets helps develop storytelling skills and group cooperation.

Inculcating vocational skills and real-life experiences in students to achieve the goals of NEP 2020

To inculcate vocational skills and real-life experiences in students and achieve the goals of NEP 2020, integrate hands-on learning, industry exposure, and skill-based activities throughout the curriculum and school environment.

Early Exposure and Skill Integration

- Introduce vocational subjects and skill-oriented activities from middle school onwards, such as basic carpentry, agriculture, culinary arts, and electronics workshops.
- Blend academic subjects with real-life skill components—for instance, integrating financial literacy into mathematics or using science classes for practical experiments and local fieldwork.

Internships and Bagless Days

- Organize regular internships or “bagless days” where students work hands-on with local artisans, tradespeople, or industry experts to gain experience in fields like tailoring, pottery, farming, or IT.
- These practical exposures help students connect theory with practice, appreciate the dignity of labor, and develop job-relevant skills.

Skill Labs and Community Projects

- Set up skill labs in schools stocked with modern equipment for areas like robotics, textile work, coding, or culinary arts, encouraging students to experiment, create, and innovate.
- Engage students in community service or entrepreneurship projects, such as organizing campus recycling initiatives, small school businesses, or public service campaigns, building teamwork and self-reliance.

Collaborations and Short-Term Courses

- Partner with local ITIs, polytechnics, businesses, or community experts to offer short-term courses and workshops in traditional and emerging vocations.

- Promote “Lok Vidya” (local, artisanal knowledge) by enabling students to apprentice with craftspeople and participate in local cultural industries.

Flexible Curriculum and Continuous Reflection

- Allow students to choose vocational modules according to interests, fostering ownership and personal initiative.
- Include regular reflection, portfolio creation, and feedback sessions, where students review their practical learning, set goals, and track skill development.

By embedding these experiential, vocational, and industry-aligned activities in daily school life, students develop not only employable skills but also the independence, adaptability, and resilience that NEP 2020 targets for future-ready citizens.

Career Skill Preparation Approaches

Students are prepared for career skills through a mix of academic knowledge, vocational training, hands-on experiences, and guidance in soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

- Vocational and Technical Education Students take specialized courses in areas like IT, healthcare, agriculture, business, or manufacturing, gaining job-ready skills and certifications.
- Internships and Industry Exposure Schools offer internships, apprenticeships, job-shadowing, or industry visits, letting students experience real workplaces, build professional relationships, and apply classroom learning to actual job settings.
- Skill-Based Curriculum Programs include skill labs, workshops, and project-based learning where students build practical skills in coding, robotics, culinary arts, design, and other fields relevant to current job markets.
- Soft Skills Development Students practice communication, leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, and adaptability through group work, role-playing, presentations, and problem-solving activities.
- Career Guidance and Mentorship Professional counselors, mentors, and teachers provide tailored advice on career choices, resume writing, interview skills, and workplace behavior, helping students make informed decisions:
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation Projects Students start mini-businesses or participate in innovation clubs, learning financial literacy, marketing, project management, and creative thinking in real-world contexts.

These strategies help students bridge the gap between school education and the demands of the professional world, equipping them for a successful career.

Importance of reskilling to help students connect professionally in their careers

Reskilling helps students connect professionally in their careers by equipping them with new,

in-demand skills, enhancing their employability, and opening up pathways to better job opportunities, career advancement, and impactful professional networks.

Enhanced Employability and New Opportunities

- Students with updated skills can transition to emerging fields and roles that are highly sought after, making them more attractive to employers and increasing their job prospects.
- Reskilling programs often have alumni networks and professional communities, supporting graduates with ongoing resources, mentorship, and job opportunities.

Increased Adaptability and Confidence

- Mastering new skills instills confidence and a sense of accomplishment, helping students approach professional challenges with preparedness and enthusiasm.
- Expanding the professional toolkit makes students versatile, able to handle diverse tasks and succeed across various industries.

Professional Connections Stronger

- By participating in reskilling programs, students network with peers, mentors, and industry professionals, gaining insights and connections that support career growth.
- These networks share job openings, industry news, and professional advice, helping students remain competitive and well-informed in their chosen career paths.

Reskilling thus not only prepares students for changing job demands but also strengthens their professional profiles and networks, making it easier to connect and thrive in their careers.

Fostering autonomy in students

Fostering autonomy and independence in students across various aspects of life involves intentional strategies that encourage self-direction, responsible decision-making, and essential life skills.

- Encourage Choice and Decision-Making Allow students to choose activities, project topics, and even classroom roles. This develops a sense of ownership, motivation, and confidence as they make and learn from their decisions.
- Teach Life Skills Explicitly Integrate practical life skills such as time management with planners, financial literacy, healthy eating, and basic self-care into daily routines, giving students real responsibilities and tools for independence.
- Promote Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking Use open-ended questions, real-life scenarios, and projects that require students to brainstorm solutions, evaluate options, and reflect on outcomes. Scaffold the process, then gently step back, letting students take the lead in finding solutions.
- Cultivate Self-Reflection and Goal-Setting Help students set their own learning and

personal goals, reflect on progress through diaries or journals, and assess their strengths and areas for improvement regularly, building self-regulation and intrinsic motivation.

- Encourage Collaboration and Peer Learning Organize cooperative tasks and group work where students learn from and support each other, fostering independence in social and teamwork skills.
- Provide Feedback and Gradually Release Responsibility: Give constructive feedback focused on effort and growth, not just achievement, then gradually reduce adult support so students build resilience and perseverance in facing challenges independently.
- Support Organizational and Planning Skills Let students help plan classroom activities, organize their workspaces, and structure their own schedules, equipping them for lifelong autonomy.

- Model and Discuss Independent Behaviors Demonstrate how to tackle new tasks, handle mistakes, and persist through setbacks. Use storytelling, role-play, and real-world examples to discuss and model independent behaviors.

Development of balance, personality is the result of a variety of exposures received at the school level and the development of various life skills during early life.

The development of a balanced personality in students is indeed the result of a variety of exposures received at the school level, combined with the development of life skills during early life. This process can be justified through the following points:

Holistic Influence of School Environment

The school environment plays a pivotal role in personality development by offering diverse social interactions, promoting confidence, independence, and moral values. Students engage with peers, teachers, and activities that cultivate social skills such as teamwork, empathy, and communication, which shape their overall personality and balanced outlook on life.

Exposure to Varied Experiences

Through academic challenges, extracurricular activities, group projects, and decision-making responsibilities, students gain resilience and a sense of responsibility. These experiences teach them to manage success and failure, time, and personal accountability, contributing to a balanced personality that can handle life's various demands.

Development of Life Skills

Schools provide structured opportunities for students to learn critical life skills such as problem-solving, self-management, and ethical behavior. By integrating practical skills like time management, financial literacy, and self-care early on, schools prepare students for independence and everyday life challenges, supporting balanced personal growth.

Emotional and Moral Growth

The school setting provides emotional support through teacher guidance, counseling, and peer relationships. It also instills core moral values like honesty, respect, and compassion through formal and informal learning, allowing students to develop ethical frameworks and emotional intelligence essential for well-rounded personalities.

Safe and Supportive Learning Climate

A positive classroom and school climate that fosters inclusivity, safety, and encouragement enables students to take risks, express themselves, and develop confidence. This nurturing environment promotes self-awareness and interpersonal skills, key components of balanced personality development.

Early Life Skill Integration

Life skills learned early complement academic learning and social experiences by empowering students to set goals, reflect on their growth, and independently navigate challenges. This integration ensures students develop autonomy, resilience, and adaptability from a young age, forming the foundation for balanced, mature personalities.

Conclusion

The formal education system carries the significant duty and responsibility of shaping the character and personality of each learner, aiming to develop independent thinkers who not only excel academically but also embrace ethical values and social responsibilities. NEP 2020 envisions education as a holistic process that goes beyond rote learning, focusing on nurturing creativity, critical thinking, and empathy in students so that they can contribute meaningfully to society and lead with integrity and resilience. To fulfill the mission of NEP 2020, education must cultivate balanced individuals equipped with strategic thinking for personal growth, national progress, and global welfare. This includes integrating multidisciplinary learning, value-based education, vocational skills, and real-world experiences that prepare students to address complex challenges in an interconnected world. By fostering autonomy and a spirit of inquiry, the system empowers learners to design their own pathways in alignment with their talents and aspirations, while grounded in India's rich cultural heritage and democratic values.

The formal education system is tasked with the noble role of nurturing future citizens who carry a strong sense of identity, responsibility, and innovation to make India a global leader and a better place to live. This transformational goal relies on collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and communities to implement NEP's vision of inclusive, equitable, and quality education that shapes character and prepares learners to thrive on the world stage with compassion and strategic foresight.

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