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Perception of Post-graduate Students towards Multidisciplinary Education at Mizoram University

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education in India. The policy aims to shift the focus from rote learning and standardized testing to a more well-rounded approach that takes into account the diverse needs and interests of students. The policy advocates for a flexible and student-centric education system that encourages critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It also recognizes the importance of integrating different subjects and disciplines to provide a more comprehensive and interconnected understanding of the world. Overall, the holistic and multidisciplinary approach in higher education proposed by the NEP 2020 will enable students to develop into well-rounded individuals with a broad range of skills and knowledge. This will not only enhance their employability but also contribute to the overall development of the country. Since the implementation of NEP 2020 at Mizoram University in August 2022, students are provided with the opportunity to have multidisciplinary education. However, the transition from the old system to multidisciplinary approach may not be as smooth as anticipated and has many challenges; this paper will reflect on the perception of post-graduate students at Mizoram University towards multidisciplinary education and the problems and challenges faced by the students regarding its practice and suggestions for effective implementation of a holistic and multidisciplinary approach in higher education.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach, Higher Education.

Introduction

Higher education is being instrumental in shaping the society today. It produces an innovative and well-educated workforce with the necessary skills to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. The move towards entrepreneurship, skill development, innovations and research has prepared the students to enter the workforce with confidence and higher productivity which booms the country's economy. Today more and more female population entered the work force and the status of middle class has improved tremendously. As a result the living standard of the common man has improved and ultimately impacting the society positively. Therefore, it is important to promote higher education in India and to encourage its equitable access to all groups of people across the states.

It is a noteworthy leap to aim for a holistic and multidisciplinary education that will have far reaching impact in the learner and in the future of our country. Having the resources and knowledge from science and humanities, technology and fine arts, having a wide range of knowledge from different subjects and the flexibility to select one's interest discipline will surely enrich the students and prepare them for the challenges of the future to be at par with the global economy. The NEP 2020 opened a platform to realise this dream by encouraging creative combination of subjects, cutting edge curriculum, flexible options and flexible entry and exit to accelerate a growing economy to achieve the anticipated dream of India becoming a super power nation and leader in science and technology.

Towards a Multidisciplinary and Holistic Approach in Higher Education

With the NEP 2020, the nation's educational system is expected to undergo a paradigm shift and a revolutionary transformation. The primary goal of this initiative is to enhance the educational system by making it more accessible, holistic, multidisciplinary, and productive. It aims to foster multidisciplinary education at all higher education institutions, including universities, colleges, and standalone educational institutions like IIMs, IITs, and NITs. It intends to implement a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to education, initially in schools and later also in higher education institutions. It encourages interdisciplinary studies through many academic institutions. Collaboration between

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academic institutions, colleges, research institutions, and other organizations falls under this category. Students can learn sciences, technology, and math while also studying liberal arts, humanities, languages, social sciences, professional skills, vocational skills, ethics, morals, human values, and other topics through the creative teaching method known as multidisciplinary and holistic learning. This will enable them to become more well-rounded citizens and prepare them for the future. Further, it promotes the inclusion of conventional Indian knowledge systems in contemporary curricula. By giving pupils a more holistic understanding of many subjects, serves to enrich the learning experience. In addition, a multidisciplinary approach to education also helps learners explore subjects from various perspectives, allowing them to develop their own beliefs and viewpoints. The NEP 2020 seeks to establish interdisciplinary education as the standard in India at all educational levels. This method of learning will be more accessible to students by being incorporated into the core curriculum and has the potential to inspire the development of a new generation of creative thinkers. (National Education Policy, 2020)

The NEP is expected to have a lasting and positive impact on the higher education landscape in the country. It aims to provide students with access to high-quality education within India itself. By introducing a multi-disciplinary approach, the NEP will place renewed emphasis on various fields, including arts, humanities, sciences, and more. This educational framework will enable students to learn and develop in a holistic manner, equipping them with a solid knowledge foundation.

The ambitious changes introduced in the new NEP 2020 have the potential to fundamentally reshape the educational system. While it is a commendable and bold effort to modernize, advance, and equalize India's education system, effective implementation remains key. To ensure the success of this policy, decision-making processes need to be significantly streamlined, and budgetary resources must be reallocated in the coming months and years.

Higher Education in Mizoram:

As per the data of AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) 2019-2020, the total number of registered colleges in Mizoram is 32 and there are 15 higher education institutes as standalone institutions. The average enrolment is 603 students per college. In Mizoram, there is one central university, viz., Mizoram University and one private University, i.e., ICFAI University.

Mizoram University is a central University recognized by the University Grants Commission, Government of India established in 2001 by the Mizoram University Act (2000) of the Parliament of India. Mizoram University was accredited 'A' grade by NAAC in 2019. There are 10 schools and 41 departments in Mizoram University as of 2022. In addition, there are 40 affiliated colleges and one constituent college to Mizoram University. It is noteworthy to mention that Mizoram University is one of the first universities in India to have implemented the NEP 2020 in August, 2022 (Mizoram University, 2023).

Mizoram University implemented the new policy from August 2022 after Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. However, the sudden implementation of the new policy brings its own challenges along with perks. Only after two years of the final document on the new policy has been released, Mizoram University adopted the NEP 2020. Multidisciplinary as suggested in the NEP 2020 is being introduced to the students through new syllabus to meet the requirements of holistic and multidisciplinary education.

Objectives of the Study:

i). To find out the perception of post-graduate students towards multidisciplinary education at Mizoram University.

ii). To find out the problems faced by post-graduate students regarding multidisciplinary education at Mizoram University.

iii). To give suggestions for improving effective implementation of multidisciplinary education at Mizoram University.

Findings of the study

The followings are the major findings of the present study.

Table 1: Sample Size

Gender	N	%
Male	47	34.3
Female	90	65.7
Total	137	100

Table 1 indicates that out of 137 respondents, 90 i.e., 65.9 per cent were female students, and 47 i.e., 34.1 per cent were male students.

Table 2: Parent Department

Parent Department	N	%
Education	61	44.5
Psychology	16	11.6
Clinical Psychology	1	0.7
Economics	19	13.8
Mizo	9	6.5
Hindi	7	5.1
Commerce	6	4.3
Library & Information	2	1.4
Public Administration	13	9.4
Sociology	1	0.7
Social Work	2	1.4
Total	137	100

Table 2 indicates respondents' parent department. Among the respondents, 61, i.e., 44.5 per cent of the student respondents were from Education department, 13 respondents were from Public Administration, 16 were from Psychology department, 19 respondents were from Economics department and the rest were from Mizo, Hindi, Commerce, Library & Information, Sociology and Social Work departments.

Table 3: Choice of Subject/Department

Choice of Subject/Department	N	%
Education	68	49.6
Mizo	19	13.8
English	2	1.4
Political Science	9	6.5
Psychology	9	6.5
History	5	3.6
Clinical Psychology	2	1.4
Social work	6	4.3
Women Studies	6	4.3
Mass Communication	6	4.3
Library & Information	4	2.9
Commerce	1	0.7
Total	137	100

Table 3 indicates interdisciplinary subjects taken by the respondents. A large number of respondents i.e., 68 chose Education as their interdisciplinary subject.

Table 4: Opportunity, Selection, and Teacher preparedness

Sl. No.	Item	Response	N	%
1	Does your department provide opportunity for multidisciplinary education?	Yes	100	100
		No	0	0
2	Do you get your first choice in selection of your interdisciplinary subject?	Yes	98	71.5
		No	39	28.5
3	Are you familiar with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its proposed multidisciplinary approach to higher education?	Yes	104	75.9
		No	33	24.1
4	Do you believe that teachers and educators are prepared to teach in a multidisciplinary manner under the NEP 2020?	Yes	115	83.9
		No	22	16.1

Table 4 shows that all respondents reported that their respective department provided an opportunity for interdisciplinary education. 98 respondents i.e., 71.5 per cent have reported that they got to study interdisciplinary subject of their first choice whereas, the rest 39 respondents i.e., 28.5 per cent replied that they did not get to study their first choice for interdisciplinary subject.

A large number of students, 104 (75.9%) are aware of the objectives of multidisciplinary approach to higher education as recommended in New Education Policy 2020, while 33 students (24.1%) are unaware of the same.

A heart-warming number of student respondents, 115 (83.9%) believed that teachers and educators are prepared to teach in a multidisciplinary manner under the NEP 2020, whereas 22 (16.1%) student respondents believed that teachers and educators are not prepared to teach in a multidisciplinary manner.

Table 5: Reasons for opting Interdisciplinary Subjects

Sl. No.	Item	Response	N	%
5	What kinds of activities do you have regarding multidisciplinary education?	Lectures	117	85.4
		Workshop	2	1.5
		Field work	18	13.1
		Internship	0	0
6	Give reasons for opting your present interdisciplinary subject?	For employment	4	2.9
		To enhance my studies	16	11.7
		To gain experience in other subjects	56	40.9
		Interest in the subject	28	20.4
		Because it is nearby my department	16	11.7
		My friends have opted for it	3	2.2
		As there are no seat available in other departments	14	10.2

Table 5 shows the kinds of activities that students had for their interdisciplinary subjects 85.4 per cent respondents reported that multidisciplinary education was imparted through class lectures, 1.5 per cent received workshop and 13.1 per cent respondents went through field works.

Here, 40.9 per cent respondents opted for their current interdisciplinary subjects to gain experience in other subjects. 20.4 per cent respondents opted for their chosen subject because they are interested in that subject. Another 11.7 per cent students opted for it to enhance their studies. 10.2 per cent have opted the subject as there are no seats available in the department of their choice. Only 2.9 per cent studied other subjects for employment whereas 2.2 per cent students made decision based on their friend's.

Table 6: Quality of Interdisciplinary programme

Sl. No.	Item	Response	N	%
7	How would you rate the quality of the multidisciplinary programme provided in your University?	Very good	14	10.2
		Good	72	52.6
		Average	47	34.3
		Poor	4	2.9
		Very Poor	0	0
8	Do you think the introduction of multidisciplinary education brings holistic education?	Yes	100	73
		No	37	27
			21	
9	Is there effective communication and coordination in your chosen interdisciplinary subject?	Yes	108	78.8
		No	29	21.2
11	Do you think Multidisciplinary education undermines your discipline/subject?	Yes	67	48.9
		No	70	51.1
12	Multidisciplinary education fosters collaboration and teamwork to students from different academic backgrounds/different disciplines	Strongly Agree	5	3.6
		Agree	42	30.7
		Neutral	79	57.7
		Disagree	6	4.4
		Strongly Disagree	5	3.6

Table 6 shows that regarding the quality of the multidisciplinary programme provided in the University, 10.2 per cent of the respondents believed to be of very good quality, 52.6 per cent rated good, 34.3 per cent rated average and the rest 2.9 per cent perceived the quality as poor.

Of the total respondents, 73 per cent believed that multidisciplinary education brings holistic education whereas 27 per cent of them did not think so. However, 48.9 per cent of the respondents said multidisciplinary education undermines their subjects while 51.1 per cent did not think so. 70.8 per cent thought that multidisciplinary education contributes positively to their future career and the rest 29.2 per cent did not think so.

The table also highlights that 3.6 per cent of the respondents highly agreed to the statement 'multidisciplinary education fosters collaboration and teamwork to students from different academic backgrounds/different disciplines' while the same percentage of students strongly disagreed the statement, while 57.7 per cent are neutral.

Table 7: Career goals and Multidisciplinary education

Sl. No.	Item	Response	N	%
13	Do you think that multidisciplinary education is more job oriented than the old system?	Yes	85	62
		No	52	38
14	Do you think multidisciplinary education contribute positively to your future career	Yes	97	70.8
		No	40	29.2
15	Do you gain insight from multidisciplinary subjects that help your main subject and studies?	Yes	85	62
		No	52	38
16	Does your career goal and interest being met through multidisciplinary education?	Yes	75	54.7
		No	62	45.3

Table 7 indicates that 62 per cent of the respondents gave the opinion that multidisciplinary education is more job-oriented than the old system, whereas 38 per cent did not think so. And, 70.8 per cent thought that multidisciplinary education contributes positively to their future career and the rest 29.2 per cent did not think so. Here, 62 per cent of the respondents gained insight from multidisciplinary subjects that help in their main subject and studies, while 38 per cent of the respondents did not gain insight. 54.7 per cent responded that their career goal and interest are being met through multidisciplinary education while 45.3 per cent responded that they are not being met.

Table 8: Effectiveness, Infrastructure and barriers of Multidisciplinary education

Sl. No.	Item	Response	N	%
17	Does multidisciplinary education enable you to gain insight into other disciplines?	Yes	116	84.7
		No	21	15.3
18	If yes/No to what extent?	To a great extent	14	10.4
		To some extent	80	59.7
		To small extent	21	15.7
		Not at all	19	14.2
19	Do you think multidisciplinary education ensure a better quality education in the 21st century?	Yes	108	78.8
		No	29	21.2
20	Is there suitable infrastructure in the academic department where you attend your interdisciplinary subject?	Yes	118	86.1
		No	19	13.9
21	Do you think Multidisciplinary education causes confusion between different academic and discipline roles?	Yes	79	57.7
		No	58	42.3
22	Do you think there are barriers to multidisciplinary education	Yes	72	52.6
		No	65	47.4

Table 8 shows that 62 per cent of the respondents gained insight from multidisciplinary subjects that help in their main subject and studies, while 38 per cent of the respondents did not gain insight.

The degree of how much multidisciplinary education helps in their main studies varied widely; 10.4 per cent gained insight to a great extent, 52.2 per cent gained insight to some extent, and 15.7 per cent to a small extent, while 14.2 per cent did not gained at all. 86.1 per cent said that there are suitable infrastructures in the academic department where they attend their interdisciplinary subject whereas 13.9 per cent said no.

78.8 per cent respondents were of the opinion that multidisciplinary education ensures a better quality education in the 21st century, while 21.2 per cent respondents answered the opposite is true. However, 57.7 per cent of the respondents perceived that multidisciplinary education causes confusion between different academic and discipline roles, and 42.3 per cent did not think that is not the case. And, 52.6 per cent of the respondents believed that there are barriers to multidisciplinary education while 47.4 per cent said no.

23. According to you, what are the obstacles that stand in the way for effective implementation of multidisciplinary education?

- Limited amount of time during lunch break. Long distance between departments. Since there is limited time in between classes students have to run from one department to another to attend the classes. Transportation problem for students who do not have vehicle to attend their interdisciplinary classes.
- Lack of infrastructure and support needed to implement successful integration of multidisciplinary learning.
- Too much work and syllabus to cover. It consumes time for studying their main subjects and could not give full focus on their respective main subjects. Interdisciplinary classes pressured Insufficient seats for students, due to limited seats, students could not choose the subject they wish to take and lost interest in the subject and failed to understand what was taught. Ineffective learning.
- Since this is a new platform, it is difficult for students to adjust to new teaching methods. Too much work load aside from their main subjects, which gave them lots of

pressures.

- Lack of collaborations and coordination among different disciplines and departments. It barred successful implementation of NEP 2020.
- Students are still not very familiar with NEP 2020, it was difficult for them to adapt to changes regarding interdisciplinary subjects.

24. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for improving the implementation of the multidisciplinary approach under the NEP 2020?

- More seats should be offered in every department so students can choose the major and minor interdisciplinary subjects in which they are really interested in.
- More practical and good communication between teachers and students.
- If students can take their own department subject for interdisciplinary subject it will be more flexible for them to learn.
- More interesting practical classes need to be made.
- Less heavy assignment and class for 3rd Semester students as there are lots of dissertation and seminar in main subjects.
- More time for lunch break and to attend the classes on time. If students were given more time or provided with some means of transport to travel between departments, it would alleviate the problems of many students.
- Also, to relieve the stress level and workload of students, it would be better if interdisciplinary classes do not conduct internal tests but rather give assignments or presentation works.
- Evaluation system to be purely based on assignments and presentation rather than tests and exams.
- Encourage project-based learning and group activities that require students to apply knowledge from multiple disciplines.
- A proper syllabus with reading recommendations, materials would be helpful in having a deeper and better understanding of the multidisciplinary subject because these subjects could be something completely new for some students.
- More interactions between teachers and students for effective teaching and learning.
- Before enrolling in the interdisciplinary class, an introductory lectures/presentation may be given to make the perfect choice of our interdisciplinary subject.
- By exposing students to a variety of disciplines, we can enhance their understanding of their chosen field while also fostering an appreciation for diverse areas of knowledge.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the findings of the study all departments in Mizoram University provided opportunity for multidisciplinary education and an overwhelming number of the respondents believed that the education and programme provided were good enough and that teachers and educators were prepared to give multidisciplinary education. However, many respondents reported that they could not get entry into the department of their first choice for interdisciplinary major and minor subjects which made them disinterested in the subjects. The study also revealed that although more than half of the respondents were aware of the objectives of multidisciplinary education recommended by New Education Policy 2020, still many students were not aware of the aims of multidisciplinary education. This could be due to the approach being new to the students and they were not familiar with NEP 2020 recommendations for higher education as a whole. In addition, departments' effort may still be insufficient to orient the students thoroughly towards the importance of multidisciplinary education.

Regarding the reasons for opting their major and minor interdisciplinary subjects, Table 5 indicates that about 33 respondents made their decision due to their friends' decision or due to easy accessibility or according to availability of seats, which is indicative of the fact that the very purpose of holistic and multidisciplinary education in higher education is not yet fully achieved. Only a handful of respondents enrolled in other disciplines for career option. It is interesting to note that all respondents were from school of education, languages, arts, humanities and social sciences but not a single respondent had opted science subject as interdisciplinary and there was no science student among the respondents. The NEP-2020's aim of a move towards more holistic and multidisciplinary education to develop a well-rounded person equipped with intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral capacities is yet to be achieved.

From Table 6, it is evident that a large percentage of respondents felt that multidisciplinary education undermines their main (core) subject and 27% felt that multidisciplinary education failed to bring holistic education and that the quality of education received for the respective interdisciplinary subjects are of average quality. Only about 35% respondents felt that multidisciplinary education fostered collaboration and team work among students of different departments. This shows that there needs to be more collaborative effort and communication among different departments to bridge this gap.

From Table 7, it is evident that multidisciplinary education provided in Mizoram University still needs to gear its curriculum towards skill-based education to contribute positively to their future career as a large number of respondents felt that the curriculum failed to deliver job-oriented learning and their interest and career goals were not met through multidisciplinary education.

Most respondents were enabled by multidisciplinary education to gain insight into other disciplines however, the extent to its contribution was still small and multidisciplinary education causes confusion between different academic discipline roles.

Based on students' response regarding Item 23, students had to rush to attend their interdisciplinary classes as there was little time to reach other departments which were located between long distance and they reported that had little time to eat lunch and were always late for their interdisciplinary classes.

Since there was limited seat available, some students had opted for subjects other than their first choice or subject of their interest which made them disinterested in the subject and lost the purpose of multidisciplinary education. Many students faced difficulty in attending their interdisciplinary classes on time due to constraint of time and long distance between departments, since they did not have their own private vehicle for transportation.

Many students felt that since the interdisciplinary subjects are new to them they have to give lots of effort to truly understand the subject, they spent more time in interdisciplinary subjects which leave less time to study their

main subjects. Since internal assessment and external examination are compulsory, they are pressured to study hard as they were afraid to fail the subject, it felt almost like a burden to take interdisciplinary subjects.

Many respondents reported that there was lack of communication, coordination and collaboration among different departments in terms of teaching and time schedule which posed problems for the students.

From the finding of the study, students wished to interact more with the teachers regarding the subject matter of their interdisciplinary major and minor. Since the approach was new for them, there were lots of doubts they wished to clarify with the teachers and also regarding flexibility of timing, manner of internal assessment and examination. They also felt that since there were variations in the methods and techniques of teachings at other departments when compared with their parent department they found it difficult to catch up with class activities and lectures.

Regarding infrastructure at Mizoram University, it is fair to say that the institution is well equipped with library, technology and digital learning. However, based on the reports of the respondents, there is still room for improvement, as some classes are congested and overcrowded; many respondents felt that more chairs and tables were needed.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended for improving implementation of multidisciplinary education at Mizoram University.

- **Awareness and Sensitization:** Before students opt for their interdisciplinary subjects, thorough sensitization and awareness programme regarding the aims and purpose of implementing multidisciplinary education; also workshop and exposure on the nature of the subject matter of each interdisciplinary subject will be more effective to orient the students, to make wise decision and how they can get maximum benefit from the subject they had selected.
- **Increase of Seats Availability:** If possible, it would be desirable more seats be available in each department as to accommodate many students who wish to attend their preferred subjects so that students can choose the major and minor interdisciplinary subjects in which they are really interested in so as to enhance their learning and gain maximum benefit from their chosen subjects.
- More collaborative effort and communication among different departments regarding time schedule, method of instruction, and number of assignments given would alleviate some of students' problems.
- **Flexibility in Time Schedule:** Since there is constraint of time students had to rush to attend their disciplinary classes, it would be desirable if they are given more time for break or arrange some means of transportation for reaching the department on time.
- **Communication and Interaction:** Students desired more practical and good communication between teachers and students to clarify their doubts regarding the subject matter being taught. A more open interaction between teachers and students and also among students would benefit the students as well as the teachers where everyone involved would get insight to improve teaching and learning.
- **More Flexible Evaluation:** It would be desirable if evaluation of interdisciplinary subjects be a little flexible than their main subjects so as to relieve the stress and burden carried by the students. And also they will have more time to devote for their main subjects. In this regard, evaluation in the form of assignments and presentation rather than tests or lesser number of tests if any is recommended.
- Encourage project-based learning and group activities that require students to apply their knowledge to their main studies and future career.
- **More Job-oriented and Detailed Syllabus:** A syllabus with reading recommendations and materials would be helpful in having a deeper and better understanding of the multidisciplinary subject because these subjects could be something completely new for some students. A more holistic and job-oriented teaching would greatly benefit the students to prepare them for a 21st century workforce.
- **Faculty Development:** It would be helpful for teachers to orient towards multidisciplinary education and its effective transaction to enable increase in technology-based learning, more engaging teaching, integration of technology and pedagogy, assessment and student support for enhanced student experiences.

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