Academe *Journal of Education & Psychology* *ISSN No: 2249-040X*
Volume-15, Issue-1, Year-2025 (January-June) *Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal (IF: 6.25)*
PP: 154-163 *Journal Website www.academejournal.in*

"SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BAGLESS EDUCATION: A KEY PATHWAY TO ACHIEVING NEP 2020 OBJECTIVES"

Chandrasekhar Bhoi

Assistant Professor (TE) in Botany, B.J.B. Autonomous College,Bhubaneswar,India

Biswarupa Behera

Asst.Prof.(cont.) in pedagogy of chemistry, Ravenshaw university, Cuttack

Swaviman Subhendu Mohanty.

Asst. Prof. (cont.) in Pedagogy of Biological science, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack

ABSTRACT

The *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020* represents a paradigm shift in India's approach to education, emphasizing flexibility, learner-centric pedagogy, and the integration of vocational and skill-based learning from an early stage. Among its innovative recommendations is the concept of *Bagless Days*—periodic, structured days during which students engage in learning without textbooks, focusing instead on hands-on activities, local crafts, vocational training, and experiential learning modules. This review-based study critically examines the theoretical underpinnings, practical implementation, and policy implications of Bagless Education within the NEP 2020 framework. Drawing from national and international educational models, the paper highlights how Bagless Education supports the development of 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. Additionally, it underscores the potential of this approach in reducing academic pressure, increasing engagement, and fostering inclusivity by connecting classroom learning with real-world experiences.The paper concludes with recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders on optimizing the impact and scalability of Bagless Education across diverse educational contexts in India.

Keywords: Bagless Education, NEP 2020, Skill Development, Experiential Learning,Vocational Training, 21st-Century Skills, Holistic Education, Educational Reform

1. INTRODUCTION & POLICY CONTEXT

The *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020* marks a significant shift in India's educational vision, aiming to transform the system from one that is heavily content-driven to one that prioritizes holistic development, creativity, critical thinking, and real-world skills (Ministry of Education, 2020). Rooted in the principles of accessibility, equity, quality, and lifelong learning, NEP 2020 seeks to make education more experiential, competency-based, and aligned with the developmental needs of the 21st century.

One of the most innovative features of the policy is the recommendation to implement "Bagless Days" across schools—specifically, a minimum of 10 days per year during Grades 6 to 8 (and encouraged even earlier) to be dedicated exclusively to hands-on, vocational, and experiential learning activities (NEP 2020, p. 38). On these days, traditional textbooks are set aside, and students are immersed in real-world tasks such as local craftwork, agricultural activities, community service, and exposure to various trades and professions. The objective is to integrate learning with life by encouraging the development of practical skills, creativity, and an appreciation for the dignity of labor.

The introduction of Bagless Days reflects an acknowledgment of long-standing criticisms of the Indian education system—namely, its overemphasis on rote memorization and examination-driven learning (Kumar, 2005; Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). By incorporating structured, curriculum-aligned activities into the mainstream schooling process, Bagless Days aim to foster early exposure to vocational skills, nurture curiosity, and make education more joyful and relevant to students' lived experiences. This initiative is also closely tied to the larger vision of enhancing employability, supporting local economies, and bridging the urban-rural divide in skill development opportunities.

Moreover, the emphasis on contextualized, skill-based education aligns closely with global educational frameworks such as UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 project, which advocate for a learning paradigm grounded in flexibility, lifelong learning, and socio-emotional development (UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2018).

In sum, Bagless Education is not a peripheral experiment but a policy-backed strategy for transforming traditional schooling into a more dynamic and inclusive space for 21st-century learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study follows a narrative review approach to synthesize developments in Bagless Education from 2020 to 2025. It draws from policy documents, educational reports, peer-reviewed articles, and media sources. Selection criteria included relevance to Bagless Education, vocational training, and experiential pedagogies aligned with NEP 2020.

Four key themes guided the analysis:

1. Theoretical Foundations – Educational and pedagogical theories.
2. Policy Alignment – Consistency with NEP 2020 and national reforms.
3. Implementation Case Studies – Pilot projects and school-level practices.
4. Barriers and Recommendations – Challenges and policy suggestions.

Table 1: Key Sources by Theme

Theme	Key Sources	Focus Area
Theoretical Foundations	Kolb (1984), Dewey (1938), UNESCO (2017), OECD (2018)	Experiential learning, global competencies
Policy Alignment	NEP 2020, NCERT (2021), NCF-SE (2023)	National education reforms, vocational integration
Implementation Case Studies	CBSE (2022), State Reports (Delhi, Karnataka), Azim Premji Foundation (2023)	Ground-level practices and outcomes
Barriers & Recommendations	EPW (2023), IJEL (2022), The Hindu (2024), teacher feedback reports	Training gaps, infrastructure, local adaptation

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section synthesizes global and Indian research on Bagless Education, experiential learning theories, vocational integration, and international comparisons. These areas form the conceptual and practical foundations of Bagless Days as proposed in NEP 2020.

3.1 Bagless Education in Policy and Practice

The concept of *Bagless Education* gained prominence with the release of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which proposed at least 10 Bagless Days per year for students in Grades 6–8, aiming to foster hands-on engagement with local crafts, storytelling, and vocational exposure (Ministry of Education, 2020). The NCERT has supported this policy with dedicated teacher training modules and pedagogical handbooks (NCERT, 2021; 2024). Pilot programs in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh have showcased Bagless Days involving local artisan visits, community-based projects, nature walks, and creative art sessions. These pilots demonstrate localized adaptation and growing teacher engagement

3.2 Experiential and Constructivist Learning Theories

Bagless Education is deeply rooted in experiential and constructivist learning paradigms. John Dewey (1938) emphasized the role of direct experience in meaningful learning, advocating for education that is democratic, interactive, and connected to life. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) formalized this into a cyclical process involving:Concrete Experience,Reflective Observation,Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation.

These models affirm that students learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process — a principle directly reflected in Bagless Day activities like craft-making, field visits, and problem-solving exercises.

3.3 Skill Development in School Education

Globally, early skill development is seen as crucial for enhancing student engagement and reducing dropout rates. UNESCO-UNEVOC (2016) and the OECD (2020) advocate vocational exposure during schooling as a way to align education with real-world challenges and workforce demands. In India, NITI Aayog (2021) highlighted that fewer than 5% of school students are exposed to structured skill-based education. Studies by the Azim Premji Foundation (2022) show that children, particularly in rural settings, respond positively to life skills modules, community-integrated learning, and flexible, non-academic tasks that reflect their socio-economic contexts. These insights provide a compelling rationale for institutionalizing Bagless Education in middle school curricula.

3.4 International Comparisons

Internationally, several countries offer valuable models that echo the spirit of Bagless Education:

1. **Finland's "phenomenon-based learning"** replaces subject silos with interdisciplinary, project-based themes rooted in real-life contexts. This model promotes critical thinking and student-led inquiry from early grades (Sahlberg, 2015).
2. **Germany's dual vocational education system** integrates classroom instruction with apprenticeships, ensuring students acquire practical skills alongside academic knowledge (Euler, 2013).
3. These models provide evidence that **skill-based, experiential learning** can enhance academic achievement, student confidence, and employability — validating the intent behind NEP 2020's Bagless Day framework.

Table 2: Summary of Literature Themes and Key Sources

Theme	Key Authors/Organizations	Contribution to Bagless Education Framework
Policy Foundation	Ministry of Education (2020), NCERT (2021, 2024)	Policy basis for Bagless Days; curriculum and teacher support
Pedagogical Theory	Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984)	Experiential learning cycle; constructivist rationale
Skill Development	UNESCO-UNEVOC (2016), OECD (2020), NITI Aayog (2021), Azim Premji Foundation (2022)	Early vocational training; integration of crafts and life skills in curriculum
Global Comparisons	Sahlberg (2015), Euler (2013)	Finland and Germany as models of hands-on, skill-integrated educatio

4. THEORETICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The implementation of Bagless Education as proposed in NEP 2020 is grounded in well-established educational theories and aligned with global development goals. Its design emphasizes learning that is participatory, locally relevant, and skill-centered.

4.1 Constructivism and Experiential Learning

Bagless Education is fundamentally rooted in constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and interaction with their environment. John Dewey (1938), a pioneer of progressive education, argued that effective learning arises from meaningful experiences that link academic content with real-life contexts. Dewey emphasized that education should not be limited to passive instruction but should encourage learners to think critically, solve problems, and engage with their surroundings.

Building upon Dewey's insights, David Kolb (1984) introduced the *Experiential Learning Theory*, which describes learning as a four-stage cycle: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation.

This model provides the theoretical foundation for Bagless Days, where students participate in hands-on tasks (e.g., pottery, gardening, storytelling), reflect on their experiences, and apply insights in new contexts. Such experiential approaches enhance retention, promote critical thinking, and help students connect learning to their own lives (Kolb, 1984; Moon, 2004).

4.2 Vocational Integration and Skill Acquisition

NEP 2020 highlights the importance of early exposure to vocational education to help learners develop practical skills, explore future careers, and appreciate the dignity of labor. Bagless Days enable students to engage in local crafts and trades—such as agriculture, carpentry, weaving, cooking, and gardening—which are often undervalued in traditional curricula (Ministry of Education, 2020).

According to UNESCO-UNEVOC (2016), early vocational training supports the development of life skills, increases student engagement, and reduces dropout rates, particularly in low-income or rural communities. By linking classroom instruction with real-world activities, Bagless Education serves as a bridge between academic learning and livelihood skills, addressing both cognitive and non-cognitive domains of development (NITI Aayog, 2021).

4.3 Alignment with SDG 4

Bagless Education also aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN, 2015). Specifically, SDG Target 4.4 calls for a substantial increase in the number of youth and adults with relevant technical and vocational skills for employment and entrepreneurship.

By embedding skill-based, inclusive learning into school systems, Bagless Education addresses SDG 4's sub-targets related to equity, relevance, and sustainability. It also complements global frameworks such as UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which promotes critical thinking, values-based education, and active citizenship (UNESCO, 2017).

5. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND CASE STUDIES

Bagless Education, as recommended in NEP 2020, is not only theoretically supported but also increasingly explored through pilot implementations and global comparisons. This section reviews national case studies, international parallels, and stakeholder feedback to assess the effectiveness and challenges of this innovative approach.

5.1 National Implementation

Several Indian states have initiated Bagless Day pilot programs, aligning with NEP's directive to incorporate at least 10 experiential learning days per year for students in Grades 6–8. Delhi introduced thematic Bagless Days that included storytelling, yoga, and sessions with artisans under the Happiness Curriculum and Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum (Delhi DoE, 2023). In Maharashtra, selected schools integrated agricultural and craft-based modules through partnerships with local NGOs (MSCERT, 2023). Uttar Pradesh piloted activities such as pottery, painting, and community service in rural schools, particularly in the Bundelkhand region (UP Basic Shiksha Parishad, 2024).

A review conducted by NCERT in 2024 reported notable improvements in student engagement, creativity, peer interaction, and self-confidence, especially among middle school students. Teachers observed better classroom dynamics and higher motivation levels during Bagless Days. However, the study also highlighted variations in implementation fidelity due to logistical challenges, lack of structured planning, and uneven teacher preparedness (NCERT, 2024).

5.2 Global Parallels

Internationally, India's Bagless Education model shares similarities with Finland's "phenomenon-based learning", where students work on interdisciplinary, real-world themes instead of traditional subject divisions. This approach fosters inquiry-based thinking, collaboration, and practical application (Sahlberg, 2015).

In Germany, the dual vocational education and training (VET) system combines classroom learning with on-the-job apprenticeships. From the secondary level, students receive structured vocational exposure, making them job-ready while still in school (Euler, 2013). Though India's Bagless Education is implemented at an earlier stage and in shorter intervals, the emphasis on skill development and experiential learning reflects similar principles.

These international models provide long-term evidence that hands-on, contextual learning can improve both academic outcomes and career readiness—validating the potential of Bagless Education when well-executed.

5.3 Stakeholder Perspectives

Feedback from key stakeholders offers important insights into the practical impact and scalability of Bagless Days:

Students across pilot programs report increased enjoyment, creativity, and reduced academic pressure during Bagless Days (Azim Premji Foundation, 2023). Activities like group discussions, crafts, and field visits were viewed as refreshing departures from rote learning.

Teachers expressed appreciation for the pedagogical freedom and deeper student engagement afforded by Bagless Days. However, they also cited the need for structured guidelines, additional training, and resource support to implement activities effectively, particularly in low-income and rural schools (NCERT, 2024; EPW, 2023).

Parents and community members showed interest in participating in vocational sessions, such as craft demonstrations and storytelling, especially in rural and tribal areas. However, in urban settings, concerns about "non-academic time loss" were occasionally noted (NITI Aayog, 2021).

Overall, the stakeholder evidence suggests strong receptivity and promise, but also highlights the need for systemic support to ensure equitable implementation.

6. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

6.1 Curriculum Integration

Integrating Bagless Days into the academic calendar requires a well-structured approach that ensures consistency with existing curricular goals. These days should not be treated as isolated events but rather woven into the broader educational strategy. Ideally, Bagless Days can be organized once every month or quarter, depending on the institutional capacity.

The activities conducted on these days should focus on hands-on and experiential learning. Examples include storytelling to enhance language skills, dramatization and role plays to foster emotional intelligence and understanding of social issues, field visits to farms or local businesses for real-world exposure, and sessions in local crafts to develop psychomotor skills and cultural appreciation. Such activities enrich students' learning by connecting knowledge with life experiences (NCERT, 2021).

To facilitate implementation, academic institutions should prepare a resource bank of activity modules, mapped to age and subject-specific learning outcomes. Teachers should be provided with guidance materials and flexibility in choosing contextually relevant themes.

6.2 Teacher Preparation

Teachers are the primary facilitators of Bagless Day initiatives. Their role expands beyond traditional instruction to include guiding students through discovery-based and collaborative learning. Therefore, specialized training is essential to equip teachers with the skills required for such facilitation.

Targeted professional development must cover experiential learning frameworks (e.g., Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle), facilitation of group activities, student-centered methodologies, and the use of simple vocational tools. It is equally important to train teachers in managing diverse learners and inclusive education practices.

To ensure long-term impact, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) must be made mandatory and integrated into teacher appraisal and incentive systems. Workshops, peer-

learning forums, and digital modules can serve as effective formats for this purpose (UNESCO, 2020).

6.3 Infrastructure and Partnerships

Creating an enabling environment for Bagless Days involves establishing the necessary physical and human infrastructure. Schools should be supported in setting up Maker Labs, Skill Parks, and Open Learning Zones where students can explore, build, and collaborate on projects. These spaces should be accessible, inclusive, and equipped with basic tools and materials.

In addition to in-house capabilities, forming strategic partnerships with local communities is vital. Collaborations with local artisans can bring in traditional wisdom and skill-building opportunities. NGOs and civil society organizations can support program design, monitoring, and thematic sessions on topics like health, hygiene, environment, and civic duties. Local industries can offer practical insights and mentorship through site visits or interactive sessions.

These partnerships not only enrich the learning experience but also ground education in the local socio-economic context, making it more relevant and engaging (Government of India, 2020).

Table 3: Implementation Framework for Bagless Days

Component	Description	Stakeholders Involved	Frequency
Curriculum Integration	Thematic planning, mapped with learning outcomes, activity repositories	Teachers, Curriculum Designers	Monthly/Quarterly
Teacher Preparation	CPD, training in experiential methods, inclusive practices	Education Departments, NGOs, DIETs	Annual/Bi-annual
Infrastructure	Maker labs, open learning spaces, vocational tools	School Committees, CSR Sponsors	One-time Setup + Ongoing
Partnerships	Artisans, NGOs, industries for skill and community-based learning	Local Government, Community Leaders	Ongoing

7. CHALLENGES

Despite the transformative potential of Bagless Days, several systemic challenges may hinder their effective implementation across schools. These barriers must be addressed through policy support, capacity building, and inclusive planning.

Table 2: Challenges to Implementation of Bagless Days

Challenge	Details	Implications	Sources/Citations
Teacher Preparedness	Many educators lack exposure to experiential learning techniques, student-centered facilitation, or vocational content. Traditional teacher education is often theoretical and exam-oriented.	Teachers may feel ill-equipped, leading to inconsistent or ineffective delivery.	NCERT (2021); UNESCO (2020)

Infrastructure Deficits	Rural and underfunded schools often lack maker labs, open spaces, vocational tools, and material kits necessary for conducting hands-on learning.	Limits the scope and quality of Bagless Day activities.	NEP (2020); Azim Premji Foundation (2022)
Equity Issues	Schools in remote or economically weaker regions face greater implementation challenges, including limited community partnerships and fewer trained staff.	Widening of educational disparities between urban and rural learners.	Brookings (2020); Oxfam India (2021)
Assessment Frameworks	Existing assessment systems are focused on cognitive outcomes and academic exams, with little emphasis on creativity, collaboration, or practical skills.	Lack of accountability and recognition for skills developed on Bagless Days.	NCERT (2021); NITI Aayog (2020)
Sustainability	Without institutional backing and recurring budget allocations, Bagless Days risk becoming tokenistic events rather than integrated pedagogical practices.	Short-term implementation with no long-term impact or policy continuity.	NEP (2020); UNESCO (2020); India Today (2023)

8. RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

8.1 Longitudinal Studies on Skill Acquisition

Currently, there is a lack of long-term studies that evaluate the sustained impact of Bagless interventions on students' cognitive, emotional, and vocational skills. Most evaluations, if any, are anecdotal or short-term, limiting evidence-based policymaking.

Future research should explore how repeated exposure to Bagless Days influences students' problem-solving abilities, creativity, collaboration, and confidence over several years. Longitudinal mixed-method studies could uncover correlations between experiential learning and improved life skills, employability, and academic outcomes over time (Banerjee & Duflo, 2019; UNESCO, 2020).

8.2 Development of Portfolio-Based Assessment Methods

Traditional assessments do not capture the nuanced, process-based learning that Bagless Days aim to promote. There is a critical need to develop portfolio-based and performance-based assessment tools that track student growth in real-life competencies such as communication, teamwork, creativity, and civic responsibility.

Research is needed to test and refine tools like digital learning portfolios, rubric-based evaluations, and self-reflection journals, especially within low-resource school contexts. These tools can enable both formative and summative evaluation of non-academic learning (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2014; NCERT, 2021).

8.3 Regional Case Studies Comparing Implementation Effectiveness

The diversity in school infrastructure, teacher capacity, and community involvement across Indian states calls for region-specific implementation research. Comparative case studies that analyze urban vs. rural, public vs. private, or tribal vs. mainstream school contexts can help identify scalable models and context-driven innovations.

Such comparative analysis can also highlight successful partnership models, resource-sharing frameworks, and effective activity typologies. This evidence base would be essential to inform guidelines for adaptive implementation (NUEPA, 2018; Oxfam India, 2021).

8.4 Cost-Benefit Analysis of Experiential Infrastructure

Implementing Bagless Days requires investment in maker labs, vocational tools, and open learning environments. However, there is limited research on the economic return of such infrastructure in terms of student engagement, learning outcomes, and employability.

Rigorous cost-benefit analyses should be conducted to measure the financial viability of various infrastructure models (low-cost, community-supported, CSR-funded, etc.). This would help prioritize investment in high-impact, low-cost infrastructure strategies, particularly for government schools (World Bank, 2019; NITI Aayog, 2020).

10. CONCLUSION

Bagless Education represents a transformative shift in the Indian educational landscape, aimed at nurturing learners beyond rote memorization and standardized testing. Rooted in the vision articulated by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, it emphasizes the importance of joyful, inclusive, and competency-based learning that prepares students for life, work, and citizenship in the 21st century.By integrating hands-on activities, storytelling, role play, craftwork, and community interaction into regular schooling, Bagless Education cultivates practical skills, creativity, collaborative ability, and real-world problem-solving. It also fosters emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and self-confidence—qualities that are increasingly recognized as essential in both personal and professional spheres.

However, the success of Bagless Education depends on more than well-meaning policy. It requires systemic investment in teacher capacity, physical and digital infrastructure, inclusive curriculum design, and community partnerships. If implemented thoughtfully and supported sustainably, Bagless Education has the potential to transition from a policy innovation into a pedagogical cornerstone of Indian education. It can bridge the gap between school and life, theory and practice, and ultimately, between learning and meaningful living. This is not only a step toward educational reform but a stride toward nation-building through empowered learners.

REFERENCES

1. Azim Premji Foundation. (2022). Reimagining middle school learning. Bangalore.
2. Azim Premji Foundation. (2023). Voices from the field: Implementing Bagless Days in rural schools. Bengaluru.
3. Banerjee, A. V., & Duflo, E. (2011). Poor economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty. PublicAffairs.
4. CBSE. (2022). Vocational exposure pilot study. Central Board of Secondary Education.
5. Delhi Directorate of Education. (2023). Evaluation report: Happiness Curriculum and Bagless Days. Government of NCT Delhi.
6. Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and education. Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131728609335764
7. Economic & Political Weekly. (2023). The ground realities of skill education in Indian schools. Economic & Political Weekly, 58(12).

8. Euler, D. (2013). Germany's dual vocational training system: A model for other countries? Bertelsmann Stiftung.
9. International Journal of Experiential Learning. (2022). "Learning Without Bags" study. International Journal of Experiential Learning.
10. Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice-Hall.
11. Kumar, K. (2005). Political agenda of education: A study of colonialist and nationalist ideas (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
12. Ministry of Education. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Government of India. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
13. Moon, J. A. (2004). A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice. Routledge.
14. MSCERT. (2023). Maharashtra Bagless Learning pilot program review. Maharashtra State Council of Educational Research and Training.
15. NCERT. (2021). Teacher training manual on experiential learning. National Council of Educational Research and Training.
16. NCERT. (2024). Bagless Days implementation review report. National Council of Educational Research and Training.
17. NCFSE. (2023). National Curriculum Framework – School Education. New Delhi.
18. NITI Aayog. (2020). School Education Quality Index (SEQI). Government of India.
19. NITI Aayog. (2021). Report on vocational education in Indian schools. Government of India.
20. OECD. (2018). Education 2030: The future of education and skills. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/
21. OECD. (2020). Vocational education and training in the 21st century. OECD Publishing.
22. Sahlberg, P. (2015). Finnish lessons 2.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland? Teachers College Press.
23. The Hindu. (2024). Hands-on learning in schools. The Hindu.
24. Times of India. (2025). Science parks and Bagless Days in UP. The Times of India.
25. UNESCO. (2017). Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives. UNESCO Publishing. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444
26. UNESCO-UNEVOC. (2016). Developing skills for employability: Vocational education for youth. UNESCO-UNEVOC