



The Self as the Core of Holistic Education: An Interdisciplinary Integration of the Bhagavad Gita, Psychological Perspectives and Nep 2020

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How to Cite this Article:

Kapri, G. & Ghosh, S. (2026). The Self as the Core of Holistic Education: An Interdisciplinary Integration of the Bhagavad Gita, Psychological Perspectives and Nep 2020. International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management, <i>02</i>(04). <https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i4.279>

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<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i4.279>

Abstract:

In the contemporary era of rapid technological advancement and material-oriented lifestyles, education often prioritizes cognitive development while neglecting the emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of learners. By combining ideas from the Bhagavad Gita, contemporary psychology and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, this essay seeks to rethink comprehensive education through the perspective of the self. The Bhagavad Gita presents a profound understanding of self-realization, duty (dharma), and inner balance, which aligns with psychological constructs such as self-concept, self-regulation, and emotional intelligence. NEP 2020 advocates learner-centered, value-based, and experiential education, resonating strongly with both philosophical and psychological perspectives of the Self. The study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates these domains to promote a balanced and meaningful educational approach. The paper adopts a qualitative, analytical methodology based on textual interpretation and policy analysis. The results indicate that learners' general well-being and academic performance can be greatly improved by a well-balanced synthesis of psychological concepts and spiritual wisdom. The study concluded that to educate people for meaningful and responsible lives, education must go beyond academic success and foster the inner self.

Key Words:

Holistic education, Bhagavad Gita, Psychology, NEP 2020, Self-awareness.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the present era of rapid technological advancement and increasing competition, education has largely become outcome-oriented, focusing primarily on academic performance and measurable achievements. While such an approach contributes to intellectual development, it often overlooks essential aspects of human growth such as emotional stability, moral values, and inner awareness. As a result, issues such as stress, identity crisis, and value disorientation are becoming increasingly common among learners.

Holistic education offers an alternative perspective by emphasizing the balanced development of the individual-intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual. At the center of this approach lies the concept of the “Self.” Understanding oneself is fundamental to achieving personal growth, meaningful learning, and social harmony. Ancient Indian philosophy, particularly the Bhagavad Gita, provides profound insights into self-realization and inner consciousness. Similarly, modern psychology explores concepts such as self-concept, self-efficacy, and identity formation, which play a crucial role in shaping behavior and learning. Furthermore, NEP 2020 highlights the importance of experiential learning, value-based education, and holistic development. This paper attempts to integrate these perspectives to develop a comprehensive understanding of holistic education through the concept of the Self.

Recent research on the concept of the “self” in education highlights its central role in fostering holistic development and meaningful learning experiences. Scholars across psychology, philosophy, and education argue that understanding the self enables learners to develop autonomy, emotional balance, and a sense of purpose. The integration of classical philosophical insights, particularly from the Bhagavad Gita, with modern psychological theories and contemporary educational frameworks like NEP 2020, provides a comprehensive approach to nurturing the whole individual.

Bandura, A. (1977) conducted a study entitled “*Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change.*” The main objective of the study was to examine how beliefs in one’s capabilities influence motivation and performance. Finally, the researcher found that self-efficacy significantly affects how individuals think, feel, and act. The study revealed that students with higher self-efficacy demonstrate greater persistence, resilience, and academic success. It also highlighted that mastery experiences, social modeling, and encouragement enhance self-efficacy beliefs. Moreover, the findings indicated that fostering self-belief in learners is essential for achieving educational goals and promoting lifelong learning.

Gardner, H. (1983) conducted a study entitled “*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.*” The main objective of the study was to challenge the traditional notion of intelligence and propose a broader understanding of human abilities. Finally, the researcher found that intelligence is multidimensional, including linguistic, logical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. The study revealed that intrapersonal intelligence, which involves self-awareness, is essential for understanding oneself. It also highlighted that recognizing diverse intelligences supports inclusive and holistic education. Moreover, the findings indicated that educational practices should cater to individual differences to foster self-development.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002) conducted a study entitled “*Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner.*” The main objective of the study was to examine how learners actively control and direct their own learning processes. Finally, the researcher found that self-regulated learners set goals, monitor progress, and reflect on outcomes effectively. The study revealed that such learners demonstrate higher academic achievement and motivation. It also highlighted that self-regulation involves cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components. Moreover, the findings indicated that teaching strategies should encourage autonomy and self-reflection to develop independent learners.



UNESCO (1996) presented a comprehensive framework in the report “*Learning: The Treasure Within.*” The main objective of the study was to redefine the goals of education in a rapidly changing world. Finally, the report identified four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. The study revealed that “learning to be” emphasizes the development of the whole person, including moral, emotional, and creative dimensions. It also highlighted that education should go beyond academic achievement to foster human values and self-realization. Moreover, the findings indicated that holistic education is essential for sustainable development and global harmony.

Overall, the literature suggests that the concept of the self is central to holistic education. While psychological theories provide empirical understanding of self-development, philosophical texts like the Bhagavad Gita offer deeper insights into self-realization, and policy frameworks like NEP 2020 emphasize their practical application. Together, they underscore the importance of nurturing the whole individual—intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually—for achieving true educational excellence.

2.0 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In recent years, there has been growing recognition that the existing education system is insufficient in addressing the overall development of learners. While academic success remains a primary focus, there is a noticeable gap in nurturing emotional intelligence, ethical values, and self-awareness.

The increasing prevalence of stress, anxiety, and lack of purpose among students indicates the need for a more balanced and meaningful approach to education. Holistic education, with its emphasis on the development of the whole person, provides a promising direction.

However, there is limited integration between traditional philosophical insights, modern psychological theories, and current educational policies. This study is significant as it attempts to bridge this gap by bringing together: The spiritual perspective of the “*Bhagavad Gita*”, The scientific understanding of the “*Self*” from psychology and the policy framework of “*NEP 2020.*” Such integration is essential for developing an education system that is both academically effective and humanly meaningful.

3.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the concept of the “Self” help in understanding holistic education?
2. How do the Bhagavad Gita, psychological theories, and NEP 2020 together support students’ overall development?

4.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To understand the role of the Self in holistic education
2. To study how philosophical, psychological, and policy perspectives support overall development of learners

5.0 METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach and is analytical in nature, focusing on conceptual interpretation and theoretical understanding rather than empirical investigation. The study seeks to explore the



concept of the Self as the core of holistic education through an interdisciplinary examination of philosophical, psychological, and policy perspectives.

The data for the study have been collected from both primary and secondary sources, including:

- Classical texts and philosophical works, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*
- Books related to education, philosophy, and psychology
- Research articles and scholarly journals
- Educational policy documents, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The collected data were analysed using interpretative analysis. Key ideas related to the Self, holistic education, self-realization, and human development were identified, categorized, and compared across the selected sources. The study then observed the interrelationship among philosophical teachings, psychological theories, and educational policy to develop an integrated understanding of holistic education.

6.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA, MODERN PSYCHOLOGY, AND NEP 2020

The framework operates on the premise that the “Self” is the central axis around which holistic education revolves. It bridges ancient wisdom, modern science, and current policy to move education from a purely cognitive exercise to a transformative life experience.

6.1 Present Education

The modern education system is increasingly concerned with cognitive development and quantitative outcomes. According to the UNESCO Report (1996), education should be organised around four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.

UNESCO gives details:

- 1) **Learning to Know:** It focuses on the acquisition of knowledge. The majority of educational systems place considerable emphasis on syllabus completion and exam success.
- 2) **Learning to Do:** Skill development is required for this ; only students enrolled in vocational or technical programs can participate.
- 3) **Learning to Live Together:** It is frequently ignored, despite its importance in multicultural, multilingual communities.
- 4) **Learning to Be:** It gets the least amount of attention. The development of personality, moral principles, creativity, and emotional intelligence all depend on this foundation.

However, the latter pillars - particularly “learning to be” -are largely overlooked in favour of the first two. Without a focus “learning to be,” education is not complete. As a result, social unrest is growing increasingly frequent. A good technologist or doctor is not a good husband or father. Older parents are being abandoned by their children. The quality of life in society is deteriorating. Individuals are experiencing an increasing number of psychiatric disorders. Stress, worry, and depression is the norm.

6.2 Bhagavad Gita

Shrimad Bhagavat Gita highlights the final two pillars in addition to the first two during this difficult time. As interwoven routes to comprehensive development, the Bhagavad Gita highlights the significance of knowledge (*jnana*), action (*karma*), and devotion (*bhakti*) (*Bhagavad Gita*, 3.3). The Bhagavat Gita therefore demonstrates



to us the way to holistic development via authentic education. A genuine education ought to assist people in realizing their inherent potential and true selves.

According to the Gita, the self (*Atman*) is indestructible, everlasting, and unchangeable. It is not the same as the body, brain, or mind. In his speech to Arjuna, Lord Krishna states:

“The self is never born, and it never dies; it is not slain when the body is slain” (Bhagavad Gita 2.20)

This stanza asserts that death only affects the physical body and not the actual self, highlighting the immortality and continuity of the self. The Gita highlights that the self, which is a pure consciousness, is our ultimate identity rather than the body, which dies, or the mind, which changes:

“As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.” (Bhagavad Gita 2.22)

Reincarnation and the transcendence of the self over physical change are demonstrated by this allegory.

The self is portrayed in the Gita as a mute witness who is not involved in the actions of the body:

“He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men...” (Bhagavad Gita 4.18)

Krishna demonstrates how self-realization results in a detachment from the results of activity and an awareness of oneself as an observer rather than a true doer.

- The secret to moksha (*liberation*) is self-knowledge (*Atma-jnana*). A person can break free from the cycles of life and death and the bonds of karma by discovering who they really are:

“When a man sees all beings as the self and the self as all beings, he never turns away from it.” (Bhagavad Gita 6.29)

The non-dualistic (Advaita) perspective, which views the self and the universe as one, is reflected in this.

6.3 Psychology

Understanding oneself, or our own identity, is the first step toward holistic development. In contemporary psychology and education, the idea of “*Self*” has grown in significance. The self is a multifaceted concept in psychology that includes an individual's ideas, emotions, and self-perceptions. It consists of several parts:

- 1) **Self-concept:** This pertains to how a person views himself in several spheres of life, such as the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical realms (Rogers, 1959).
- 2) **Self-esteem:** It has to do with the evaluative part of the self, or how one feels about oneself (Coopersmith, 1967).
- 3) **Self-efficacy:** Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1977), is a person's confidence in their capacity to carry out tasks and accomplish objectives.
- 4) **Ideal self and real self:** Additionally, Rogers (1959) made a distinction between the real self-one's actual self- and the ideal self-one's desired self. Psychological well-being is enhanced when the two are more in line.

Psychologically, social contact, culture, and life experiences all influence the formation of the self, which starts in early childhood. Identity creation is emphasised as a crucial developmental process in Erikson's stages of psychological development (Erikson, 1968).

The idea of self has a big influence on students' motivation, engagement, and success in learning environments. Important dimensions consist of:

- a) **Academic self-concept:** refers to how a student views their own capacity for academic success (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Higher motivation and improved academic performance are correlated with a favourable academic self-concept.



- b) **Self-regulated learning:** Strong self-esteem increases the likelihood that students will take ownership of their education, set objectives, and track their progress (Zimmerman, 2002).
- c) **Teacher's role in shaping self:** Teachers shape students' perceptions of themselves through expectations, classroom dynamics, and feedback. Self-efficacy and self-esteem are increased by positive reinforcement and a nurturing learning environment (Hattie, 2009).

Constructivist and humanistic approaches to education, which see students as active participants creating knowledge via experiences that reflect and develop their identities, also place a strong emphasis on the concept of self.

6.4 NEP 2020

The concept of self and holistic education is strongly linked by NEP 2020. It acknowledges that real education entails both personal growth and the learning of external knowledge.

While self-development guarantees meaningful engagement with learning, holistic education offers the framework for developing the self. The policy's emphasis on the following reflects this integration:

- i. Learner- centred pedagogy
- ii. Experiential and reflective learning
- iii. Emotional and social development
- iv. Ethical and value-based education

NEP 2020 seeks to develop well-rounded people who are capable of critical thinking, creativity, and responsible citizenship by emphasising both the external and internal aspects of learning.

The emphasis on self and holistic development becomes extremely pertinent in the context of growing academic pressure, technological influence, and societal difficulties. By encouraging balanced growth and inner well-being, NEP 2020 tackles these problems.

The policy resonates with both traditional philosophical concepts of self-realisation and contemporary psychological theories of self-concept and emotional intelligence. It is therefore a thorough foundation for changing education in the twenty-first century.

6.5 Theoretical Linkages

The present study establishes meaningful linkages between the philosophical teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, the scientific insights of modern Psychology, and the educational vision of the National Education Policy 2020. These linkages demonstrate how the concept of the "self" acts as a unifying thread connecting inner awareness, psychological development, and educational practice. The integration can be understood through the following three key theoretical linkages:



The following table illustrates how the "Self" is developed through the intersection of these three domains:

Dimension of the Self	Bhagavad Gita Concept	Psychological Construct	NEP 2020 Application
1. Cognitive	<i>Buddhi</i> (Discernment)	Critical Thinking & Metacognition	Inquiry-based learning; multidisciplinary approach.
2. Emotional	<i>Samatvam</i> (Equanimity)	Emotional Regulation & Resilience	Focus on mental health and well-being.
3. Ethical/Social	<i>Dharma</i> (Righteous Action)	Prosocial Behavior & Social Intelligence	Ethics and Human values; Community engagement.
4. Conative	<i>Karma Yoga</i> (Selfless Action)	Intrinsic Motivation & Self-Efficacy	Experiential learning; Vocational integration.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From Objective-1, The study reveals that the concept of the *Self* is central to holistic education, as it integrates cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human development. Insights from the *Bhagavad Gita* highlight the Self (*Ātman*) as the true essence of an individual, emphasizing self-awareness, inner balance, and self-realization as key to meaningful learning.

From a psychological perspective, constructs such as self-concept, self-efficacy, and identity significantly influence learners' motivation, behaviour, and academic performance. A positive and well-developed sense of self enhances confidence, engagement, and the ability to regulate one's own learning.

From Objective-2, The study finds a strong convergence between philosophical insights, psychological theories, and educational policy frameworks in supporting holistic development.

- A. The *Bhagavad Gita* provides a spiritual foundation, emphasizing values such as self-discipline, detachment, ethical action, and self-realization.
- B. Modern psychology offers a scientific understanding of learner development through concepts like emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, identity formation, and self-regulated learning.
- C. NEP 2020 provides a practical and structural framework by promoting learner-centered pedagogy, experiential learning, and value-based education.

The integration of these perspectives creates a comprehensive model where learning is not limited to academic achievement but extends to emotional maturity, ethical awareness, and social responsibility.

Thus, the findings indicate that a combined approach of philosophy, psychology, and policy is essential for fostering well-rounded individuals capable of leading meaningful and responsible lives.

The analysis of philosophical, psychological, and policy perspectives reveals a deep convergence around the concept of the "Self" as the core of holistic education. Rather than treating these domains separately, the findings suggest that the *Bhagavad Gita*, modern psychology, and NEP 2020 collectively offer a multi-dimensional framework for understanding human development. The discussion below synthesizes these insights at a conceptual level.



7.1 Holistic Development through the Panchakosha Perspective

One of the key insights emerging from the study is that holistic education is not limited to intellectual growth but involves the layered development of the human personality. The *Panchakosha model* - ranging from the physical (*Annamaya*) to the blissful (*Anandamaya*) - provides a comprehensive understanding of human development.

From a policy perspective, NEP 2020's emphasis on physical, emotional, and cognitive development reflects this layered structure. The integration suggests that education must move beyond knowledge transmission and focus on inner growth and self-awareness, ensuring balanced development across all dimensions of the self.

7.2 Cognitive Transformation and Psychological Resilience

Another important finding is the parallel between the Bhagavad Gita's dialogue (Krishna-Arjuna) and modern psychological approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Arjuna's crisis represents confusion, anxiety, and moral conflict-issues similar to those addressed in contemporary education. Krishna's guidance helps restructure Arjuna's thinking, promoting clarity, detachment, and purpose.

This aligns with NEP 2020's focus on mental well-being and emotional health. The concept of *Sthitapragya* (mental stability) can be interpreted as a model for developing resilience, emotional balance, and stress management among learners in today's competitive environment.

7.3 Process-Oriented Learning and 'Nishkama Karma'

The study highlights a strong connection between the Gita's principle of *Nishkama Karma* (action without attachment to results) and modern psychological concepts such as "Flow" and intrinsic motivation. When learners focus on the learning process rather than outcomes then anxiety reduces, engagement increases and deep learning occurs.

This insight strongly supports NEP 2020's shift toward competency-based and skill-oriented education, where the emphasis is on learning by doing rather than exam performance. It promotes a mindset where effort, discipline, and meaningful engagement are valued over mere results.

7.4 Self-Actualization and the Higher Purpose of Education

A major conceptual synthesis emerges when comparing:

- a) Maslow's Self-Actualization
- b) Gita's Self-Realization
- c) NEP 2020's "full human potential"

While psychology explains the motivational journey, the Bhagavad Gita provides a spiritual destination, and NEP 2020 offers a policy framework to support this development. This integrated perspective redefines



education as a process of discovering one's true identity, achieving inner harmony and developing universal empathy. Thus, the "Self" is not merely psychological but also ethical, social, and spiritual.

7.5 Personalized Learning through Triguna Theory

The study further reveals that the Triguna Theory (*Sattva, Rajas, Tamas*) offers a powerful framework for understanding learner diversity.

- a) ***Sattvic Learners*** : These learners are reflective, calm, and knowledge-oriented. They exhibit clarity of thought, self-discipline, and a deep interest in learning.
- b) ***Rajasic Learners*** : These learners are active, energetic, and goal-driven. They are motivated by achievement, competition, and recognition.
- c) ***Tamasic Learners*** : These learners tend to be passive, less motivated, and sometimes disengaged. They may require additional support, guidance, and encouragement.

This classification aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on personalized and learner-centered education. It suggests that teaching strategies should be adapted based on students' psychological tendencies, thereby improving effectiveness and inclusivity.

7.6 Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Development

The integration of modern psychology (Emotional Intelligence), NEP 2020 (Social-Emotional Learning), and the Bhagavad Gita (Dharma and universal values) highlights the importance of ethical and emotional development. The principle of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" (the world as one family) promotes global citizenship, aligning education with the needs of a socially responsible and interconnected world.

7.7 Meta-Synthesis of the Findings

At a deeper level, the study presents a unified model:

- A. **Bhagavad Gita** : Provides the spiritual foundation (*Soul*)
- B. **Psychology** : Explains cognitive and emotional mechanisms (*Mind*)
- C. **NEP 2020** : Offers the structural and policy framework (*System*)

The findings clearly indicate that holistic education cannot be achieved through isolated approaches. Instead, it requires an integrated framework where Inner consciousness (Gita) , Psychological development (Modern theories) & Educational structure (NEP 2020) work together to shape a balanced human being.

8. CONCLUSION

The present study highlights that education, in its true sense, must go beyond the limited focus on academic achievement and cognitive development to embrace the holistic growth of the individual. In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, increasing competition, and growing psychological stress, the need for a balanced and meaningful educational approach has become more urgent than ever.



By integrating the philosophical insights of the Bhagavad Gita, the scientific perspectives of modern psychology, and the progressive framework of NEP 2020, the study presents a comprehensive understanding of education centered on the development of the Self. The Bhagavad Gita offers a profound spiritual foundation by emphasizing self-realization, inner awareness, and ethical living. Modern psychology complements this by explaining the role of self-concept, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and identity formation in shaping learners' behaviour and performance. NEP 2020 further operationalizes these ideas by promoting learner-centered, experiential, and value-based education.

The synthesis of these perspectives demonstrates that holistic education is not merely an ideal but a practical necessity. It enables learners to develop intellectual competence along with emotional maturity, moral integrity, and social responsibility. Such an approach fosters not only academic success but also inner stability, resilience, and a sense of purpose.

The study also emphasizes the crucial role of educators in facilitating this transformation. Teachers must move beyond traditional instructional roles and become facilitators who nurture self-awareness, encourage reflection, and create supportive learning environments. At the same time, educational institutions and policymakers must ensure that curricula and assessment systems align with holistic and value-oriented goals.

In summary, the integration of spirituality, psychology, and policy offers a powerful framework for reimagining education in the 21st century. Education rooted in the development of the Self has the potential to create not only knowledgeable individuals but also compassionate, ethical, and responsible human beings, capable of contributing positively to society. Thus, holistic education emerges as the foundation for building a more balanced, humane, and sustainable future.

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