

# From Inferiority to Empowerment: An Adlerian Reading of Student Motivation in Higher Education under NEP 2020

Architaba H Gohil

*Research Scholar, Department of English, MK Bhavnagar University, Gujarat*

[doi.org/10.64643/IJIRTV12I8-190992-459](https://doi.org/10.64643/IJIRTV12I8-190992-459)

**Abstract-** The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has a vision of a complete makeover in the existing education system in India, with a focus on development, teaching, and developing human skills. The modern-day students face issues of anxiety, lack of self-esteem, and motivational problems because of academic competition, pressures, and socio-economic differences. This research work uses Individual Psychology Theory, a theory by Alfred Adler, for analysing the motivational problems of the students at the university level as per the implementation of NEP 2020. The theory of inferiority feelings, striving for superiority, encouragement, and social interest by Adler has a great application in psychology with regard to understanding how individuals learn and overcome challenges. This research suggests that the application of flexibility, interdisciplinary learning, mentor support, and formative assessment, as described in the NEP-2020 guidelines, is largely in line with Adler's emphasis on empowerment rather than a comparison formula. The application of an assessment structure that is encouraging, rather than a deficit-oriented assessment, has a great potential to convert inferiority feelings into a motive for improvement. The paper also delves deeper into how practices such as inclusive classrooms, caring teacher-student relationships, and learning routes, which are inspired by Adlerian psychology, can help instil a sense of confidence, feeling of belonging, and self-motivation in students. In this regard, the importance of humanistic psychological models has been brought to the forefront in the fulfilment of the vision that has been set by NEP 2020, especially when the presence of technology and artificial intelligence has become a dominant force in this modern age. Ultimately, the importance of a learning environment that makes a student a producer as well as a contributing member of society has been emphasized.

**Keywords:** Alfred Adler, Individual Psychology, Student Motivation, Inferiority Feelings, Empowerment in Education, NEP 2020, Human Potential.

## I. INTRODUCTION

India, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse demographic tapestry, stands on the precipice of a profound transformation. At the heart of this transformation is its higher education system, a bastion of knowledge and empowerment. Higher education in India has been a dynamic force, evolving from ancient centers of learning such as Nalanda and Takshashila to the modern-day universities and institutions that dot the subcontinent. The winds of change have blown through its hallowed halls, leading us to a point where we stand at the confluence of history, policy, technology, and socio-economic dynamics, all converging to redefine the contours of education in the country (Raj). India is currently in its transitive period. Implementation of New Education (NEP 2020) Policy has changed the landscape of Higher Education in India. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, adopted by Government of India, envisions significant and far-reaching reforms in higher education sector in India, moving from rote learning to skill-based, holistic education. The policy seeks to move toward a holistic, flexible, and student-centric model that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning. Several months into its implementation, many educators and learners appeared to be struggling with the transition from being strictly theory-based to an emphasis on 'Experiential Learning'; where students will be learning through doing (rather than sitting through lectures and memorising facts). Though this was originally perceived by many as being an obstacle, the move towards 'Experiential Learning' has given rise to new and exciting avenues for deeper insights, greater critical thought processes and more meaningful connections with their knowledge base, thus improving the overall quality of

the teaching and learning experience in higher education.

## II. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

NEP 2020 is a forward looking educational vision that emphasizes the holistic development of the student flexibility, openness, and learner independence. Nevertheless, changes in the policy will not be able to bring about a real change unless they are understood and carried out in a way that is in line with the students' psychological realities. Even though at the policy level there is an acknowledgment of the importance of mental health, mentoring, and well-being, a conceptual gap still exists between institutional reform and students' academic experiences. The present research is prompted by the necessity to close this gap by combining educational policy with the psychological perspective. The article through the examination of student motivation from a theoretical perspective intends to illustrate how changes in higher education under NEP 2020 can become a source of real power, confidence, and personal development besides structural changes.

## III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature first indicates that the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a multi-disciplinary education system which is flexible, student-oriented, inclusive, and pays attention to the students' well-being. In general, the policy is stated to be a radical shift away from the traditional memorization of the textbook and from the very stressful type of examinations to a learner-centered and skill-oriented education. (Mishra) Research results in educational psychology reveal that higher education students are suffering more and more from stress, anxiety, and loss of motivation (Sheerha). Among the causes of this, the studies identify hard and unfair examination systems, comparison among students, and lack of emotional support. On the other hand, student mentoring, autonomy, formative assessment, and good teacher-student relationships are said to be some of the factors that bring about intrinsic motivation and academic self-confidence. Humanistic approaches to education highlight holistic development, encouragement, and social connectedness as being the main aspects of

learning. However, most of the NEP related literature pieces are still concentrated on the policy with very few that engage with psychological theories which explain how students internalize educational reforms. This deficiency of literature calls for a theoretical framework that links the vision of the NEP 2020 with students' motivational and emotional experiences.

## IV. NEP 2020 AND VISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

### Realizing Student Potential through Flexible Learning Pathways

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India has brought a significant transformation in higher education system. It is moving away from the conventional models of education towards a new paradigm that is focused on an integrated approach to learning. This approach involves not only the cognitive but also social, emotional and ethical components. According to the NEP 2020, higher education is no longer considered just a way of giving knowledge to the students; rather, it is an avenue for the realization of human potential through all kinds and forms of development. The objectives set out in NEP 2020 are to equip the students with the mental, emotional and social skills by the promotion of the critical thinking and the creativity, emotional intelligence and the self-awareness. The NEP 2020 also acknowledges that the students originate from various socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, and have different abilities and aspirations; hence, they will need different routes to success. Therefore, the NEP 2020 supports the adoption of flexible academic paths and a variety of choices for entry and exit, as well as the personalization of learning to facilitate the attainment of goals by students in the most suitable manner, which will help in lowering the academic pressure and the stress that result from uniform standards of excellence and linear models of success.

### Student Well-being and Mental Health as Educational Priorities

NEP 2020 highlights the importance of student well-being and mental health and recognizes that the incidence of anxiety, low self-esteem, academic pressure, and competitiveness in higher education is

increasing. To this end, the policy envisages the creation of mentoring systems, academic and psychological counselling services, peer, support mechanisms, and a teacher-student relationship of mutual understanding. The introduction of such measures indicates a conscious move away from performance, based educational practices towards a more supportive and nurturing academic environment.

#### Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Education

Another characteristic of the NEP 2020 that is strongly supported by the policy is the concept of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary learning. By removing the strict disciplinary boundaries, the policy enables students to have the liberty to choose any of the diverse fields in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and vocational studies. Such a system affords learners the opportunity to discover their likes and strengths, create their academic identities, and view education not as a means for competition but as a source of their personal and intellectual development.

#### Reforming Assessment for Meaningful Learning

NEP 2020 reforms assessment as one of its major components. It envisages the shift from end, of, term, summative, and high, stakes tests that measure a student's level of learning at one point in time towards a more continuous form of assessment, also known as formative assessments, which provides ongoing feedback to both the teacher and the learner. Hence, assessment should not be considered only as a judgement or rating tool (used primarily to provide grades), but rather like a learning and growth tool. Such a change will enable students to develop their own ability, self, motivation, and mental strength through concepts of self, reflection, feedback and skill acquisition; at the same time their fear of failure will be decreased.

#### Inclusivity, Equity, and Social Responsibility

The care and concern for others that NEP 2020 presents as the basis of its higher education policies is reflected in the principles of inclusivity and social responsibility. In order to realize this objective, the NEP 2020 policy first of all, ensures the right to

equitable access to general education by requiring all institutions to provide inclusive classrooms for all students, irrespective of their background. The policy further commits itself to the enhancement of participation in higher education of the students from the marginalized and the deprived communities by involving them in community, based collaboration and partnership as well as creating opportunities for them to foster the feeling of being and belonging.<sup>2,6</sup> Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and the Human Dimension of Education

#### Integration of Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

NEP 2020 looks at the integration of Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Higher Education through a framework of social and technological responsibility; while NEP 2020 acknowledges how Technology can be used to increase access, individualisation, and efficiency for students, the policy continues to place Teachers at the centre of Higher Education as Mentors and Facilitators.

#### Towards an Empowering Vision of Higher Education

NEP 2020 takes the position that Higher Education should be based on Empowerment rather than Competition, Growth rather than Comparison, and Collaboration rather than Isolation. NEP 2020's emphasis on Flexibility, Well-Being, Inclusion and Meaningful Assessment creates the foundation for a higher education system that enables Motivated, Confident, and Lifelong Learners, who are Good Citizens with a Social Responsibility to Society. (Ministry of Human Resource Development)

#### V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ALFRED ADLER'S INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

When people think of psychology, names of famous figures like Freud and Jung often spring to mind. One of their contemporaries, Alfred Adler (1870-1937), a pioneering Austrian physician and psychiatrist, also made ground breaking contributions to psychology, including personality, motivation, and self-improvement. He formed the school of thought known as individual psychology (Cherry). Alfred Adler is

known as one of the most influential thinkers in psychology. While he was initially a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, Adler eventually departed from Freud's theories and developed his own perspective, which he called Individual Psychology. He had a strong influence on a number of other eminent psychologists, including Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Karen Horney. He is also remembered for his concept of the inferiority complex, which he believed played a major part in the formation of personality. Adler's theory focused on looking at the individual as a whole, which is why he referred to his approach as individual psychology. Adler was eventually expelled from Freud's psychoanalytic circle, but he went on to have a tremendous impact on the development of psychotherapy (Patel)

*'The Science of Living'* originally published in 1930 looks at Individual Psychology as a science. Adler discusses the various elements of Individual Psychology and its application to everyday life: including the inferiority complex, the superiority complex and other social aspects, such as, love and marriage, sex and sexuality, children and their education. The most fundamental principle of Adlerian theory is striving for superiority. According to Adler, "*the one nonstative force motivating an individual's behavior is the striving for success or superiority.*" (Ferguson) Every individual begins life with physical deficiencies that result in feelings of inferiority. These feelings act as a motivation to strive for superiority. Adler considered the motivation for superiority to be the *fundamental fact of life*. Striving for superiority is not an attempt to be better than others but is *instinctive, fundamental, and inborn in our nature*. It is "*the ongoing effort towards a better adaptation between the world and man.*" Adler conceived inferiority feelings as the motivating force in all behaviour. He stated, "*To be a human being means to feel oneself inferior.*" All humans are born with weak and inferior bodies, and throughout life the need to overcome this inferiority motivates behaviour. This plus and minus situation exists simultaneously and helps an individual become whole, as both are dimensions of a single force. Inferiority feelings are not genetically determined but are shaped by environmental conditions common to infancy. (Adler).

Adler stated that "*the value of all human activity must be seen from the viewpoint of social interest.*" Social interest is an innate potential for cooperation and is the standard for psychological health. Social interest develops through early relationships, particularly the mother-child relationship, and later environmental influences. A lack of social interest results in self-centeredness and lack of constructive goals. Social interest is "*the sole criterion of human values.*" (Migalski, Huo and Osburn) Adler viewed creative power as the third force apart from heredity and environment. It is the movement toward a goal and the most noticeable trait of life. "*This creative power is a striving power... the power which accomplishes the goal of an ideal completion to overcome the difficulties of life.*" (Mansager) Through creative power, individuals choose their path and style of life.

## VI. ALIGNING INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY WITH NEP 2020

Adler argued that every person has a sense of inferiority that comes from their physical, psychological, or social limitations. These feelings, instead of being unhealthy, are actually the main source of motivation for development. In his work, Adler stated that "to be a human being is to feel oneself inferior" and it is through the overcoming of these feelings that the human race achieve their level of progress.

The idea of striving for superiority is a metaphor for not seeking control over others but self, enhancement and leading a meaningful life. The points made by NEP 2020 about lifelong learning, learner autonomy, and flexible pathways are compatible with the idea of personal development rather than winning in a competition.

One of the most important things that Adler put on the list of necessary elements for motivation was the presence of encouragement. The features of NEP 2020 such as mentoring, formative assessment, and supportive pedagogy are in line with this idea as they help to convert the occasion of learning from the fear that comes from the challenge to the opportunity for growth.

The idea of social interest, which Adler considered to be the measure of mental health, is in line with the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, ethical citizenship, and community engagement emphasized by NEP 2020. In both models, education is a means to social contribution rather than just a single individual's achievement.

Moreover, Adler's idea of creative power emphasizes the role of human agency beyond heredity and environment. The National Education Policy 2020, through its support for choice, based curricula, interdisciplinary learning, and student agency, is instrumental in fostering creativity, responsibility, and self-directed growth among learners.

## VII. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study carries importance beyond the theory, education, and policy levels. On the theoretical level, it merges psychology, based theory with the analysis of educational policy, thus giving an interdisciplinary view to the issue of student motivation. From the educational point of view, the study becomes a source of the information for the teachers and the institutions which are willing to implement NEP 2020 in such a way that it helps to develop the students' self-confidence, stamina, and intrinsic motivation. As a kind of counterbalance to the trend of increasing technological intervention, the study is a sort of a comeback statement for the need of a human, centered, psychologically informed education system.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This research outlines how Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology provides a fruitful theoretical perspective for understanding student motivation in light of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Both NEP 2020 and Adlerian psychology, by their focus on factors such as encouragement, flexibility, social connectedness, and personal agency, point to an educational ideal that is less about competition and more about empowerment. The paper posits that higher education can become a source of motivation for students to grow and overcome their sense of inferiority if learning environments are centered around well-being, inclusivity, and authentic

assessment. As such, NEP 2020 could become a vehicle for the development of learners who are not only self-assured and intrinsically motivated but also socially responsible and capable of making a positive contribution to society despite the complexity and rapid technological advancements of the world.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Adler, Alfred. *The Science of Living (Psychology Revivals)*. 1st. Routledge, 2013. web.
- [2] Cherry, Kendra. "Alfred Adler's Career, Life, and Theory of Personality." 10 March 2025. Verywellmind. Ed. Amanda Tust. web. <<https://www.verywellmind.com/alfred-adler-2795502>>.
- [3] Ferguson, Eva Dreikurs. "Adler's Motivational Theory: An Historical Perspective on Belonging and the Fundamental Human Striving." *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 76.1 (2020): 51-58. web. <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341784097\\_Adler's\\_Motivational\\_Theory\\_An\\_Historical\\_Perspective\\_on\\_Belonging\\_and\\_the\\_Fundamental\\_Human\\_Striving](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341784097_Adler's_Motivational_Theory_An_Historical_Perspective_on_Belonging_and_the_Fundamental_Human_Striving)>.
- [4] Mansager, Erik. "Creative Power." February 2020. Alfred Adler Institute. web. <<https://adler.institute/creative-power/>>.
- [5] Migalski, Leigh Johnson, Danqing Huo and Francis Sesso Osburn. *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. Ed. Virgil Zeigler Hill and Todd K Shackelford. Springer Cham, 2017. web.
- [6] Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. *National Education Policy 2020*. Ministry of Human Resource Development, n.d. web. <[https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)>.
- [7] Mishra, Osseen. "Navigating Change: NEP's Role in transforming." *International Journal of Creative Research and Thoughts (IJCRT)* 12.6 (2024): 86-93. web. <<https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2406688.pdf>>.
- [8] Patel, Ankit. "Person of the Month: Alfred Adler (1870-1937)." *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* 3.3 (2016). web. <<https://ijip.in/wp>>.

content/uploads/2019/01/18.01.001.20160303.pdf

f>.

[9] Raj, Aparna. "Higher Education in India: Vision-2047-The Changing Education Landscape in India." Educational Research 16.1 (2025). web. <<https://www.interesjournals.org/articles/higher-education-in-india-vision2047the-changing-education-landscape-in-india-115174.html>>.

[10] Sheerha, Anita. "Psychological Principles embedded in the National Education Policy 2020." International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR) 7.5 (2025). web.