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Article

Learning Beyond Textbooks: Vocational and Skill-Based Education through Bagless Day Activities

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Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates a transformative approach to education by emphasising vocational and skill-based learning as an essential part of school curricula. A notable innovation within this policy is the introduction of Bagless Days, where students participate in experiential, practical activities that link classroom learning with real-world skills. This paper examines the importance of integrating vocational education through Bagless Day initiatives to promote holistic development among learners. It highlights how Bagless Day activities can serve as a platform for exposing students to various vocational skills such as gardening, carpentry, cooking, financial literacy, digital literacy, and local crafts, thereby fostering self-reliance and employability. Such activities should be designed to align with principles of inclusivity, local relevance, joyful learning, and sustainability. Furthermore, community engagement and collaboration with local artisans and professionals enrich the learning experience and provide authentic exposure. By analysing pedagogical strategies and the frameworks implemented, the paper stresses the necessity of structured planning, reflection-based learning, and skill assessment methods to ensure Bagless Days are meaningful. It underlines the role of these initiatives in narrowing the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical life skills, ultimately supporting the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047. The paper concludes that, if carefully crafted, Bagless Day activities can serve as powerful tools for promoting vocational awareness, inclusive growth, and lifelong learning, thereby transforming the educational experience across India.

Keywords: Bagless Days, Vocational Education, Skill-Based Learning, Experiential Learning, Hands-on Activities, Holistic Development

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern education system faces increasing pressure to make learning relevant, meaningful, and applicable to real-life situations. Traditional textbook-focused pedagogy, though vital for developing conceptual understanding, often restricts students' exposure to practical skills and workplace realities. In response to these challenges, education reforms worldwide are progressively emphasising experiential and skill-based learning to prepare students for dynamic social and economic environments (OECD, 2019). In the Indian context, the National Education Policy 2020 signifies a paradigm shift by promoting the integration of vocational education and experiential learning within mainstream schooling (Ministry of Education, 2020). One of the most progressive initiatives under this policy is the introduction of Bagless Days, which aim to move learning beyond textbooks and examinations. On these days, students participate in hands-on activities, field visits, observational learning, and community interactions, enabling them to experience learning as an active and enjoyable process. Research on flipped learning reveals that student-centered, hands-on approaches enhance engagement and ownership of learning, which aligns with the pedagogical goals of Bagless Days (Asagar, 2024). This paper explores Bagless

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Day activities as an effective pedagogical strategy for fostering vocational and skill-based education. It contends that Bagless Days can bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical life skills, supporting holistic development and lifelong learning.

2. CONCEPT OF BAGLESS DAYS UNDER NEP 2020

Bagless Days are designed as structured learning days where conventional classroom instruction is replaced by experiential, activity-based learning. According to NEP 2020, these days aim to expose students to vocational crafts, arts, and life skills in an exploratory manner without academic pressure (Ministry of Education, 2020). The guidelines for implementing Bagless Days highlight joyful learning, creativity, inclusivity, and local relevance (Ministry of Education, 2023). These days motivate students to actively participate in learning experiences that encompass cognitive, emotional, and practical aspects. Instead of being viewed as informal breaks, Bagless Days are seen as meaningful learning opportunities integrated within the academic calendar. They are not only an experiential alternative to traditional classrooms but also a strategic intervention intended to incorporate vocational awareness and community engagement into mainstream education.

The guidelines specify that Bagless Days offer students in Grades 6–8 the chance to explore a variety of practical and craft-based activities under the guidance of local experts, helping them connect theoretical knowledge with practical skills (Government of Assam). Moreover, Assam's guidelines explicitly state that such activities aim to develop teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking while promoting pride in skills and providing insights into local vocations. Engaging with local artisans and craftsmen enables students to appreciate the socioeconomic value of various occupations within their communities (Government of Assam). Therefore, Bagless Days mark a shift from rote memorisation towards learning through experience, reflection, and application.

3. NEED FOR VOCATIONAL AND SKILL-BASED EDUCATION

Vocational and skill-based education has gained global significance due to rapid technological advancements, changing labour markets, and the increasing demand for employability and entrepreneurship skills. International frameworks such as the OECD's Education 2030 project highlight that future-ready education must provide learners with practical competencies, adaptability, and problem-solving skills (OECD, 2019).

NEP 2020 recognises that early exposure to vocational education helps students develop respect for all forms of work and reduces the social divide between academic and vocational streams (Ministry of Education, 2020). Bagless Days provide a flexible platform for introducing vocational learning without rigid specialisation, allowing students to explore diverse skills such as agriculture, handicrafts, digital literacy, and financial management. Such exposure not only enhances employability but also nurtures self-reliance, creativity, and informed career awareness (PSSCIVE–NCERT, 2021).

The Assam Bagless Days guidelines further emphasise the importance of exposing students to local vocational practices across a wide range of sectors, from traditional crafts such as pottery, bamboo craft, and handloom weaving to emerging areas like textile designing and electrical work. Such exposure supports the exploration of potential career paths, opportunities for higher education, and lifelong vocation-oriented interests (Government of Assam). This aligns with NEP 2020's recommendation that students be provided with experiential modules that extend learning beyond classroom walls into community and industry settings (Ministry of Education) 2020).

4. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AS THE PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATION

Experiential learning provides the theoretical basis for Bagless Day activities. Kolb's experiential learning theory highlights that knowledge is built through concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015). Bagless Days closely follow this cycle by offering students opportunities to learn through doing and reflecting. Activities such as project work, workshops, simulations, and collaborative tasks allow students to apply theoretical ideas in real-world situations. Experiential learning encourages deeper understanding, critical thinking, and long-term retention, making it especially effective for vocational and skill-based education (UNESCO 2021).

4.1. Field Trips and Observation-Based Learning

Field trips and observation-based learning, as highlighted in the presentation content, are key to successful Bagless Day implementation. Educational visits enable students to observe real-world work environments, tools, processes, and professional practices that cannot be recreated in classrooms. According to the Bagless Days implementation guidelines, students may visit local farms, industries, workshops, markets, and institutions to observe vocational practices and engage with professionals (Ministry of Education, 2023). Such observational learning helps students link academic concepts with real-life applications and gain practical insights into various occupations (Press Information Bureau, 2023). Field-based learning also enhances school–community partnerships and turns the local environment into a lively laboratory of learning.

One of the strengths of the Assam guideline is the specific emphasis on field visits as a structured learning tool. For example, students are invited to participate in guided visits to national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, wetlands, and reserved forests, where they engage in direct observation of flora and fauna and develop scientific inquiry skills (Government of Assam). Similarly, visits to local handloom and handicraft industries or tea estates allow students to understand traditional manufacturing processes, observe tools and techniques used by artisans, and reflect on the socio-economic contributions of small-scale industries. These activities deepen learner engagement

with contextually relevant skills—enhancing observational capacity, critical thinking, and real-world connection (Government of Assam).

This approach extends beyond mere visits: students are encouraged to interact with workers, record observations, prepare reports, and relate their experiences back to classroom concepts, thus reinforcing cognitive, interpersonal, and analytical skills.

4.2. Reflection and Documentation of Learning

Reflection is a vital part of experiential and observational learning. Post-activity reflection helps students internalise experiences, articulate learning outcomes, and link practice with theory (Kolb, 2015). During Bagless Days, students may keep reflective journals, prepare reports, create portfolios, or join group discussions. Such reflective activities develop metacognitive skills, self-awareness, and critical thinking. They also enable teachers to evaluate learning beyond rote memorisation, concentrating instead on understanding, engagement, and skill development (UNESCO, 2021).

The Assam documents highlight the importance of post-activity reflection and reporting as a vital part of the Bagless Days programme. After each activity, students share their experiences with peers and teachers, prepare reports and reflections, and consider how their observations relate to academic learning. Such documentation enhances understanding and fosters metacognitive development (Government of Assam).

Teachers also evaluate student engagement qualitatively—observing interest, participation, teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking—rather than relying solely on traditional examinations. These insights assist students in developing self-directed learning skills and emphasise the importance of a process-oriented approach education.

4.3. Inclusivity and Local Relevance

Bagless Days have significant potential to foster inclusive education. By diversifying learning methods, they cater to different learning styles, abilities, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Students who may struggle with traditional academic instruction often thrive in hands-on and observational learning environments. Local relevance further boosts inclusivity by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, regional crafts, and community expertise into the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2023). Such contextualised learning affirms local cultures and encourages sustainable, culturally responsive education.

Studies on marginalized adolescent girls highlight how locally relevant, community-based education can address systemic barriers and promote empowerment—a principle that Bagless Days can embody (Khullar, 2024). Importantly, the Assam guidelines include provisions for adapting activities to support Children with Special Needs (CwSN or Divyang), demonstrating a commitment to inclusive education. It suggests that parents and teachers collaborate to develop adaptive strategies that enable all students to participate meaningfully, ensuring Bagless Days are accessible and supportive for diverse learners (Government of Assam). Local relevance is further strengthened through activities such as community service, indigenous games, local performing arts, and cultural explorations—ensuring that learning reflects the unique social, cultural, and economic contexts of the learners' own world communities.

5. ROLE OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Teachers play a crucial role in planning, facilitating, and reflecting on Bagless Day activities. Their role shifts from simply transmitting content to acting as facilitators and mentors, which requires pedagogical flexibility and creativity. However, research indicates that teacher resistance to new pedagogical approaches and technology integration remains a barrier, underscoring the need for targeted professional development (Naaz, 2025). Ongoing professional development is vital to equip teachers with skills for experiential and vocational pedagogy (NCERT, 2022). School leadership is equally important in providing institutional support, resources, and community linkages. Effective leadership ensures that Bagless Days are well-organised, inclusive, and aligned with the curriculum goals.

The Assam guideline emphasises the crucial role of teachers in planning, guiding, and mentoring students during Bagless Day activities. Teachers are involved from the design stage through to execution, ensuring that students are well-prepared, motivated, safe, and able to reflect meaningfully on their experiences (Government of Assam). Additionally, principals and heads of schools must obtain permissions and co-ordinate with local authorities and community stakeholders, emphasising the collaborative effort necessary for successful implementation (Government of Assam).

6. ASSESSMENT OF SKILL-BASED LEARNING

Assessment during Bagless Days should emphasise formative and competency-based approaches rather than traditional examinations. Tools such as observation checklists, portfolios, self-assessment, and peer assessment offer meaningful insights into students' learning processes and skill development (PSSCIVE–NCERT, 2021). Such assessment practices recognise learning as a continuous process and promote growth, creativity, and reflection thinking.

Assam's guidelines include suggestive activity formats and detailed stakeholder roles, providing practical models to help schools overcome common barriers such as planning difficulties and resource limitations. The documents offer templates for annual work plans, suggestive activity formats, and implementation mechanisms to support systematic execution (Government of Assam). This level of detail serves as a model for other states and schools seeking structured and contextually appropriate implementation of Bagless Days—a step towards realising broader NEP 2020 goals of holistic education.

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7. CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

Despite their potential, Bagless Day initiatives face challenges such as limited resources, time constraints, and lack of teacher preparedness. Studies on ICT integration reveal similar obstacles, including infrastructural gaps and insufficient institutional support, which must be addressed for successful implementation (Naaz, 2025). Addressing these challenges requires clear guidelines, teacher training, community participation, and documentation of best practices (Ministry of Education, 2023). With systematic planning and sustained support, Bagless Days can develop into a transformative pedagogical practice that seamlessly integrates vocational education into schools curricula.

8. CONCLUSION

Bagless Day activities mark a significant move from textbook-focused education to experiential, skill-based learning. By incorporating vocational training, field observation, and community involvement, Bagless Days connect theory with practice and foster complete development. When carefully planned and inclusively executed, Bagless Days cultivate self-reliant, skilled, and thoughtful learners aligned with the wider goal of educational reform and national progress. They are not just policy changes but powerful tools for redefining the purpose and methods of schooling in India.

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Author(s) Contribution

All the Author(s) work equally to prepare the manuscript.

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Human Ethics and Consent to Participate

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