

Review Article

Welfarism to Neoliberal Capitalism: A Critical Evaluation of Design Education Paradigm in India

Arun Mascarenhas* , Govindan Vivekanandan Sreekumar , Sugandh Malhotra 

IDC School of Design, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, India

Abstract

As an economic and political framework, neoliberalism has significantly influenced global education over the past few decades, reshaping paradigms and practices within educational institutions. Neoliberalism, often referred to as ‘Market Economy,’ is marked by its advocacy for the deregulation of market-driven policies—the commodification of education, which has profoundly impacted various dimensions of education, including Design. Design education in India has undergone an evident transformation since its economic liberalization in 1991, reflecting broader neoliberal trends worldwide. The Design discourse in India was deeply rooted in socially relevant, need-based, and welfare-driven principles in its formative years, aligning closely with the national development agenda and emphasizing collective well-being. However, post-liberalization, the rise of private universities, and an increasing emphasis on market-driven ‘Design Thinking’ have shifted the focus toward neoliberal priorities, forming an ideological gap in design education that contests its foundational ethos. This paper critically examines this significant shift through the lens of ‘neoliberal creativity’ articulated in works like Kevin Gormley. It explores its ramifications on design pedagogy, institutional structures, and the role of creative domains within contemporary India. The literature review aims to scrutinize the multifaceted effects of neoliberal ideologies on education, primarily focusing on the emphasis on Creativity and Innovation while also providing insights into the evolving nature of pedagogical practices. Synthesizing existing illustrates how neoliberal policies shape educational structures and practices. That often prioritizes economic outcomes over the holistic development of students while marginalizing alternative Design Narratives. Hence, this analysis seeks to synthesize perspectives from various scholars, revealing a complex interplay between neoliberal ideologies and design educational practices.

Keywords

Neoliberalism, LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization), Design Education, Creativity, Innovation

1. Introduction

Since the first wave of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, the alliance between industrialism and capitalism has hugely impacted society and the ‘ecosphere’ [1]. Globalization has been inferred liable for altering its socioeconomic character and is seen as a process of homogenizing choices [2, 3]. According to Bourdieu (1998), cited in [4], “neo-liberalism is

a political project for the reconstruction of society in accord with the demands of an unrestrained global capitalism.” The broader scholarship outlines neoliberalism as multifaceted in its manifestations, and outlining and theorizing it has been tough [5, 6]; however, it has been identified that globalization's existence in various forms from the late 19th century to

*Corresponding author: arun.idc@iitb.ac.in (Arun Mascarenhas)

Received: 16 April 2025; Accepted: 27 April 2025; Published: 29 May 2025



its present ubiquity. In such a setting, the pragmatic rationale for the market and market values becomes paramount, resulting in a global monoculture transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.

Education has historically been viewed as a public good, essential for individual empowerment and societal progress, echoing the sentiments that it nurtures the democratic character of any society. In India, this principle is deeply embedded in the constitutional commitment to education as a fundamental right, as articulated in the *Right to Education Act* (2009). Traditionally, education—has served broader socio-cultural and developmental goals beyond mere economic outcomes [7]. However, the rise of neoliberal policies has sparked a fundamental shift in this perspective, which perceives education as a market-driven commodity rather than an intrinsic democratic right [8].

The historical connection between Industry, Art, and Crafts (now a unified synonym as Design) during the colonial regime in India provides a backdrop for this analysis [9]. Design as a domain of practice is poorly defined [10]; due to its esoteric nature and adaptability, the term Design is also one of the overused terms across disciplines. In the past few decades, the domain of Design has moved beyond making/ producing and styling commodities to encompass myriad areas like management, consultation, strategy building, application, and software development [11]. Examining neoliberalism within the context of design education necessitates a nuanced understanding of its broad implications on pedagogical practices, educational policies, and identity formations within institutions [12-14]. In what follows, the sections appraising existing scholarship within education structures seek to provide nuanced insights into how neoliberal policies have influenced the objectives and epistemological foundations of education and Design. Furthermore, it observes the marginalization of alternative pedagogical models that resist market-driven constraints, advocating for revitalizing design education as a space for critical engagement, social responsibility, and democratic participation. The Discussion and conclusions seek to synthesize perspectives from various scholars, revealing a complex interplay between neoliberal ideologies and design educational practices and possible way out.

2. Neoliberal Ideology and Educational Structures

The phrase neoliberalism is invoked to describe various phenomena, be it hegemonic capitalism, authoritarian nationalism [15], or the threat of climate change to the rising class disparities in society [16]. Since the liberalization of the economy, India's higher education sector has undergone rapid privatization. Government funding for public institutions has declined, while private universities and foreign collaborations have proliferated [17]. The commodification of education has led to rising tuition fees, an increased focus on industry-driven,

market-oriented curricula (stressing innovation, entrepreneurship, and startup culture), and consequently, marginalization of critical and socially responsible pedagogies [18-21].

Bozalek et al. assert that emphasizing efficiency, productivity, and standardized outcomes in educational practices often reflects the overarching neoliberal ideologies governing educational institutions [2]. Likewise, Hara and Sherbine's study highlights an absence of professional discourse surrounding market pressures, which creates a culture of compliance among educators, hindering their ability to resist these neoliberal changes [22]. The literature thus consistently indicates that neoliberalism alters educational systems' fundamental purposes and operations, leading to commodification and a market-driven ethos [23]. This shift has led to the corporatization of academia, where economic utility and employability metrics take precedence over holistic learning, critical inquiry, and the social responsibility of education. The field of design education has not been immune to these transformations, as we see in the following sections.

2.1. The Influence of Neoliberalism on Pedagogy

A significant consequence of neoliberalism in education is its influence on pedagogical approaches. Critical pedagogies prioritizing democratic engagement, social justice, and meaningful learning experiences face substantial challenges in this context. For instance, Brown et al. discuss how pre-service teachers are increasingly conditioned by the neoliberal narrative that frames teaching as a function of market demands rather than a pursuit of knowledge and societal betterment [24]. This framing directly impacts their understanding of professional identity and efficacy, as teaching becomes synonymous with adherence to market expectations [25]. Further implications are observed within higher education, where the pressures of performance metrics lead to a narrowed focus on teaching practices that align with neoliberal standards, ultimately compromising alternative and critical pedagogical practices [26]. Karki identifies this trend within language educational policies, where the shift towards neoliberalism fosters a retrenchment of pedagogical creativity in favor of standardized curricula prioritizing employability over holistic education [27]. Contextual literature suggests a pervasive trend toward commodifying education, where learner outcomes are often reduced to market-derived metrics [28]. The reduction of public funding in public institutions has led to a decrease in scholarships, faculty shortages, infrastructural challenges, and accessibility toned by the promotion of privatization [17].

2.2. Resistance and Counter-Narratives to Neoliberalism

Despite the prevalence of neoliberal ideologies within educational contexts, various scholars advocate for resistance and develop counter-narratives to challenge these dominant

norms. Hara and Sherbine emphasize that critical resistance through educational practice remains vital to counteract neoliberal pressures and the associated commodification of education [22]. They propose that educators engage in continuous reflection and dialogue, fostering environments prioritizing critical inquiry over compliance with imposed standards. Robinson's study further illustrates the potential for resistance by meticulously examining teachers' innovative practices that actively challenge the neoliberal restructuring of education systems. He compellingly argues for the necessity of active engagement with pedagogies that resist the commodification and relentless standardization of learning, thereby emphasizing the critical need for educators to assert and maintain their professional autonomy within these constraining frameworks [25]. As highlighted in numerous studies, such as those conducted by Henricsson [29], storytelling and other reflective practices emerge as powerful tools for educators and students alike, providing an essential platform to critique and resist the encroachment of neoliberal ideologies into educational spaces and practices. This resistance is crucial for safeguarding the integrity of education as a public good, in opposition to the market-driven approaches that threaten its foundational principles [30, 31].

3. The Welfare-Oriented Beginnings of the Indian Institutions of Design

During its early years, Indian Design education was driven by the vision of national development and social upliftment, which reflected the broader socio-political landscape of post-independence India. The National Institute of Design (NID) was founded in 1961 following the influential 'India Report' (1958), which emphasized design as a pivotal tool for addressing India's pressing socioeconomic challenges, assisting programs "of training in the areas of design which would serve as an aid to small industries" [32, 33]. The Report also proposed that Design must aid in solving social and economic problems of national importance, a vision that guided the NID's curriculum towards areas such as handicrafts, rural development, and public welfare [34]. This approach was fundamentally aligned with the overarching developmental goals of post-independence India, prioritizing frugality, sustainability, and social impact over mere commercial viability [35].

India's first-ever design institute, NID, was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce rather than the Ministry of Education, illustrating that Design was regarded as an 'essential service' critical to the country's industrial and economic development. This period is also marked by science-oriented policies promoting Design as a vehicle for self-reliance and boosting indigenous industry, reinforcing the necessity of aligning design education with national priorities. Hence, Design education in India has consistently been regarded as a societal investment that aims

to benefit the collective developmental goals rather than narrow profitable priorities. This commitment is further reflected in the integration of the Science and Liberal Arts (SLA) in the program, which aimed to infuse humanities into professional design education, thereby providing a humanistic basis for Design and ensuring that "human interests and the mind of man (human) were paramount" (Balaram, 2019). This focus on human-centered Design was also evidenced by the invitation extended to Christopher Cornford, a British humanist and great-grandson of Charles Darwin, to assist in creating the SLA module for the design curriculum at NID. This perspective aligns with classical educational ideals, suggesting that education serves as a means of empowerment, social mobility, and collective progress.

Complementing this view, the first National Policy of Education (NPE/1968) reinforced the need for education to serve national priorities, asserting that "education must emphasize values of social justice and community development" [36]. Even though traditionally, India's economy has been predominantly agrarian, supported by thriving craft traditions and livelihood generated by them in the formative years of its development, the nation prioritized industrial self-sufficiency, a vision vividly reflected in the foundational objectives of design institutions like NID [37], which was tasked with supporting industrial production and playing a crucial role in facilitating national development plans. Given the country's diverse socio-cultural landscape, design education adopted a broad, multi-disciplinary approach rather than a narrow focus on specialized training, ensuring its relevance to India's unique developmental needs [38].

As craft traditions faced increasing threats from modern mass production, design programs emphasized projects with social impact, encouraging students to engage with craft communities actively. Research and documentation of indigenous traditions played a significant role in shaping a distinct design identity, underscoring the importance of context and heritage in design practice [38]. Following the establishment of NID at Ahmedabad, the Industrial Design Center (IDC), now known as the IDC School of Design, was established in the financial capital of India, Mumbai, within the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. The IDC ventured beyond mere engineering solutions to explore the intricate social aspects of design [39]. The philosophical foundation upon which its pedagogy was built derived from the Modern Industrial paradigm, deeply rooted in the visions of German Avant-garde and regional industrial modernism, furthering the mission of creating design solutions that address societal needs [9].

3.1. Learning by Doing: The Bauhaus and Ulm Influence

The Bauhaus and Ulm schools' institutional legacy is a robust example of the 'learning by doing' interdisciplinary approach that has significantly influenced design education

worldwide. The philosophical stance that “design as an instrument of socialism was considered appropriate” for the NID and the IDC reflects a commitment to integrating socio-economic principles into design practice [38]. This inclination is deeply rooted in addressing social concerns, highlighting the importance of meeting the “unmet needs” of the country, which is clearly articulated in the visionary principles that guided the foundational ethos of IDC within the technological institution [14]. The impact of such philosophies is evident in the practices and pedagogical approaches adopted since their formative decades (1969), where one can observe the influences of influential advocacies like ‘Design for the Real World’ (1984) by Victor Papanek and ‘Small is Beautiful’ (1993) by E.F. Schumacher, which emphasize sustainable and human-centered Design. Furthermore, the Bauhaus’s integration of art, craft, and technology has driven these institutions to create a comprehensive educational framework that embraces practical skills and fosters critical thinking and reflection on social responsibilities.

3.2. Liberalization and the Shift Towards Market-Oriented Design

In developing countries like India and Brazil, where Design was seen as a competitive capability, professional design education institutes and industrial design education emerged only in the 1960s. These are also some early design programs outside North America and Europe [13]. In India, during the formative years of its independence, the developmental discourses fuelled by nation-building aspirations complemented design education. The two early institutions (NID and IDC) formed the Design discourse. Within two decades of their design education experiences, they organized an event centered around ‘Design for Development’ associated with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID). The output of this landmark event was the ‘Ahmedabad Declaration on Industrial Design for Development’ adopted in the international congress in January 1979 [13]. However, after the liberalization of the economy in the early 1990s, the government’s policies facilitated a rapid dispersion of globalization in the diverse design areas that included agriculture, healthcare, and services. As one of the event hosts, Chatterjee reflected that it ‘remained largely a statement of intent, and less one of achievement’ [12].

The economic reforms of 1991 marked a turning point in Indian Design education. The new policy liberalized India’s economy, leading to the gradual privatization of education. As a result, private design institutions proliferated, aligning their curricula with global market demands rather than local needs. In the new millennia, the induction of several design programs and collaborations, primarily by NID and IDC, later by various other organizations, formed the neoliberal visions of Design in education and practices catalyzed by the urge to expand Design [39]. The *National Design Policy* (2007) fur-

ther emphasized Design’s role in fostering economic facets, stating that “design is a strategic tool for national advantage in the global economy.” This marked a departure from earlier vision that focused on socially relevant design.

Katiyar and Meheta, in the introduction to the conference proceedings ‘*Design Education Tradition and Modernity*,’ notes, “... design education to meet the demands of the global economy” [40]. This turn is also noticed in Tewari’s conclusions on design education in India, which has gradually shifted from ‘design for development,’ focusing on the people and society, to ‘design to boost the economy’ over the preceding decades in India [41]. Corporate partnerships and skill-based, market-oriented training programs luring lingos like ‘*Design Thinking*’ are now reshaping design education [42].

The shift from Design for social good to design for economic productivity is evident in most educational institutes’ curriculum restructuring, faculty recruitment policies, and research priorities, including publicly funded ones. The shift is noticeable from the critique by the Yashpal Committee Report and the revised NEP/1986 in 1992, marking the journey of privatization in Indian Higher education. With such growing trends, the *National Education Policy* (NEP/2020) reinforced the neoliberal framework, promoting “skill-based education” and “industry linkages.” Consequently, design education increasingly prioritized employability and product innovation for consumer markets, sidelining earlier concerns for rural and grassroots design interventions and public good orientations.

3.3. Neoliberalism and the Discursive Construction of ‘Creativity’

As Gormley argues, neoliberalism reshapes creativity into a market-driven tool, prioritizing problem-solving for economic gain over exploratory or critical engagement [43]. This transformation is particularly evident in design education, with an increasing emphasis on standardized methodologies like Design Thinking and startup culture lacking the values of social good. Framing creativity and innovation only as a structured, iterative process rather than inclusive of an open-ended, experimental pursuit limits its scope [44]. While such frameworks (like the Stanford *d.school* Design Thinking Model) offer valuable problem-solving tools and methods, they simultaneously risk narrowing creativity to predefined categories that align with corporate expectations, undermining the broader potential of creative inquiry. This shift reflects what Foucault (2004) described as the ‘*homo economicus*’ paradigm, in which individuals are trained to function as self-regulating economic agents rather than as critical thinkers or social change-makers [43]. Moreover, the rapid expansion of privatization in design education has created a significant ideological gap between older institutions’ legacy of social relevance. Emerging and newer institutions appear to be motivated primarily by market imperatives. Unlike the early years, when design education was

framed within a national developmental agenda to foster social innovation and collective well-being, contemporary discourse primarily revolves around branding and user interface/user experience (UI/UX), commodifying the faceless ‘user’ rather than grooming the citizenship. This entrenched the neoliberal narrative within the creative industries and affected the fabric of design education.

3.4. The Impact of Global Market Trends on Indian Design Education

Consumer experience is increasingly shaped by global market trends, which often intersect with exclusionary practices, particularly given the country's literacy and technology adoption gap. The *India Skills Report* (2021) reinforces this trend, emphasizing the creation of ‘industry-ready graduates’ and seeking ‘alignment with global economic trends’ as primary objectives for higher education institutions. While these objectives contribute to economic growth, they also neglect the broader socio-cultural role of Design in actively addressing systemic inequalities and environmental challenges that persist within the region. Gormley highlights that neoliberal discourses selectively endorse certain forms of creativity while marginalizing others; this selective endorsement is particularly pertinent in India, where it becomes evident in the marginalization of design approaches that do not seamlessly fit into the global market framework [43]. Indigenous design practices, vernacular architecture, and participatory design methodologies [45] are frequently sidelined in pedagogical priorities, favoring trendy commercial aspects lured with digital convenience. Reinforcing, Balaram observes that traditional knowledge systems are treated as aesthetic resources rather than legitimate design epistemologies, reflecting a narrow understanding of what constitutes valid design knowledge within education [46]. Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) *Creative Economy Report* (2013) raises a cautionary note regarding the erasure of cultural specificity in favor of market-driven standardization, emphasizing the risk of homogenization in the creative sectors. Such exclusion not only erodes the cultural richness inherent in Indian design education and practice but also severely limits its potential as a transformative tool for systemic social change within various communities. Moreover, the persistent absence of robust discourse to integrate socially conscious design practices into private educational institutions further exacerbates this divide, highlighting the urgent need to re-evaluate design education in light of these hounding global market trends.

3.5. Alternative and Resistance Narratives in Design Education

The intersection between design and neoliberalism constitutes an entire area of research that traverses multiple fields, from economic developmental agenda to problem-solving,

ease of life, and efficiency. Neoliberal ideology profoundly impacted and significantly reshaped the educational discourse, shifting its focus from a socially relevant public good to a commodified service governed by market principles. This transformation is evident in the global policy discourse and competition among academic institutions [37]. Despite the challenges, several institutions and educators worldwide continue to advocate for Design as a socially responsible practice [32, 47]. Initiatives such as participatory design workshops, grassroots innovation labs, and collaborations with NGOs have emerged as counter-narratives to purely market-driven education [48, 49].

The experimental and socially relevant programs located within some public design institutions, like the NID, IDC School of Design, the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), the Indian Institute of Crafts and Design (IICD) Jaipur, and Ambedkar University Delhi have successfully integrated local crafts, sustainability, and social justice concerns into their pedagogical frameworks. These initiatives collectively offered a vision of design education that is more inclusive and actively engaging with the challenges of our times. After liberalization, successive governments complemented the privatization agenda. India's higher education sector saw a marked rise in private universities. Digital technologies and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have created an atmosphere of new disciplines, such as UI/UX, Design Management, and System Design, catering to neoliberal forces in profitability through strategy persuasive and predatory tactics in the name of promising high-paid career options. This led to an illusion and renewed interest in Design education as a lucrative option rather than inculcating social values and responsibilities. Several design institutions mushroomed around this prospect, offering courses and career promises. Consequently, the workforce with narrow design capabilities is flooding the industry with a lack of direction and guidance on the welfare agenda of design. Even publicly funded institutions succumb to these sweeping transformations due to ideological gaps within leadership.

Even though the nation aims to be among the top economies and aspires to achieve significant strides as a global design hub, without fixing this fundamental lacuna in Design education, we seldom reach the global goals of sustainable development that we aspire to achieve by 2035. We must not only expand our research focus to integrate sustainability and social innovation aligned with national policies to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving world but also without marginalizing alternative design pedagogies that give hope against prevalent such forces.

4. Discussion

Neoliberalism, often conceptualized as an economic and political paradigm favoring market-driven solutions, has profoundly reshaped educational discourses, especially higher

education across the globe. The focal points of this review are within the larger discourse, positioning design education as a public good, challenging the prevailing neoliberal narratives, and advocating for a more inclusive, equitable, and critically engaged approach to teaching and learning in Design. Interrogating neoliberalism as a signifier in design education, we aimed to explore how its foundational tenets influence educational discourse and practice for the future. This study contributes to ongoing debates regarding the future of education and the role of design disciplines within general education in fostering ethical, sustainable, and socially responsive practices.

One critical aspect of neoliberalism is its emphasis on individualism and competition. This ideological framework has permeated various educational contexts, framing students as consumers and educators as service providers, reengineering the social contract within academic realms. According to Gupta, the neoliberal model constructs educators as ‘teacher-entrepreneurs,’ which fundamentally reshapes their identities within a neoliberal educational landscape. This transformation exemplifies the broader tendency under neoliberalism to prioritize market-oriented values over collective agency and solidarity within educational institutions [50]. A primary concern in this discourse is the structural transition from education as a public good to a market-oriented commodity. As Karki observes, the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideologies profoundly shapes educational practices, advocating for deregulation and privatization. This transition carries significant implications for education policies and extends to all levels of the educational spectrum, including design education [27].

The emphasis on entrepreneurship and market responsiveness in curricula reflects an erosion of traditional educational values prioritizing critical engagement and democratic participation [51]. Consequently, creativity becomes predominantly linked to problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills rather than encouraging open-ended intellectual and critical exploration, illuminating a pivotal shift in the cultural understanding of education in a neoliberal context [52, 53]. Privileges the measurable, structured models of creativity, while alternative forms, such as ‘little-c’ creativity—emphasize small-scale, personal creative acts that are often overlooked (Craft, 2001). The increasing neo-liberalization of creativity in education also places significant pressure on teachers and students, contributing to a landscape where educational practices are increasingly efficiency-driven and performance-oriented. Educators are expected to cultivate “creative problem solvers” whose skills align with specific industry needs, reflecting a growing demand for workforce readiness.

At the same time, students are encouraged to develop competencies that enhance their market value rather than nurture ‘intrinsic creative’ potential, which leads to a narrow understanding of what creativity entails. This approach reinforces the idea that creativity must serve economic impera-

tives, thus limiting its broader cultural dimensions and potential for fostering critical thought. In the realm of design education, these neoliberal undercurrents manifest in various ways—curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and student engagement. Neoliberalism often catalyzes a shift toward skills-based training, emphasizing employability and market readiness over critical thinking and open-minded exploration. This commodification of educational outcomes, as discussed by Santamaría, results in the prioritization of institutional metrics, such as graduation rates and job placement statistics, over enriching educational experiences that promote creativity and innovation [54].

Identifying the critical gap in understanding creativity concepts in policy documents, Mascarenhas et al. mapped creativity concepts in Indian education policies, pointing out their implications for holistic development and Design Education [42]. Their study elicits how neoliberal ideologies have increasingly shaped creativity in educational discourse, aligning it with economic priorities rather than fostering diverse creative expressions and a holistic approach to learning. Additionally, creativity is framed as a key factor in maintaining national economic competitiveness, which reinforces ideologies of self-improvement and lifelong learning as obligations rather than personal or intellectual pursuits. This shift calls for a critical re-evaluation of how creativity is conceptualized in education and policies. There is a pressing need to embrace more inclusive and diverse understandings that extend beyond mere market utility. By broadening the discourse, education systems can ensure that creativity serves not just economic growth but also individual expression, social critique, and cultural innovation.

Muzzattis’s study indicates a correlation between the neoliberal emphasis on market-driven education and the inherent risks of perpetuating inequalities within learning environments [55]. As it increasingly aligns itself with neoliberal imperatives, the reality is that Design education may inadvertently stifle the very notion of creativity it seeks to foster. Furthermore, the broader sociopolitical context profoundly influences how neoliberalism manifests within educational institutions; Slater Elyas and Picard argue that adopting neoliberal paradigms often overlooks local complexities and alternative narratives, thereby homogenizing diverse educational practices under a singular neoliberal ethos [56, 57]. This critical perspective urges us to examine how these ideologies interact with existing social hierarchies, cultural narratives, and institutional structures, thus enabling a deeper understanding of their implications within design education.

The interplay between neoliberal ideologies and design education also invites an exploration of power dynamics within curricula. Research studies illustrate that the push toward neo-liberalization has led to the marginalization of alternative pedagogical frameworks, such as critical pedagogy, which seeks to empower students as active agents of change. We must critically assess the extent to which design education transformed into a vehicle for reproducing existing inequali-

ties and challenging and redefining them [58]. This calls for an urgent re-evaluation of curricular objectives and teaching methodologies that can counteract this trend toward educational homogenization. Additionally, the capitalist ideologies underpinning neoliberalism have resulted in the corporatization of educational institutions, particularly the privately owned and run institutions. This process not only reshapes the governance and funding mechanisms of universities but also fundamentally alters the relationships between educational stakeholders, ultimately diminishing the focus on education as a public good and fostering a more transactional view of learning experiences.

Neoliberalism significantly influences the type of knowledge valorized within design education, shaping curricular content and pedagogical approaches. According to Muzzatti, the intersection of austerity measures and neoliberal values within educational institutions specifically detracts from their fundamental mission of fostering intellectual inquiry and innovation [55]. This shift raises critical questions about the role of design education—should it merely serve the market demands, or should it retain its commitment to broader social and cultural imperatives? As we consider these implications, advocating for institutional frameworks prioritizing inclusivity and diversity becomes essential. Further complexity emerges when examining how neoliberalism intersects with identity formation in educational settings. As Schmeichel et al. elucidates, the interaction of neoliberalism with other discourses, including race, gender, and socioeconomic status, illustrates the multifaceted impact of these ideologies on educational research and practice [59]. In design education, where identity and expression are paramount, the pressure to conform to neoliberal values may marginalize diverse voices that do not align with mainstream narratives. This phenomenon underscores the pressing need for an intersectional analysis within design curricula to understand how various identities experience and respond to the challenges imposed by neoliberal frameworks.

Critically engaging with the neoliberal landscape within design education also opens avenues for resistance and innovation. According to Lackus, fostering entrepreneurial skills can simultaneously trigger more profound critiques of neoliberalism, cultivating an educational environment that prioritizes social justice and collective transformation [60]. Resilience and resistance emerge as essential qualities for educators and students alike, fostering a collaborative spirit that challenges the entrenched assumptions of neoliberalism. Through grassroots organizing and community engagement, as explored by Nygreen, educational stakeholders can actively participate in reshaping the academic landscape to promote equity and inclusivity [61]. An acute awareness of the neoliberal paradigm is indispensable for reimagining design education as a transformative and liberatory space, illustrating the need for holistic approaches that accommodate diverse perspectives and experiences.

As we navigate the complexities of neoliberal influence, it

becomes evident that the need for critical discourse, reflexivity, and a commitment to social responsibility within educational frameworks—specifically in design education—is paramount. A reconfiguration of pedagogical approaches, grounded in essential theories and reflective practices, may enhance the potential for design education to reclaim its role as a driver of social change. Therefore, the interrogation of neoliberalism as a signifier within the context of design education reveals profound implications for how we conceptualize educational practices. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of neoliberalism and its interplay with diverse educational discourses, as discussed in this section, we can more effectively challenge its negative trajectories while fostering an inclusive and innovative educational environment. The future of design education hinges on our ability to engage with these processes critically, cultivating pedagogical frameworks that espouse equity, creativity, and social justice to navigate the evolving demands of contemporary society.

5. Conclusions

The impact of neoliberalism on education is multifaceted, influencing structural reforms, pedagogical practices, and educator identities while prompting reflections on resistance strategies. The analysis presents a comprehensive overview of how neoliberal ideologies permeate educational frameworks—leading to a commodified understanding of learning that prioritizes market efficiency over critical engagement and pedagogical depth, as noted by authors who interrogate the implications of such ideologies within educational contexts. Furthermore, this commodification transforms the learner's experience and reshapes the identity of educators who must navigate this shifting landscape while maintaining integrities of teaching that resist undue market pressure. However, the emerging discourses of resistance suggest potential pathways for reclaiming educational values, emphasizing the necessity to return to critical pedagogies. This ongoing dialogue highlights the resilience of educators and communities in challenging the status quo, illuminating pathways that reaffirm the intrinsic value of education as a public good rather than a mere commodity. The body of work underscores the urgent need for an ongoing critical examination of neoliberalism's effects on education and exploring transformative pedagogies that can effectively counteract its pervasive influence.

Indian design education has evolved through distinct paradigms—Foundational, Developmental, and Reflective—shaped by historical, cultural, and economic influences that have been meticulously documented in various scholarly discourses. Post-independence, the India Report (1958) laid the foundation for regional modernism in Design education and practices, establishing key institutions like the NID and the IDC, which have played a central role in shaping design pedagogy. Even though global models like Bauhaus and Ulm have influenced the pedagogical approach in Indian design

education, they have also adapted to local socio-cultural contexts, ensuring relevance and resonance within the Indian milieu. The Ahmedabad Declaration (1979) was pivotal in shifting the focus of design education towards “Design for Development,” emphasizing solutions for rural India and low-cost innovations, aligning with the broader narrative of social responsibility in design practices.

The focus on learning by doing, interdisciplinary collaboration, and integrating liberal arts into design curricula has been central to enhancing the richness of the educational experience. The contextualization of Western models enabled design institutions to address real-world problems, effectively blending tradition with modernity, an increasingly necessary balance in today’s globalized landscape. Economic liberalization in 1991 significantly impacted design education, fostering the growth of consumer culture and facilitating digital transformation. The impact of neoliberal policies on design education is profound, raising concerns about accessibility, purpose, and the future of creativity. While economic pragmatism is essential, there is a compelling need to reclaim design education as a space for critical engagement, ethical responsibility, and democratic participation, echoing the sentiments articulated in numerous educational reform proposals. Future research should explore policy interventions, alternative pedagogical models, and community-driven design initiatives that challenge the dominant neoliberal paradigm—reinforcing that education should fundamentally function as a public good rather than merely a vehicle for market-driven objectives.

The transformation of Indian design education from a socially driven discipline to a neoliberal, market-oriented field reflects broader economic and ideological shifts that have been critically recognized in scholarship. While the expansion of design education has created new opportunities, it has eroded the original welfare-oriented vision underpinning early educational frameworks. To bridge the ideological gap, Indian design institutions, mainly the newly formed catering to the emergent scope of Design, must actively reintegrate social responsibility into their curricula, fostering a balance between market relevance and ethical, community-driven innovation. This requires a renewed commitment to the foundational principles of Design for Development, as envisioned in early policy documents. A re-evaluation of Design’s role in addressing pressing socioeconomic challenges can help restore its lost purpose in the Indian context, ensuring that creativity serves not just markets but society as a whole.

Abbreviations

ICSID	International Council of Societies of Industrial Design
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDC	Industrial Design Centre
IICD	Indian Institute of Crafts and Design
IITB	Indian Institute of Technology Bombay

LPG	Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization
NID	National Institute of Design
NIFT	National Institute of Fashion Technology
NPE	National Policy of Education
SLA	Science and Liberal Arts
UI/UX	User Interface/ User Experience
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Acknowledgments

The present work is part of the ongoing doctoral study of the first author under the supervision of the second author—the third author, as part of the research progress committee (RPC).

Disclosure

The author/s report no potential conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

While preparing this work, the author(s) used AI tools like Grammarly, Scite, Chat GPT, and Zotero for summarization and punctuation. However, after using the tools/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the publication’s content.

Author Contributions

Arun Mascarenhas: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Govindan Vivekanandan Sreekumar: Supervision

Sugandh Malhotra: Writing – review & editing

Funding

The Seed Grant Project of the first author supports this work. (RD/0519-IRCCSH0-007).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] S. Keirl, Against Neoliberalism; for Sustainable-Democratic Curriculum; Through Design and Technology Education, in: K. Stables, S. Keirl (Eds.), *Environment, Ethics and Cultures*, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, 2015: pp. 153–174. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-938-8_10
- [2] V. Bozalek, W. McMillan, D. Marshall, M. November, A. D. Daniels, T. Sylvester, Analysing the Professional Development of Teaching and Learning from a Political Ethics of Care Perspective, *Teaching in Higher Education* 19 (2014) 447–458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2014.880681>
- [3] R. Kumar, R. Paul, S. Somayaji, G. Somayaji, Transforming Spaces or Refashioning Hierarchies? Some Preliminary Reflections on Gender Relations, Media and Globalisation, *Sociology of Globalisation: Perspectives from India* (2006) 377–390. <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=17624613967335796410&hl=en&oi=scholar> (accessed March 19, 2025)
- [4] N. Fairclough, Language and Neo-Liberalism, *Discourse & Society* 11 (2000) 147–148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926500011002001>
- [5] T. C. Boas, J. Gans-Morse, Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44 (2009) 137–161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9040-5>
- [6] R. Venugopal, Neoliberalism as concept, *Economy and Society* 44 (2015) 165–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2015.1013356>
- [7] J. Tilak, Higher education: A public good or a commodity for trade? Commitment to higher education or commitment of higher education to trade, *PROSPECTS* 38 (2008) 449–466. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-009-9093-2>
- [8] S. Chattopadhyay, *Education and economics: Disciplinary evolution and policy discourse*, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- [9] A. Mascarenhas, J. Tiwari, Industrial Art to Design Education: A Historical Overview of Art Education Relevance for Design Education in India, in: A. Sharma, R. Poovaiah (Eds.), *Futuring Design Education*, Volume 2, Springer Nature Singapore, Singapore, 2025: pp. 247–260. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-97-9210-8_20
- [10] S. H. Poggenpohl, Design Literacy, Discourse and Communities of Practice, *Visible Language* 42 (2008). <https://journals.uc.edu/index.php/vl/article/view/5810> (accessed March 21, 2025)
- [11] G. Julier, From Visual Culture to Design Culture, *Design Issues* 22 (2006) 64–76. <https://doi.org/10.1162/074793606775247817>
- [12] A. Chatterjee, Design in India: The Experience of Transition, *Design Issues* 21 (2005) 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.1162/074793605774597514>
- [13] S. Tewari, Design for development 2.0? Revisiting the Ahmedabad Declaration and discourse of design in India, in: *Research + Education Forum Proceedings Hyderabad 2019*, World Design Organization, Hyderabad, India, 2019.
- [14] V. N. Adarkar, Design and Man in a Developing Society, in: 1973.
- [15] I. Bruff, The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism, *Rethinking Marxism* 26 (2014) 113–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2013.843250>
- [16] N. Ghatak, Beyond the Classroom: A Case Study on the Relationship Between Education as a Public Good, Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy, *Journal of Development Policy and Practice* 9 (2023) 71–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/24551333231201255>
- [17] S. Chattopadhyay, A. Sharma, A Neoliberal Approach to Policy Making in Indian Higher Education During the Post-liberalization Era, in: P. K. Biswas, P. Das (Eds.), *Indian Economy: Reforms and Development: Essays in Honour of Manoj Kumar Sanyal*, Springer Singapore, Singapore, 2019: pp. 289–313. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8269-7_13
- [18] K. Laing, L. M. Smith, L. Todd, The Impact Agenda and Critical Social Research in Education: Hitting the Target but Missing the Spot?, *Policy Futures in Education* 16 (2017) 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210317742214>
- [19] Y. Lin, Fostering Creativity Through Education – A Conceptual Framework of Creative Pedagogy, *Creative Education* 02 (2011) 149–155. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2011.23021>
- [20] R. Rogers, E. Malancharuvil-Berkes, M. Mosley, D. Hui, G. O. Joseph, Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature, *Review of Educational Research* 75 (2005) 365–416. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3515986> (accessed October 3, 2024)
- [21] H. Shin, J. S. Park, Researching Language and Neoliberalism, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 37 (2015) 443–452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2015.1071823>
- [22] M. Hara, K. Sherbine, Be[com]ing a Teacher in Neoliberal Times: The Possibilities of Visioning for Resistance in Teacher Education, *Policy Futures in Education* 16 (2018) 669–690. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210318758814>
- [23] E. Nikpouya, G. Zareian, Neoliberalism and the Violation of Students’ Rights: The Case of English Language Education, *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching* 7 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2024.7.1.3>
- [24] C. P. Brown, D. H. Ku, D. P. Barry, K. Puckett, Examining Preservice Teachers’ Conceptions of Teaching to Consider the Impact of Policymakers’ Neoliberal Reforms on Their Sense-making of Their New Profession, *Journal of Teacher Education* 73 (2022) 463–478. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871221105803>
- [25] K. S. Robinson, The Influence of Neoliberalism on Graduate Student Teaching Preparation: A Structural, Interactionist Study, *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 11 (2020) 295–310. <https://doi.org/10.1108/sgpe-09-2019-0076>

- [26] A. Brown, Biting the Hand That Feeds You? Teachers Engage with an Ethnography of Neoliberalism in Education, *Policy Futures in Education* 15 (2016) 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316639415>
- [27] T. M. Karki, Impact of Neoliberalism on Language Educational Policies, *Panauti J.* 2 (2024) 111–119. <https://doi.org/10.3126/panauti.v2i1.66601>
- [28] C. P. Brown, Confronting the Contradictions: A Case Study of Early Childhood Teacher Development in Neoliberal Times, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 10 (2009) 240–259. <https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2009.10.3.240>
- [29] O. Henricsson, Student Teachers’ Storytelling: Countering Neoliberalism in Education, *Phenomenology & Practice* 14 (2020) 24–38. <https://doi.org/10.29173/pandpr29396>
- [30] R. Jha, *Unsettled city: neoliberal redevelopment, state crisis, slum resettlement & biopolitical struggle in Mumbai*, School of Social Work, Lund University, Lund, 2023.
- [31] C. Pelletan, How To “Talk Left and Walk Right” in South Africa: Access to Medicines in the Neoliberal Era: An insight into the public market of antiretroviral treatments in South Africa, *Angles* 8 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.613>
- [32] A. Chatterjee, Design for Communication: The NID Experience, *India International Centre Quarterly* 10 (1983) 216–225. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23001646> (accessed April 5, 2025)
- [33] C. Eames, R. Eames, *The India Report.*, Government of India., India, 1958.
- [34] S. Balaram, Design in India: The Importance of the Ahmedabad Declaration, *Design Issues* 25 (2009) 54–79. <https://doi.org/10.1162/desi.2009.25.4.54>
- [35] S. Balasubrahmanyam, *Genesis of design education in India the warp and weft of local global contexts*, CEPT, 2012. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/476771>
- [36] MHRD-GoI, *National Policy on Education*, (1968). https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE-1968.pdf
- [37] A. Mascarenhas, V. Kant, Need for an ‘Integrated Policy Design’ and ‘Design Policy’ for India’s ‘Creative Economy,’ in: A. Chakrabarti, V. Singh (Eds.), *Design in the Era of Industry 4.0*, Volume 3, Springer Nature Singapore, Singapore, 2023: pp. 1081–1093. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-0428-0_88
- [38] S. Balaram, *Bauhaus and the Origin of Design Education in India*, (2019). <http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/articles/3268/bauhaus-and-the-origin-of-design-education-in-india> (accessed March 20, 2025)
- [39] S. Tewari, *Design in Visions: Visions of/on Design from the Events, Declarations and Policies in India*, 2018.
- [40] V. S. Katiyar, S. Mehta, *Design Education: Tradition and Modernity*, 1st ed., NID Press, Paldi Ahmedabad, 2007.
- [41] S. Tiwari, S. Thakurta Roy, *Design Paradigms: A Post-colonial Design History of India*, 2021.
- [42] A. Mascarenhas, G. V. Sreekumar, V. Kant, Mapping the Creativity Concepts in Education Policies: Implications for Holistic Development and Design Education in India, in: A. Chakrabarti, P. Omkar, (Eds.), *Responsible and Resilient Design for Society*, Springer Nature Singapore, DoD, IIT Hyderabad, India, 2025: p. 484.
- [43] K. Gormley, Neoliberalism and the discursive construction of ‘creativity,’ *Critical Studies in Education* 61 (2020) 313–328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2018.1459762>
- [44] E. Gonen, Tim Brown, *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* (2009), MGDR 04 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.23860/MGDR-2019-04-02-08>
- [45] A. Mascarenhas, S. Poosapati, *Cocoon Finger Puppets: Fostering Creativity and Innovative Teaching Through a Participatory Pedagogical Method*, *JAAr.d* 2 (2024) pp. 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.62030/2024JanuaryArticle1>
- [46] S. Balaram, *Thinking Design*, First Edition, Sage India, New Delhi, India, Thousand Oaks, California, 2010.
- [47] V. Papenak, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*, 2nd (2006), 1984.
- [48] S. Banerjee, A. Shaban, *Reimagining the Social Enterprise Through Grassroots Social Innovations in India*, in: *Theory of Social Enterprise and Pluralism*, Routledge, 2019: pp. 116–129.
- [49] K. Maldonado-Mariscal, *Grassroots innovation and social innovation in perspective*, *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (2023). <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1247293>
- [50] A. Gupta, *Teacher-Entrepreneurialism: A Case of Teacher Identity Formation in Neoliberalizing Education Space in Contemporary India*, (2023) 12–28. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032693262-2>
- [51] M. A. F. Wilson, *Neoliberal Ideology in a Private Sudbury School*, *Policy Futures in Education* 15 (2015) 170–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210315610256>
- [52] K. Comiling, R. J. M. Sanchez, *A Postcolonial Critique of Amartya Sen’s Capability Framework*, *AP* 4 (2014) 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.13185/AP2014.04101>
- [53] S. Hickey, J. Seekings, *The global politics of social protection*, Helsinki: The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), 2017. <https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2017/339-4>
- [54] G. d. C. Santamaría, *Challenges and Drawbacks in the Marketisation of Higher Education Within Neoliberalism*, *Review of European Studies* 12 (2020) 22. <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v12n1p22>
- [55] S. L. Muzzatti, *Strange Bedfellows: Austerity and Social Justice at the Neoliberal University*, *Critical Criminology* 30 (2022) 495–507. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-022-09646-9>

- [56] T. Elyas, M. Picard, Critiquing of Higher Education Policy in Saudi Arabia: Towards a New Neoliberalism, *Education Business and Society Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues* 6 (2013) 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17537981311314709>
- [57] G. Slater, Assembling the Opposition: Organizing Struggles Against Neoliberalism and Educational Insecurity, *Policy Futures in Education* 18 (2018) 72–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210318766949>
- [58] H. A. Giroux, Neoliberalism, Corporate Culture, and the Promise of Higher Education: The University as a Democratic Public Sphere, *Harvard Educational Review* 72 (2002) 425–464. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.72.4.0515nr62324n71p1>
- [59] M. Schmeichel, A. Sharma, E. Pittard, Contours of Neoliberalism in US Empirical Educational Research, *Curriculum Inquiry* 47 (2017) 195–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2017.1283592>
- [60] M. Lack áus, Does Entrepreneurial Education Trigger More or Less Neoliberalism in Education?, *Education + Training* 59 (2017) 635–650. <https://doi.org/10.1108/et-09-2016-0151>
- [61] K. Nygreen, Negotiating Tensions: Grassroots Organizing, School Reform, and the Paradox of Neoliberal Democracy, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 48 (2017) 42–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12182>

Biography



Arun Mascarenhas is a communication design professor specializing in drawing and contemporary sculpture and has expertise in fine art practices, art history, and aesthetics. His research focuses on Creativity, Design Education, and Public Policies, and his teaching interests include Art & Design

Fundamentals, Form and Aesthetics, Communication Designs, Design for Handmade, Design for Public Spaces, and Qualitative research approaches. He guides diverse Visual Culture and Design projects and contributes to design programs at the IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay.



Govindan Vivekanandan Sreekumar is a Communication Design Professor at IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay; he works in Design Education and Pedagogy, Typography and Calligraphy, Publication Design, Information Design, and Magazine Design.



Sugandh Malhotra is a Mobility and Vehicle Design (MVD) Professor at IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay. His areas of interest are Design Forecasting, Mobility and Vehicle Design, Design Research Methods, Speculative Design and Sustainability, Design Frameworks for Future Design Possibilities.

ilities.