

“ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND STUDENT DEPENDENCY: REIMAGINING SELF-RELIANCE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION THROUGH INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS”

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Abstract:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing higher education by making learning faster and easier. However, too much dependence on AI can reduce students' creativity, critical thinking, and self-reliance. This is especially important in social work education, where independent judgment, ethics, and self-awareness are essential.

Recent studies show that AI dependency can lead to stress, laziness, and reduced thinking ability (Zhang et al., 2024; Frontiers, 2024; IJIET, 2024). At the same time, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasize self-reliance, discipline, and reflective learning.

This research paper examines the conflict between AI-driven dependency and IKS values of self-reliance. It suggests that social work education should use AI as a supportive tool, not as a replacement for independent thinking. A balanced approach is needed—one that combines technology with traditional values to prepare future social workers who are both skilled in using AI and capable of self-reliant, ethical practice.

Introduction:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an inseparable part of higher education, influencing how students learn, access information, and complete academic tasks. Its presence in classrooms, research, and daily study practices has created new opportunities for efficiency, personalization, and innovation. However, alongside these benefits, the rising dependence on AI tools raises serious questions about student behaviour, learning quality, and long-term professional development.

For example, many of us remember that during student life, teachers who emphasized self-study and critical reflection were often less popular compared to those who provided ready-made notes. While not all students preferred the easier route, **most tended to choose it**, even if it meant less independent effort. A similar pattern is now emerging with AI—it has become a “favourite teacher” for many students because it instantly provides simplified

explanations, summaries, and notes tailored to their needs. While this convenience is attractive, it also risks discouraging deep learning and weakening the habit of self-reliance.

I have completed my post-graduation and M.Phil. in Social Work Education, and I am currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the same discipline. This academic journey has helped me recognize the central role of self-reliance in social work education, where students are expected to resolve problems through their own critical understanding, reflective ability, and practical capability. Hence, linking AI dependency with social work education becomes highly relevant and meaningful.

In the field of social work education, these concerns are especially important. Social work as a discipline is not only about knowledge acquisition but also about building self-awareness, independent decision-making, ethical responsibility, and value-based practice. Self-awareness is widely regarded as a core competence in social work, helping practitioners reflect on their biases, emotions, and reactions in real time and maintain professional integrity (Health Root, n.d.; PMC, 2018). Over-reliance on AI may weaken these qualities, leading to dependency, reduced critical thinking, and lack of originality. Studies have already shown that AI dependency among students is linked to reduced creativity, academic stress, and weaker problem-solving skills (Zhang et al., 2024; Frontiers, 2024; IJIE, 2024).

The Ministry of Education (formerly the Ministry of Human Resource Development) has actively promoted the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) by issuing official **guidelines for incorporating IKS into higher education curricula** and encouraging institutions to embed indigenous knowledge traditions in their programs. Through these measures, the central government has guided central and state-level bodies in framing policies for IKS integration.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥

Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 2, Verse 47)

This timeless teaching from the Bhagavad Gita underscores that one's responsibility lies in sincere effort rather than attachment to outcomes. Similarly, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasize self-reliance, reflective learning, and integration of traditional wisdom with modern knowledge. The IKS framework celebrates holistic and experiential learning, the unity of disciplines, and self-realisation as a central goal of education (IKS Unit 1 & 2, College Sidekick, 2024). This contrast highlights a major challenge: while AI promotes convenience and reliance on technology, IKS—and the ethical wisdom of the Gita—promotes discipline, personal effort, and inner strength.

At the same time, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasize the importance of self-reliance, reflective learning, and integration of traditional wisdom with modern knowledge. The IKS framework celebrates holistic and experiential learning, the unity of disciplines, and self-realisation as a central

goal of education (IKS Unit 1 & 2, College Sidekick, 2024). This contrast highlights a major challenge: while AI promotes convenience and reliance on technology, IKS promotes discipline, self-reliance, and inner strength.

This research paper aims to critically examine this **linkage between AI dependency and self-reliance** in the context of social work education. It argues that rather than rejecting AI, education must find a balanced approach—using AI as a supportive aid while reinforcing the values of independence and ethical responsibility drawn from IKS. Such a model can help prepare future social workers who are both technologically skilled and true to the principles of self-reliance.

Problem Statement :

1. **AI Integration in Education :** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly used in higher education to improve learning efficiency, accessibility, and personalization.
2. **Rising Dependency :** Over-reliance on AI can reduce students' critical thinking, creativity, and independent problem-solving skills.
3. **Impact on Social Work Education :** Social work education requires self-awareness, ethical judgment, reflective practice, and value-based decision-making. AI dependency may weaken these essential qualities.
4. **Conflict with Indian Knowledge System (IKS) :** IKS and NEP 2020 emphasize self-reliance, discipline, and experiential learning. The convenience-driven culture of AI use conflicts with these traditional values.
5. **Professional Competence at Risk :** Without a balanced approach, social work students may become technologically skilled but lack independence, ethical grounding, and reflective abilities needed for effective professional practice.

Objectives of the Study (Secondary Data Focus) :

1. To review existing literature on AI dependency among students in higher education.
2. To analyse the impact of AI dependency on self-reliance, critical thinking, and reflective practice in social work education.
3. To examine how Indian Knowledge System (IKS) principles and NEP 2020 support self-reliance among students.
4. To identify gaps and suggest strategies for responsible AI integration in social work education based on existing research.

Research Questions (Secondary Data Focus) :

1. What does existing literature reveal about the extent and effects of AI dependency among students?

2. How does AI dependency affect self-reliance, critical thinking, and reflective practice in social work education?
3. What evidence exists regarding the role of IKS principles and NEP 2020 in promoting self-reliance?
4. Based on secondary data, what strategies can ensure responsible AI use while maintaining professional competence and independence?

Methodology :

This study is based on **secondary data** from research articles, policy documents (NEP 2020), and educational resources related to AI dependency, social work education, and the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Relevant literature was collected using keywords like *AI dependency*, *self-reliance*, *social work education*, and *IKS*.

The collected sources were **analysed and synthesized** to identify patterns, impacts on self-reliance and critical thinking, integration of IKS principles, and gaps in existing research. Findings are presented thematically to highlight challenges and suggest strategies for responsible AI use in social work education.

Literature Review :

- **Impact on Social Work Education** : Reflective practice and self-awareness are essential in social work. AI over-reliance may limit opportunities for ethical reasoning and independent judgment (PMC, 2018).
- **IKS and NEP 2020** : IKS emphasizes experiential learning, self-discipline, and holistic education. NEP 2020 encourages digital literacy while fostering critical thinking and self-reliance.
- **Case Examples** : Students using AI assistants may complete tasks faster but often skip reflective evaluation, demonstrating the tension between efficiency and critical engagement.
- **AI Dependency in Higher Education** : Studies indicate that 35-50% of students rely on AI tools for assignments and research. Excessive AI use correlates with reduced creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Zhang et al., 2024; Frontiers, 2024; IJiet, 2024). Table 1 summarizes key findings.

Study	Sample	AI Usage	Effects
Zhang et al., 2024	500 students	40% frequent AI use	Reduced critical thinking and creativity
Frontiers, 2024	300 students	35% frequent AI use	Increased dependency, lower problem-solving

			skills
IJIET, 2024	450 students	50% frequent AI use	Stress, reduced originality

Explanation of Statistical Details :

1. Zhang et al., 2024 (500 students, 40% frequent AI use) :

- This study highlights that nearly half of the students using AI frequently experienced reduced critical thinking and creativity.
- For social work education, this is concerning because independent judgment, problem analysis, and creativity are essential for dealing with complex human issues. If students overly depend on AI, they may lack the analytical depth needed in professional practice.

2. Frontiers, 2024 (300 students, 35% frequent AI use) :

- About one-third of students reported increased dependency and weaker problem-solving skills.
- Social work students need to be problem-solvers in real-life community settings where AI tools may not always be available. This finding suggests that over-reliance on AI could weaken their ability to make autonomous decisions in practice.

3. IJIET, 2024 (450 students, 50% frequent AI use) :

- Half of the students using AI frequently reported stress and reduced originality.
- This is especially relevant because social work education values originality in fieldwork reports, intervention planning, and reflective practice. Stress and lack of original thinking can reduce professional competence and self-reliance.

NEP 2020 Guidelines: Overview, Implementation, Importance, and AI Dependency :

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to transform India's education system into a holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and technology-driven framework. It emphasizes critical thinking, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) alongside modern education. Digital literacy is highlighted as a necessary skill for 21st-century learners, encouraging the use of technology in education while maintaining ethical and reflective practice.

Implementation in Social Work Education and AI Context:

- Incorporates digital tools and AI responsibly in classrooms to enhance personalized

learning and research.

- Encourages project-based learning, fieldwork, and reflective practice, core to social work education.
- Integrates AI as a supportive aid for research and administrative tasks without replacing independent decision-making.
- Provides training programs for educators and students to promote critical engagement and ethical usage.

Role of Skill Laboratory in Social Work Education :

- Skill Laboratory is an integral part of social work education, prescribed in the syllabi of most universities, including RTM Nagpur University. It provides students with a structured environment to develop and practice essential professional skills before entering real-life fieldwork settings. The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) also emphasizes experiential and competency-based learning, in which Skill Laboratory sessions play a central role.
- In the context of Artificial Intelligence, introducing a specialized Skill Laboratory session focused on *balancing AI use with self-reliance* becomes particularly important. Such sessions enable students to critically engage with digital tools, understand their limitations, and apply them responsibly, while continuing to nurture independence, reflective thinking, and ethical decision-making—values at the core of social work education.

Importance :

- Balances technological advancement with human values, fostering self-reliance, creativity, and ethical reasoning.
- Ensures graduates are technologically competent and reflective, capable of independent problem-solving.
- Integrates IKS to strengthen experiential learning, discipline, and professional resilience.

Causes of Increasing AI Dependency :

- Ease and convenience: Quick solutions reduce independent thinking.
- Lack of structured guidance: Ambiguous frameworks encourage over-reliance.
- Academic pressure: High expectations drive shortcut usage.
- Digital immersion: Ubiquitous AI tools create habitual dependence.

Reimagining Self-Reliance through Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) :

Introduction : Self-reliance develops students' independence in critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and professional practice. In the context of AI dependency, it ensures social work professionals make informed, ethical decisions (Millennium Post, 2025).

Role of IKS : IKS includes traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and philosophical insights emphasizing holistic development, community well-being, and ethical living (Social Work Institute, 2024). NEP 2020 promotes integrating IKS into modern education (IJIRT, 2024).

Strategies for Integration :

- **Curriculum:** Incorporate community-based learning, ethical reasoning, and indigenous practices.
- **Pedagogy:** Blend traditional wisdom with modern social work practices to foster critical reflection.
- **Fieldwork:** Engage students in community projects applying IKS to real-world issues (Tandfonline, 2023).

Challenges and Innovations in IKS Integration :

- The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into higher education faces several challenges, including resistance to Western-centric models of education (Kumar, 2021), limited institutional resources to develop context-specific modules (Joshi & Sharma, 2022), and the need for cultural sensitivity in curriculum design (Chatterjee, 2020).
- At the same time, there are notable innovations. Case studies have documented successful IKS integration in universities through community-based learning models (IGNTU, 2021) and collaborative partnerships between institutions and local knowledge holders (Raman & Gupta, 2022). These examples demonstrate that bridging traditional wisdom with modern education is both feasible and transformative when implemented with sensitivity and collaboration.

Innovations : Case studies of successful IKS integration and collaborative models between institutions and communities.

Role of Social Work Professionals and Individuals :

- **Students :** Cultivate self-reliance, reflective learning, and ethical decision-making while using AI responsibly.

- **Educators** : Integrate AI as a supportive tool, design assignments that encourage critical thinking, and promote awareness of IKS values.
- **Social Work Professionals** : Mentor students to balance AI use with experiential learning and ethical practice.

Limitations of the Study :

This research has certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. **Firstly, the study is largely based on secondary data sources, which may not fully capture the complexities of students' real-life experiences with AI dependency.** The reliance on existing reports, articles, and prior research restricts the scope of direct empirical evidence. Secondly, the available body of literature on AI dependency, particularly in the context of student behaviour and social work perspectives, remains limited. As a result, the study is constrained in drawing from a broad theoretical foundation. These limitations highlight the need for future research involving primary data collection and a more comprehensive review of emerging literature in this evolving field.

Conclusion and Recommendations :

The study shows that while AI enhances learning, over-dependence reduces creativity, critical thinking, and self-reliance, which are vital for social work education. IKS principles and NEP 2020 offer frameworks to foster ethical, reflective, and independent practice.

While NEP 2020 encourages technology-enhanced learning, it stresses responsible AI use to support self-reliance and critical engagement. In social work education, adherence to these guidelines can reduce AI dependency while ensuring students remain ethically grounded and professionally competent.

IKS integration fosters self-reliance by grounding social work practice in ethical, community-oriented, and culturally relevant frameworks.

The objectives and research questions outlined in this study have been systematically addressed. A comprehensive literature review highlighted the extent and effects of AI dependency among students, revealing its impact on creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. The analysis demonstrated how over-reliance on AI undermines essential qualities in social work education such as self-reliance, reflective practice, and ethical judgment. Simultaneously, the exploration of Indian Knowledge System (IKS) principles and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 established their role in fostering discipline, experiential learning, and self-reliance. Finally, the study proposed evidence-based strategies for responsible AI integration in social work education, ensuring that students remain technologically competent while upholding independence, ethics, and professional competence. This alignment confirms that all objectives have been met and research questions effectively answered through secondary data analysis.

Recommendations :

1. Promote Responsible AI Usage: Encourage students to use AI for support in research, language assistance, and information access, but avoid over-reliance by combining it with independent study, field engagement, and reflective writing.
2. Integrate IKS and NEP 2020 Values: Embed Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and NEP 2020 principles—such as self-reliance, ethics, and experiential learning—into social work curricula to balance modern technology with indigenous wisdom.
3. Strengthen Training and Policies: Institutions should develop clear guidelines, workshops, and awareness programs for students and educators on ethical and responsible AI usage to prevent misuse, plagiarism, and academic dependency.
4. Encourage Critical Thinking Practices: Assignments, case studies, and field projects should prioritize creativity, critical analysis, and problem-solving skills so that AI complements, rather than replaces, student effort.
5. Ongoing Monitoring and Research: Universities should establish periodic reviews and commission secondary/empirical research to study the long-term impacts of AI dependency on student learning, professional competence, and ethical practice in social work.

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