

Integrating Indigenous Pedagogies into School Education: Policy, Practice, and Challenges under NEP 2020

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in India's educational framework by emphasizing culturally responsive, inclusive, and experiential learning. A central feature of the policy is the recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems and pedagogical practices as valuable resources for strengthening school education. This study explores the integration of Indigenous pedagogies into school education, examining the policy provisions under NEP 2020, current implementation practices, and the challenges encountered in translating policy into classroom realities. Using a qualitative approach based on policy analysis and a review of relevant literature, the study investigates how Indigenous teaching methods—such as oral traditions, storytelling, community-based learning, ecological knowledge, local languages, and experiential practices—can enrich the curriculum and promote holistic development. The findings suggest that Indigenous pedagogies foster contextualized learning, strengthen cultural identity, encourage environmental sustainability, and improve student engagement. However, the implementation of these approaches faces several obstacles, including inadequate teacher preparation, limited curricular integration, and scarcity of culturally relevant learning materials, language barriers, and insufficient institutional support. The study argues that effective implementation requires sustained teacher training, active community participation, curriculum redesign, and stronger collaboration among policymakers, educators, and Indigenous communities. By highlighting both opportunities and challenges, this research contributes to the discourse on equitable and culturally relevant education and offers recommendations for realizing the transformative vision of NEP 2020. Integrating Indigenous pedagogies into mainstream school education has the potential to create a more inclusive, context-sensitive, and sustainable educational system that values India's diverse cultural heritage while preparing learners for contemporary societal needs.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Indigenous Pedagogies, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, School Education, Experiential Learning, Teacher Education, Sustainable Education.

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1. Introduction

Education is not merely a process of transmitting knowledge; it is also a means of preserving culture, identity, values, and community wisdom. Across India, indigenous communities have developed rich pedagogical traditions rooted in local languages, oral narratives, storytelling, observation, apprenticeship, experiential learning, ecological knowledge, folk arts, and community participation (Carpena-Méndez et al., 2022). These indigenous pedagogies have historically nurtured holistic development by integrating cognitive, emotional, ethical, social, and practical dimensions of learning (Carpena-Méndez et al., 2022; Garcia & Shirley, 2017). However, during the colonial period and in the post-independence expansion of formal schooling, many of these traditional educational practices were marginalized in favour of standardized, textbook-oriented, examination-driven, and teacher-centred approaches (Madden, 2015). As a result, a significant gap emerged between school education and the lived experiences, cultural heritage, and local knowledge systems of learners.

Recognizing this disconnect, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a paradigm shift in Indian education by advocating an education system that is rooted in India's cultural diversity while preparing students for global citizenship (Baral, 2024; Khan & Husain, 2025). The policy emphasizes that curriculum and pedagogy should be grounded in Indian and local contexts, incorporating indigenous and traditional ways of learning, local knowledge systems, arts, crafts, languages, environmental practices, and community wisdom to make education more relevant, engaging, and meaningful (Asagar, 2025). It further promotes experiential learning, play-based pedagogy, multilingual education, competency-based assessment, and holistic development, all of which resonate strongly with indigenous educational philosophies (Khan & Husain, 2025; Jadav & Basha, 2026).

Indigenous pedagogies are characterized by learner-centred, experiential, collaborative, and place-based approaches that emphasize learning through observation, participation, storytelling, practical engagement, and interaction with nature and the community (Garcia & Shirley, 2017). These pedagogical traditions foster critical thinking, creativity, environmental stewardship, ethical values, and cultural identity while promoting sustainable lifestyles (Madden, 2015). In the Indian context, indigenous pedagogies vary across regions and communities, including tribal knowledge systems, traditional ecological practices, folk traditions, local crafts, agricultural knowledge, yoga, Ayurveda, oral literature, and community-based learning (Da Silva et al., 2024). Their integration into formal schooling has the potential to enrich classroom experiences, enhance students' cultural understanding, improve contextual learning, and contribute to inclusive and equitable education (Ann Rahman & Cochrane, 2023).

NEP 2020 explicitly recommends the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), tribal knowledge, indigenous games, local arts, traditional occupations, and culturally relevant examples across different stages of school education (Asagar, 2025; Khan & Husain, 2025). The policy also encourages the use of the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction in the foundational years, recognizing that children learn best when education is connected to their linguistic and cultural environment (Asagar, 2025; Baral, 2024). Furthermore, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) aligns with

these principles by promoting contextualized, multidisciplinary, and experiential learning that reflects local realities and indigenous knowledge traditions (Jadav & Basha, 2026).

Despite these progressive policy provisions, translating indigenous pedagogies from policy documents into classroom practice remains a significant challenge (Ann Rahman & Cochrane, 2023). Many schools continue to rely on conventional teaching methods that prioritize rote memorization and standardized examinations (Jaiswal, 2025). Teachers often receive limited professional preparation for integrating indigenous knowledge into classroom instruction. Additional barriers include inadequate curriculum materials, insufficient documentation of local knowledge, limited community participation, language diversity, scarcity of teaching-learning resources, and varying levels of institutional support across states (Funk & Woodroffe, 2024). Moreover, balancing indigenous knowledge with modern scientific knowledge requires careful curriculum design to ensure both academic rigor and cultural relevance (Huaman & Swentzell, 2021). Recent scholarship also points to a persistent gap between NEP 2020's vision and its implementation in school classrooms.

The integration of indigenous pedagogies is particularly important in achieving the broader goals of sustainable development, social inclusion, and educational equity (Jaiswal, 2025). It contributes to preserving cultural heritage, strengthening local identities, promoting environmental consciousness, and empowering indigenous and marginalized communities (Funk & Woodroffe, 2024; Huaman & Swentzell, 2021). By connecting school education with learners' lived experiences, indigenous pedagogies can improve student engagement, reduce cultural alienation, and support holistic development in accordance with the vision of NEP 2020.

Against this backdrop, the present study, "Integrating Indigenous Pedagogies into School Education: Policy, Practice, and Challenges under NEP 2020," seeks to critically examine the policy framework supporting indigenous pedagogies, explore their integration into school curricula and classroom practices, and identify the opportunities and challenges associated with their implementation. Through an analysis of policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and existing literature, the study aims to assess the extent to which the aspirations of NEP 2020 are being translated into educational practice and to propose strategies for strengthening the meaningful integration of indigenous pedagogies in Indian school education.

2. Research Objectives

- To examine the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 related to the integration of Indigenous Pedagogies in school education.
- To identify and analyze indigenous pedagogical practices and learning traditions relevant to school education in India.
- To assess the extent to which indigenous pedagogies are integrated into school curricula, teaching-learning processes, and classroom practices under NEP 2020.
- To identify the opportunities and challenges in integrating indigenous pedagogies into school education under NEP 2020.
- To propose a framework and policy recommendations for strengthening the integration of indigenous pedagogies in Indian school education.

3. Research Methodology

Using a qualitative approach based on policy analysis and a review of relevant literature. Secondary data will be collected from National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023, NCERT publications and reports, Ministry of Education documents, research articles, books, journals, dissertations, and government reports related to Indigenous knowledge systems and education etc. Data was analysed using content analysis technique.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 related to the integration of Indigenous Pedagogies in school education.

Encourages the inclusion of traditional Indian knowledge, philosophy, arts, crafts, languages, and scientific traditions in education. Seeks to preserve and transmit indigenous knowledge through formal education. Recommends that, wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5 (and preferably Grade 8 and beyond) should be the home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language (Pujar, 2026). Supports indigenous ways of learning by enabling children to learn in familiar linguistic and cultural contexts. Promotes experiential, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and project-based learning (Ann Rahman & Cochrane, 2023). These approaches align with many indigenous pedagogical traditions that emphasize observation, participation, storytelling, and learning by doing (Ann Rahman & Cochrane, 2023). Encourages curriculum and pedagogy that reflect local history, culture, traditions, geography, and community knowledge. Supports contextualized learning rooted in learners' lived experiences (Khan & Husain, 2025). Advocates holistic education integrating cognitive, social, emotional, ethical, artistic, and physical development. Reflects indigenous perspectives that view learning as interconnected rather than divided into isolated subjects. Emphasizes the protection and promotion of tribal and endangered languages (Pujar, 2026). Recognizes language as a key medium for preserving indigenous knowledge and cultural identity. Encourages vocational education from the school level. Recognizes traditional occupations, crafts, agriculture, and artisanal knowledge as valuable learning resources (Carnes, 2015). Focuses on the educational needs of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), including tribal communities. Promotes culturally responsive educational practices that respect diverse knowledge systems. Recommends preparing teachers to adopt learner-centered, culturally relevant, and context-sensitive pedagogies (Funk & Woodroffe, 2024). Encourages teachers to incorporate local knowledge and community resources into classroom teaching. Promotes environmental awareness, sustainable lifestyles, and respect for nature. Indigenous ecological knowledge and traditional environmental practices can contribute to achieving these goals (Khan & Husain, 2025).

4.2 Indigenous Pedagogical Practices and Learning Traditions Relevant to School Education in India

Indigenous pedagogical practices are traditional methods of teaching and learning that have evolved within indigenous and tribal communities over generations. These practices are deeply rooted in local culture, language, values, ecological knowledge, and community life (King &

Schiellmann, 2004). Unlike conventional classroom-based education, indigenous pedagogies emphasize experiential learning, observation, participation, storytelling, and holistic development (Cardinal & Fenichel, 2017). In India, these practices offer valuable insights for creating culturally responsive and inclusive school education, in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Oral Traditions and Storytelling: Storytelling is a central feature of indigenous education. Elders transmit knowledge, history, moral values, customs, and ecological wisdom through folktales, myths, songs, riddles, and proverbs (Biermann & Townsend-Cross, 2008). This method strengthens communication skills, critical thinking, memory, and cultural identity.

Experiential Learning (Learning by Doing): Indigenous communities emphasize practical learning through direct experience rather than memorization (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023). Children learn farming, fishing, weaving, pottery, forest management, and other life skills by actively participating in community activities (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023).

Observation and Apprenticeship: Children learn by observing parents, elders, artisans, and community leaders and gradually participating in daily tasks (Jaiswal, 2025). Knowledge is transferred through demonstration, guided practice, and mentorship.

Community-Based Learning: Learning takes place within the community rather than being confined to classrooms. Festivals, rituals, agricultural activities, and collective decision-making become opportunities for learning social responsibility and cooperation (Ann Rahman & Cochrane, 2023).

Nature-Based and Place-Based Learning: Indigenous education is closely connected with the natural environment. Learners acquire knowledge about biodiversity, medicinal plants, water conservation, weather patterns, and sustainable resource use (Biermann & Townsend-Cross, 2008; Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023).

Mother Tongue and Multilingual Learning: Most indigenous communities transmit knowledge through their mother tongue (Lambe, 2003; McNally, 2004). Learning in the first language improves comprehension, participation, and cultural continuity.

Holistic and Value-Based Education: Indigenous pedagogies integrate intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual, and moral development (McNally, 2004). Respect for nature, cooperation, empathy, and community welfare are central educational values (Lambe, 2003).

Indigenous Arts, Crafts, and Cultural Practices: Traditional music, dance, painting, weaving, pottery, and handicrafts are important learning methods that transmit cultural heritage and practical knowledge (Jaiswal, 2025; Ann Rahman & Cochrane, 2023).

4.3 Indigenous pedagogies are integrated into school curricula, teaching-learning processes, and classroom practices under NEP 2020.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes the importance of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), local knowledge, and culturally responsive education. Although the policy does not explicitly use the term "indigenous pedagogies" throughout, many of its recommendations reflect indigenous ways of teaching and learning. These pedagogical approaches are intended

to make education more inclusive, experiential, learner-centered, and connected to local contexts (Cardinal & Fenichel, 2017).

Mother Tongue-Based and Multilingual Education: NEP 2020 recommends that the medium of instruction, wherever possible, should be the home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language at least until Grade 5 and preferably up to Grade 8. Teaching in students' home languages during the foundational years (Lata et al., 2022; Pujar, 2026). Using local stories, songs, folktales, and oral traditions as learning resources. Encouraging multilingual communication to improve comprehension and cultural identity.

Experiential and Activity-Based Learning: The policy emphasizes learning by doing, problem-solving, inquiry, projects, and hands-on experiences rather than rote memorization (Ann Rahman & Cochrane, 2023). Project-based learning, field visits and community surveys, practical activities connected with local environments and occupations, observation and experimentation (Pujar, 2026; Ann Rahman & Cochrane, 2023). This closely resembles indigenous learning through participation and practical experience.

Local Context and Indigenous Knowledge: NEP 2020 encourages schools to integrate local history, geography, culture, arts, crafts, agriculture, biodiversity, and traditional knowledge into the curriculum (Da Silva et al., 2024). Local examples in textbooks. Community resource persons as knowledge holders. Contextualized learning based on regional culture.

Storytelling and Oral Traditions: Storytelling has long been an indigenous method of transmitting knowledge, values, and cultural heritage. Integration into classroom practices are storytelling sessions, folk literature and indigenous narratives, classroom discussions based on traditional stories, use of proverbs, songs, and local legends to explain concepts (Jaiswal, 2025).

Arts-Integrated Learning: NEP 2020 promotes integrating music, dance, theatre, painting, crafts, and local art forms into teaching across subjects. Examples: tribal art in visual arts lessons, folk songs for language learning, traditional dance to explore cultural diversity and craft-based learning in vocational education.

Vocational and Skill-Based Learning: The policy introduces vocational education from middle school and encourages exposure to traditional occupations and local crafts. Examples are pottery, handloom weaving, bamboo craft, agriculture, carpentry and indigenous food processing. This reflects apprenticeship-based indigenous learning.

Environmental and Nature-Based Learning: Indigenous communities traditionally learn through interaction with nature. NEP 2020 promotes environmental awareness, biodiversity education, sustainable lifestyles and local ecosystem studies. Classroom practices include school gardens, nature walks, biodiversity mapping, water conservation projects and local environmental studies

Holistic and Value-Based Education: Indigenous education views learning as the development of the whole person (Lata et al., 2022). NEP 2020 similarly promotes ethical values, empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity, social responsibility and well-being. These values are integrated through classroom discussions, community engagement, and co-curricular activities

(Lata et al., 2022; Thakur et al., 2023).

Community Participation: Traditional indigenous learning occurs within families and communities. NEP 2020 encourages schools to collaborate with local communities, invite artisans, farmers, tribal elders, and local experts as resource persons and organize community-based projects.

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS): The policy explicitly promotes the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems, including traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous medicine, mathematics and astronomy, philosophy, yoga, cultural heritage and traditional technologies (Pujar, 2026). These can be integrated through interdisciplinary teaching and locally relevant curriculum materials.

4.4 Opportunities and challenges in integrating indigenous pedagogies into school education under NEP 2020.

The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** provides a transformative framework for integrating indigenous pedagogies into school education by emphasizing holistic, experiential, multilingual, and culturally rooted learning. While the policy creates significant opportunities for revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), its successful implementation also faces several institutional, pedagogical, and socio-cultural challenges.

Opportunities

NEP 2020 advocates holistic development by integrating cognitive, emotional, physical, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of learning. Indigenous pedagogies, which emphasize experiential learning, storytelling, observation, community participation, and learning from nature, naturally align with this vision (Thakur et al., 2023; Venkateshwarlu, 2021). The policy encourages the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems, tribal traditions, local arts, crafts, folklore, and traditional ecological knowledge in school curricula (Lata et al., 2022). This helps preserve cultural heritage while strengthening students' cultural identity and appreciation of India's diversity. Indigenous pedagogies promote learning through real-life experiences, local environments, agriculture, traditional occupations, and community engagement. Such context-based education enhances conceptual understanding and improves student engagement. NEP 2020 recommends the use of the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction, especially during the foundational years. Indigenous pedagogies naturally rely on local languages, making learning more meaningful and accessible (Shinde et al., 2024). Integrating indigenous knowledge validates the experiences of tribal and marginalized communities, making education more inclusive and culturally responsive. It supports educational equity by recognizing diverse forms of knowledge. Traditional ecological knowledge promotes biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, water management, and environmental stewardship. Incorporating these practices supports Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Experiential and collaborative indigenous learning methods foster critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills alongside moral values and social responsibility. Indigenous pedagogies encourage collaboration among schools, parents, local artisans, elders, farmers, and traditional knowledge holders (Shinde et al., 2024). Such partnerships enrich

classroom learning and strengthen school-community relationships. Traditional crafts, handicrafts, agriculture, weaving, pottery, folk arts, and indigenous technologies provide opportunities for vocational education, entrepreneurship, and livelihood skills envisioned under NEP 2020 (Venkateshwarlu, 2021). The flexibility promoted by NEP 2020 allows schools to incorporate local history, geography, culture, traditional sciences, and indigenous practices into classroom teaching through project-based and interdisciplinary learning.

Challenges

Many teachers lack adequate knowledge and professional training to integrate indigenous pedagogies effectively into classroom instruction (Shinde et al., 2024). Teacher education programmes often provide limited exposure to Indigenous Knowledge Systems. There is a shortage of quality textbooks, teaching-learning materials, digital resources, and documented indigenous knowledge suitable for different school levels. India's examination-oriented education system continues to emphasize memorization and academic performance, making it difficult to adopt experiential and culturally contextual pedagogies (Thakur et al., 2023). India's indigenous communities possess highly diverse languages, traditions, and knowledge systems. Designing a common curriculum that respects this diversity while maintaining national educational standards remains challenging (Kumari, 2020; Shinde et al., 2024). Much indigenous knowledge exists in oral traditions and community practices rather than written records. Documenting, preserving, and validating this knowledge without losing its authenticity is a major challenge. Although NEP supports multilingual education, many indigenous languages lack standardized scripts, textbooks, trained teachers, and educational resources (Venkateshwarlu, 2021). Curriculum developers must carefully integrate indigenous knowledge with contemporary scientific knowledge to ensure academic rigor while respecting cultural traditions. Successful implementation requires coordination among central and state governments, NCERT, SCERTs, teacher education institutions, schools, and local communities (Rahaman et al., 2025). Variations in institutional capacity may hinder effective implementation. Many schools, particularly in rural and tribal areas, face shortages of infrastructure, funding, technology, and trained personnel needed to implement innovative pedagogical approaches (Smita, 2020; Rahaman et al., 2025). There is a possibility that indigenous knowledge may be included superficially—as isolated lessons or cultural events—rather than being meaningfully integrated into curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and classroom practices. The use of indigenous knowledge in education raises questions regarding community ownership, informed consent, protection of traditional knowledge, and equitable recognition of indigenous communities (Thakur et al., 2023). There is a lack of robust frameworks to assess how effectively indigenous pedagogies are implemented and their impact on student learning, cultural identity, and educational outcomes (Shinde et al., 2024; Venkateshwarlu, 2021).

4.5 Framework and policy recommendations for strengthening the integration of indigenous pedagogies in Indian school education.

Conceptual Framework:

A comprehensive framework for integrating indigenous pedagogies into Indian school

education under NEP 2020 should be built on five interconnected pillars: policy support, curriculum integration, teacher capacity building, community participation, and monitoring & evaluation (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023). These pillars collectively ensure that indigenous knowledge systems become an integral part of teaching-learning processes rather than isolated cultural content.

Policy Support: The foundation of the framework lies in aligning educational policies with the principles of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). National and state education authorities should provide clear policy guidelines that promote culturally responsive education, multilingual instruction, and contextualized learning (Gope, 2023). Policies should encourage schools to incorporate local knowledge, tribal traditions, and community-based learning into school education while ensuring alignment with national learning standards.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Integration: Curriculum should integrate indigenous knowledge across subjects rather than treating it as a separate topic (Raza & Parween, 2025). Learning experiences should include local history and oral traditions, indigenous environmental knowledge, traditional agriculture and biodiversity conservation, folk arts, crafts, music, and dance, indigenous mathematics and astronomy, traditional health practices and wellness and community problem-solving and experiential learning (Dagore & Singh, 2026; Gope, 2023; Raza & Parween, 2025). Pedagogical approaches should emphasize experiential learning, inquiry-based learning, storytelling, observation and field-based learning, apprenticeship and mentorship, project-based learning and collaborative learning (Kumar & Singh, 2025).

Teacher Capacity Building: Teachers are the key agents of successful implementation. Professional development programmes should include indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), culturally responsive pedagogy, place-based education, multilingual teaching strategies, experiential teaching methods and community engagement techniques (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023). Teacher education institutions should incorporate indigenous pedagogies into pre-service and in-service training programmes.

Community Participation: Indigenous knowledge is community-owned and community-practiced. Schools should establish partnerships with tribal elders, local artisans, farmers, folk artists, traditional healers (where educationally appropriate), community organizations and local historians (Gope, 2023; Kumar & Singh, 2025). Community members can serve as resource persons, helping students learn through authentic experiences.

Assessment and Evaluation: Assessment systems should move beyond rote memorization and evaluate critical thinking, creativity, practical application, cultural understanding, environmental awareness, collaborative learning and problem-solving skills. Portfolio assessment, project work, field reports, presentations, and performance-based assessment should complement traditional examinations (Kumar & Singh, 2025).

Policy Recommendations:

Develop a National Framework for Indigenous Pedagogies: The Ministry of Education, NCERT, and SCERTs should jointly develop a national framework outlining principles, standards, and implementation strategies for integrating indigenous pedagogies while allowing

flexibility for regional adaptation (Dagore & Singh, 2026).

Revise School Curriculum: School curricula should systematically incorporate local knowledge systems, tribal cultures, traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous sciences, local arts and crafts, and Community history. Curriculum revision should ensure representation of India's diverse indigenous communities (Gope, 2023).

Strengthen Teacher Education: Teacher education programmes should include compulsory modules on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, multicultural education, place-based pedagogy, experiential learning, community engagement and local language pedagogy (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023). Continuous professional development programmes should be organized regularly.

Create Indigenous Learning Resources: Government agencies should develop local language textbooks, digital learning materials, audio-visual resources, oral history archives, community knowledge repositories, and interactive learning modules. These resources should be region-specific and culturally authentic (Dagore & Singh, 2026; Thakur et al., 2023).

Promote Multilingual Education: Schools should implement NEP 2020's recommendation of mother tongue-based multilingual education by developing teaching materials in indigenous languages, recruiting multilingual teachers, supporting translation initiatives and encouraging bilingual classroom practices (Thakur et al., 2023; Rahaman et al., 2025)).

Institutionalize Community Participation: Schools should establish formal mechanisms for involving indigenous community leaders, traditional knowledge holders, local cultural organizations, and NGOs working with tribal communities. Community participation should be recognized as an essential component of school education.

Strengthen Research and Documentation: Universities, research institutions, and teacher education colleges should undertake systematic documentation of indigenous pedagogies through field studies, case studies, action research, oral history projects and digital archiving (Rahaman et al., 2025). Research findings should inform curriculum development and teacher training.

Increase Financial and Institutional Support: Governments should provide dedicated funding for curriculum development, teacher training, community engagement programmes, indigenous language preservation, educational resource development, school innovation projects and special grants may be provided to tribal and rural schools.

Integrate Technology Responsibly: Digital platforms should be used to document indigenous knowledge, preserve oral traditions, develop virtual museums, create digital storytelling platforms, and facilitate access to local educational resources. Technology should complement, not replace, community-based learning.

Reform Assessment Practices: Assessment should recognize experiential learning, practical skills, community participation, environmental projects, cultural competence, and collaborative work (Rahman et al., 2025). Competency-based assessment recommended by NEP 2020 should incorporate culturally relevant learning outcomes.

Establish Monitoring and Quality Assurance Mechanisms: National and state agencies should develop indicators to evaluate curriculum implementation, teacher preparedness, student engagement, community participation, learning outcomes and preservation of indigenous knowledge (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023). Regular monitoring and independent evaluations can ensure continuous improvement.

Protect Indigenous Intellectual Property Rights: Policies should ensure prior informed consent from indigenous communities, proper acknowledgment of knowledge holders, and ethical documentation of traditional knowledge, protection against misuse or commercialization and fair benefit-sharing where appropriate (Kumar & Singh, 2025).

Strengthening the integration of indigenous pedagogies in Indian school education requires a coordinated framework that links policy, curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, community participation, research, and assessment (Dagore & Singh, 2026). NEP 2020 provides a strong policy foundation, but effective implementation depends on sustained institutional commitment, adequate resources, teacher preparedness, ethical engagement with indigenous communities, and continuous monitoring (Gope, 2023). Such a framework can transform school education into a culturally responsive, inclusive, and sustainable system that preserves India's rich indigenous heritage while preparing learners with the competencies required for the twenty-first century.

5. Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant shift in the philosophy of Indian school education by recognizing the value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and advocating for culturally responsive, experiential, and holistic learning. Through its emphasis on multilingual education, experiential pedagogy, Indian knowledge traditions, local contexts, and competency-based learning, the policy provides a strong foundation for integrating indigenous pedagogies into mainstream school education. This marks a departure from a predominantly standardized and examination-oriented system towards one that values cultural diversity, contextual relevance, and holistic human development.

The study highlights that indigenous pedagogies—characterized by storytelling, observation, apprenticeship, community participation, place-based learning, traditional ecological knowledge, local arts, and oral traditions—have considerable potential to enrich classroom practices and improve students' learning experiences. Their integration can make education more meaningful and inclusive by connecting curriculum with learners' cultural backgrounds, strengthening identity formation, promoting environmental consciousness, and preserving India's rich cultural heritage. Such pedagogical approaches also complement the broader goals of sustainable development, social inclusion, and twenty-first-century competency development envisioned under NEP 2020.

However, the findings also indicate a considerable gap between policy aspirations and classroom implementation. Although NEP 2020 strongly advocates the integration of indigenous pedagogies, several challenges continue to impede effective implementation. These include limited teacher preparedness, inadequate curriculum materials, insufficient documentation of indigenous knowledge, linguistic diversity, resource constraints, lack of

institutional coordination, and an assessment system that continues to prioritize rote learning over experiential and contextual learning. Moreover, there is a risk of reducing indigenous knowledge to symbolic or tokenistic representations unless it is systematically embedded within curriculum design, pedagogy, teacher education, and assessment practices.

Ultimately, integrating indigenous pedagogies into school education is not merely an exercise in cultural preservation but a strategic educational reform that can contribute to equitable, inclusive, and contextually relevant learning. By bridging traditional wisdom with contemporary educational practices, NEP 2020 offers an opportunity to create a school education system that is rooted in India's diverse knowledge traditions while preparing learners to address contemporary social, environmental, and global challenges. The successful realization of this vision will depend on sustained policy commitment, effective implementation mechanisms, active community participation, and continuous evaluation. If these conditions are fulfilled, the integration of indigenous pedagogies can become a transformative force in achieving the holistic, learner-centred, and culturally grounded education envisioned by NEP 2020.

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