

Research Paper

## Integrating Indigenous Wisdom with Modern Pedagogy: Indian Knowledge Systems and Nep 2020

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### ABSTRACT

This paper offers a theoretical inquiry into the integration of Indian Knowledge System (IKS) with modern pedagogy under the framework of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. IKS represents centuries of indigenous wisdom in fields such as philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, ecology, and literature. Despite its richness, it has often been marginalized in modern curricula due to colonial legacies and the global dominance of Western epistemologies. NEP 2020 proposes a paradigm shift by calling for the revitalization of IKS and its incorporation into formal education. This article critically examines the theoretical foundations of such integration, drawing upon decoloniality, constructivist pedagogy, and holistic learning frameworks. Through a conceptual analysis of policy texts and scholarly literature, it discusses how IKS can be meaningfully embedded in curricula, teaching practices, and research without succumbing to tokenism or essentialism. The analysis identifies both opportunities and challenges: opportunities for fostering cultural identity, sustainability, and holistic learning but challenges in terms of teacher preparation, epistemic validation, curriculum design, and assessment. The paper concludes that integrating IKS is not merely an educational reform but an epistemic rebalancing, requiring humility, collaboration, and innovation. Recommendations for policy and practice are offered, along with directions for future research.

**Keywords:** *Indian Knowledge Systems, NEP 2020, pedagogy, decoloniality, curriculum integration, indigenous wisdom*

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark in India's educational reforms, being the first comprehensive policy after more than three decades. It promises a structural transformation of India's education system, aligning it with the demands of the twenty-first century while rooting it in the country's civilizational ethos (Government of India, 2020). Among the many innovative provisions of the policy, the emphasis on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) stands out as a bold attempt to decolonize education and revive indigenous epistemologies.

IKS encompasses a wide array of intellectual and cultural traditions, including Ayurveda, Yoga, classical Indian philosophy, Vedic and Jain mathematics, astronomy, architecture,

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Received: September 28, 2025; Revision Received: March 02, 2026; Accepted: March 06, 2026

ecological knowledge, literature, and art. These traditions, transmitted through oral, textual, and experiential practices for centuries, embody a holistic approach to life and learning (Agrawal, 1995). However, colonial education policies systematically devalued indigenous knowledge, privileging Western paradigms of science and rationality while dismissing local traditions as unscientific or outdated (Smith, 2012).

NEP 2020 explicitly acknowledge this epistemic gap and calls for the integration of IKS across school and higher education curricula. This signals a paradigm shift in the way knowledge is conceptualized, taught, and valued. Yet, such integration raises complex questions: How can IKS be embedded in curricula without romanticizing or distorting its essence? What theoretical frameworks can guide the process of integration? What are the challenges in preparing teachers and institutions to meaningfully engage with IKS?

This paper addresses these questions by offering a theoretical exploration of the integration of IKS and modern pedagogy under NEP 2020. It aims to balance optimism about the transformative potential of IKS with critical awareness of the practical and epistemological challenges that lie ahead.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

1. To critically examine how NEP 2020 conceptualizes Indian Knowledge Systems within the national education framework.
2. To explore theoretical frameworks that support the integration of IKS with modern pedagogy.
3. To analyze pedagogical possibilities for embedding IKS in curricula, teaching, and learning processes.
4. To highlight epistemic, institutional, and policy challenges in implementing IKS integration.
5. To propose recommendations for sustainable integration and identify areas for future research.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

This paper draws upon three interrelated theoretical perspectives:

1. **Decolonial Theory and Epistemic pluralism:** Decolonial perspectives emphasize dismantling hierarchies of knowledge established during colonial modernity. They argue that indigenous knowledge is not inferior but coequal to Western science (Smith, 2012). Integrating IKS is thus an act of epistemic justice.
2. **Constructivist Pedagogy:** Constructivist theory (Piaget, 1972) posits that learners construct knowledge by linking new experiences to prior knowledge. Embedding IKS allows students to learn through cultural narratives and community wisdom, fostering deeper engagement.
3. **Holistic and Interdisciplinary Learning:** IKS inherently embraces interconnectedness across disciplines. NEP 2020's emphasis on interdisciplinarity resonates with holistic education theories (Noddings, 2013), which advocate education that cultivates intellectual, emotional, and ethical development.

These frameworks collectively justify the integration of IKS as both a pedagogical necessity and a moral responsibility.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A growing body of scholarship explores the relevance of indigenous knowledge in modern education. Agrawal (1995) was among the earliest to highlight the systematic marginalization of local knowledge under colonial regimes, urging for its recognition alongside scientific knowledge. More recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has brought Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) to the forefront of policy debates, emphasizing their integration into curricula across levels of education (Government of India, 2020).

Several scholars support this revival. Moitra (2025) argues that incorporating Ayurveda, astronomy, and philosophical traditions into higher education can enhance holistic learning and promote a broader understanding of knowledge beyond disciplinary silos. Similarly, the IMPRI (2025) research initiative underscores the potential of IKS to contribute to sustainability and strengthen cultural identity. Jain (2025) further highlights how indigenous knowledge offers valuable insights for addressing environmental and societal challenges, particularly in promoting sustainable lifestyles. These perspectives resonate with Mohanty and Behera (2025), who argue that traditional ecological knowledge can enrich science pedagogy through experiential and field-based approaches.

The pedagogical implications of IKS integration have been widely studied. Joshi and Bansal (2023), in a survey of STEM educators, found broad recognition of the cultural and intellectual value of IKS, though they noted gaps in teacher preparedness and training. Building on this, Haloi and Kharbiryumbai (2025) emphasize that teacher education curricula must include dedicated IKS modules to equip future educators with both conceptual and pedagogical tools. Gupta (2025) reports that students exposed to IKS-based learning demonstrate higher engagement and creativity, suggesting that integration can have tangible effects on student outcomes.

Gaur (2024) observes that the policy repositions India's intellectual traditions as globally relevant, while also fostering epistemic autonomy. Yet, Mangain (2025) cautions that without robust institutional mechanisms, IKS integration risks remaining symbolic or tokenistic. The IJPREMS (2024) report echoes this concern, citing barriers such as lack of standardization, limited teacher expertise, and inadequate academic resources.

International comparisons also provide important insights. For example, Smith (2012) documents how New Zealand's education system integrates Māori knowledge into curricula, balancing cultural recognition with academic rigor. These global practices demonstrate both the potential and pitfalls of indigenous knowledge integration, highlighting the need for thoughtful policy design and contextual adaptation.

Taken together, the literature underscores the dual challenge of embracing IKS meaningfully while maintaining academic rigor and inclusivity. Scholars largely agree that integration requires structural reforms in teacher education, institutional support, and curricular flexibility. At the same time, the risks of tokenism, politicization, and implementation lag remain significant. The evidence thus far suggests that NEP 2020 opens a promising pathway for knowledge pluralism, but sustained research and critical evaluation will be crucial to translating vision into practice.

## METHODOLOGY

This Study adopts a theoretical and conceptual research methodology. The analysis is based on:

- Policy analysis of NEP 2020.
- Critical synthesis of peer-reviewed articles and reports on IKS integration.
- Comparative conceptual mapping of IKS with pedagogical theories.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### 1. Curriculum Development

The inclusion of IKS in curricula can take multiple forms:

- **Disciplinary Integration:** Introducing IKS elements into existing subjects. For example, Vedic mathematics can enrich mathematics education, while ancient ecological practices can be embedded in environmental studies.
- **Interdisciplinary Courses:** Designing courses that combine philosophy, science, and ethics from Indian traditions, such as “Science and Spirituality in Ancient India.”
- **Language and Literature:** Reviving classical texts in Sanskrit, Tamil, and other regional languages to enhance linguistic diversity and cultural understanding.

However, curriculum integration must avoid superficial tokenism. It requires systematic research to ensure that IKS content is accurate, contextualized, and pedagogically relevant.

### 2. Pedagogical Practices

IKS traditions emphasize experiential, community-based, and dialogical learning. For example:

- **Storytelling and Oral Traditions:** Using folktales, epics, local narratives to teach ethics and values.
- **Experiential Learning:** Practices like Ayurveda or Yoga emphasize embodied learning, aligning with experiential education models.
- **Apprenticeship Models:** Traditional learning often occurred under gurus or master artisans. Modern adaptations of mentorship and project-based learning can draw from these models.

These practices align with constructivist pedagogy, making learning more participatory and culturally grounded.

### 3. Teacher Education and Capacity Building

A major challenge lies in preparing teachers to engage with IKS. Many teachers are products of Western-oriented training and may lack knowledge of indigenous systems. Teacher education reforms are therefore critical. Specialized training modules, workshops, and partnerships with local communities are necessary to build capacity.

### 4. Assessment and Evaluation

Current assessment models often prioritize rote learning and standardized testing. Integrating IKS requires rethinking assessment method to value creativity, critical thinking, and application of knowledge. Portfolio-based evaluation, reflective essays, and community projects could be alternatives.

### 5. Challenges of Integration

Despite its promise, IKS integration faces several obstacles:

- **Epistemic Tokenism:** Risk of including IKS superficially without genuine engagement.

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- Institutional Resistance: Universities may resist curriculum change due to bureaucratic inertia.
- Resources Limitations: Lack of textbooks, research, and funding.
- Political Risks: Concerns about ideological appropriation of IKS for nationalist agendas.

Addressing these challenges requires a balanced and inclusive approach.

### ***Policy and Curricular Recommendations***

- Establish dedicated IKS research and resource centers in universities.
- Integrate IKS modules into teacher education programs.
- Develop open educational resources (OER) in multiple Indian languages.
- Partner with local communities, artisans, and practitioners for experiential learning.
- Reform assessment methods to value creativity and holistic understanding.
- Ensure academic rigor through peer-reviewed critical editions of classical texts.

## **CONCLUSION**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 conceptualizes Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) as a core epistemic pillar of educational reform, aiming to strike a balance between cultural rootedness and global competitiveness. By positioning IKS as a foundation for sustainability, creativity, and ethical learning, the policy reflects an effort to reclaim India's intellectual heritage while aligning it with contemporary educational needs. However, translating this vision into practice is not without hurdles. Limited teacher preparedness, inadequate research infrastructure, and the danger of superficial or tokenistic inclusion pose serious challenges.

Despite these obstacles, the conceptualization of IKS within NEP 2020 is transformative in scope. It offers an opportunity to decolonize knowledge, foster innovation, and provide learners with a more holistic worldview. For this potential to be realized, authentic pedagogy, institutional commitment, and rigorous scholarly engagement are essential. Ultimately, NEP 2020 opens a path for re-imagining Indian education, where indigenous wisdom and modern pedagogy can meaningfully coexist.

### ***Future Research Directions***

- Longitudinal studies measuring the impact of IKS integration on student learning outcomes.
- Ethnographic studies of classrooms experimenting with IKS pedagogy.
- Comparative research on indigenous knowledge integration in other countries.
- Design-based research to refine pedagogical models for IKS.
- Studies on digital tools for preserving and disseminating IKS.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Sagar, J. & Sharma, M. (2026). Integrating Indigenous Wisdom with Modern Pedagogy: Indian Knowledge Systems and Nep 2020. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(1), 1167-1172. DIP:18.01.115.20261401, DOI:10.25215/1401.115