



EDUCATIONAL IDEAS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE IN THE CONTEXT OF NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary educational reforms in India, particularly in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This paper examines the philosophical convergence between Tagore's educational ideas and the key provisions of NEP 2020 through a qualitative and interpretative analysis of relevant literature and policy documents. The study explores Tagore's emphasis on holistic education, learner autonomy, experiential learning, multilingualism, education in harmony with nature, cultural rootedness, and universal humanism, and analyses their relevance within the framework of NEP 2020. The findings reveal that the policy embodies several principles envisioned by Tagore, including multidisciplinary education, competency-based learning, integration of Indian Knowledge Systems, value-based education, and the development of globally competent yet culturally grounded citizens. The study concludes that revisiting Tagore's educational philosophy provides a strong theoretical foundation for the effective implementation of NEP 2020 and for building an inclusive, learner-centred, and future-ready education system in India.

KEYWORDS: Rabindranath Tagore; National Education Policy 2020; Holistic Education; Experiential Learning; Indian Knowledge Systems; Learner-Centred Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is increasingly recognized as a transformative force for fostering sustainable development, social justice, and human well-being. In response to rapid technological advancement, globalization, and changing societal needs, education systems worldwide are shifting from content-based instruction to learner-centred, competency-oriented, and holistic approaches. In India, this paradigm shift is reflected in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which envisions an education system that is equitable, multidisciplinary, flexible, rooted in Indian culture, and aligned with global standards (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). The policy seeks to develop critical thinking, creativity, ethical values, experiential learning, multilingual competence, and lifelong learning, thereby preparing learners to address contemporary social and economic challenges. The philosophical foundations of NEP 2020 bear a striking resemblance to the educational vision of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), whose ideas continue to influence educational discourse in India and beyond. A Nobel Laureate, philosopher, and visionary educator, Tagore criticized the colonial education system for promoting rote memorization, rigid discipline, and intellectual conformity. Through Santiniketan and later Visva-Bharati University, he developed an alternative model of education that emphasized freedom, creativity, nature, cultural identity, and universal humanism (Tagore, 1917/2004). Tagore regarded education not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but as a lifelong process of self-realization that nurtures the intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, moral, physical, and spiritual dimensions of human personality (Mukherjee, 2017). Although separated by nearly a century, Tagore's educational philosophy and NEP 2020 converge remarkably in their commitment to holistic development, learner autonomy, experiential learning, multilingual education,

cultural rootedness, and global citizenship. Examining these convergences demonstrates that many contemporary educational reforms are deeply rooted in India's intellectual heritage and continue to draw inspiration from Tagore's educational ideals.

Rabindranath Tagore's Educational Philosophy

Tagore's philosophy of education was grounded in the belief that education should liberate the human mind rather than constrain it. Rejecting the mechanistic and examination-driven colonial system, he advocated an educational process that encourages curiosity, independent thinking, creativity, and joyful learning (Tagore, 1917/2004). For Tagore, genuine education enabled learners to develop their innate capacities while cultivating empathy, imagination, and social responsibility. A defining characteristic of his philosophy was learning in harmony with nature. Tagore believed that natural surroundings stimulate observation, reflection, imagination, and emotional development more effectively than conventional classroom settings. Consequently, teaching at Santiniketan frequently occurred in open-air environments where learners interacted directly with nature, making education experiential and contextually meaningful (O'Connell, 2003). His ecological vision anticipated contemporary concerns regarding environmental education and sustainable development. Equally important was Tagore's emphasis on holistic education, which sought to balance intellectual growth with emotional, aesthetic, moral, physical, and spiritual development. He integrated music, literature, painting, dance, drama, crafts, and community engagement into everyday learning, arguing that artistic expression fosters creativity, cultural sensitivity, and emotional intelligence (Sarkar, 2013). Such integration challenged the narrow academic orientation of colonial education and



promoted the development of well-rounded individuals. Tagore also championed mother tongue-based education, asserting that children learn most effectively when education begins in their native language, which preserves cultural identity and facilitates conceptual understanding (Das, 2019). Simultaneously, he encouraged the learning of foreign languages to promote intercultural dialogue and international cooperation. His philosophy of universal humanism envisioned education as a means of cultivating peace, mutual respect, and global understanding while remaining firmly rooted in indigenous traditions (Tagore, 1922/2004). Furthermore, his rural reconstruction initiatives at Sriniketan illustrated his belief that education should contribute directly to community development, vocational competence, and social transformation (O'Connell, 2003).

Key Features of NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a comprehensive reform aimed at transforming India's education system into one that is learner-centred, inclusive, flexible, and future-oriented (MoE, 2020). The policy advocates multidisciplinary and holistic education, enabling learners to combine sciences, humanities, arts, sports, and vocational education without rigid disciplinary boundaries. This approach recognizes that complex societal challenges require integrated knowledge and multiple perspectives. Another major feature is the shift toward experiential and competency-based learning, replacing rote memorization with conceptual understanding, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving. The policy introduces the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, aligning education with children's developmental stages and emphasizing foundational literacy and numeracy during the early years. NEP 2020 strongly promotes multilingualism, recommending the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction during the foundational years to enhance cognitive development and preserve linguistic diversity. It also emphasizes the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems, ethical values, environmental consciousness, art-integrated pedagogy, vocational education, digital literacy, and continuous teacher professional development. By promoting equity, inclusion, flexibility, and lifelong learning, the policy seeks to produce socially responsible and globally competent citizens while preserving India's cultural heritage (MoE, 2020).

Convergence between Tagore's Educational Ideas and NEP 2020

A critical examination reveals substantial philosophical convergence between Tagore's educational vision and the objectives of NEP 2020. Both reject teacher-centred and examination-oriented education in favour of learner-centred pedagogy, where inquiry, creativity, critical thinking, and experiential learning become central to knowledge construction (MoE, 2020; Tagore, 1917/2004). This shift reflects constructivist principles that encourage learners to actively participate in the learning process. Both frameworks advocate holistic education, recognizing that education must develop cognitive, emotional, ethical, aesthetic, physical, and social dimensions simultaneously. Tagore's integration of arts, music, literature, and nature into everyday education parallels NEP 2020's emphasis on multidisciplinary education, art-integrated

learning, sports, and vocational experiences that foster creativity and innovation. Similarly, Tagore's advocacy of learning through nature and community engagement aligns closely with NEP 2020's emphasis on project-based learning, fieldwork, environmental education, internships, and experiential pedagogy. Both approaches acknowledge that authentic learning occurs through meaningful interaction with real-life contexts rather than passive classroom instruction.

The policy's commitment to mother tongue-based multilingual education also reflects Tagore's conviction that language serves as a foundation for cognitive development and cultural continuity. Likewise, the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems within NEP 2020 resonates with Tagore's belief that education should preserve indigenous wisdom while simultaneously fostering openness to global knowledge traditions. Finally, Tagore's philosophy of universal humanism finds contemporary expression in NEP 2020's vision of nurturing globally competent citizens who possess ethical values, intercultural understanding, environmental responsibility, and social commitment. Thus, NEP 2020 may be viewed not merely as a policy reform but as a contemporary realization of many educational ideals first articulated by Rabindranath Tagore. The enduring relevance of his philosophy demonstrates that meaningful educational transformation requires balancing innovation with cultural continuity, thereby creating an education system that is both globally responsive and deeply rooted in India's intellectual and civilizational heritage.

Educational Implications

The convergence between Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers significant implications for contemporary educational practice in India. First, it underscores the need to shift from teacher-centred, examination-oriented instruction to learner-centred and experiential pedagogies that foster critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). Tagore's emphasis on freedom, inquiry, and joyful learning aligns with NEP 2020's vision of competency-based education, encouraging teachers to function as facilitators rather than mere transmitters of knowledge. Second, both Tagore's philosophy and NEP 2020 advocate holistic education that integrates cognitive, emotional, moral, physical, aesthetic, and social development. This calls for curriculum reforms that incorporate arts, environmental education, vocational learning, community engagement, and co-curricular activities into mainstream education (Mukherjee, 2017). Such integration can nurture well-rounded individuals capable of addressing contemporary societal and global challenges. Furthermore, the policy's emphasis on multilingual education and Indian Knowledge Systems reflects Tagore's commitment to preserving cultural identity while promoting global understanding. Educational institutions should therefore create learning environments that value indigenous knowledge, linguistic diversity, and intercultural dialogue. Continuous teacher professional development is equally essential for translating these philosophical ideals into effective classroom practices.



CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy remains remarkably relevant in the context of India's contemporary educational reforms. Although conceived during the colonial period, his vision of education based on freedom, creativity, experiential learning, nature, cultural rootedness, and universal humanism resonates strongly with the principles embodied in NEP 2020. The policy's emphasis on holistic development, multidisciplinary education, learner-centred pedagogy, multilingualism, and the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems reflects a philosophical continuity with Tagore's educational ideals. However, realizing this vision requires sustained institutional commitment, curriculum innovation, teacher preparedness, and equitable access to educational resources. Effective implementation of NEP 2020 should move beyond policy intentions to meaningful classroom transformation that promotes inclusive, value-based, and culturally responsive education. Reinterpreting Tagore's educational thought within the framework of NEP 2020 provides a valuable philosophical foundation for developing an education system that is globally competitive while remaining deeply rooted in India's rich intellectual and cultural heritage.

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