



Storytelling Based Pedagogy in the Context of NEP 2020: A Qualitative Review of Emerging Themes, Practices, and Educational Implications

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Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 signifies a major shift in the Indian educational landscape, moving toward a system that values personal experience, student engagement, and a well-rounded approach to growth. Among the many creative teaching methods highlighted in the policy, the use of narratives and storytelling has become a primary strategy for fostering deep, meaningful learning. This approach is deeply rooted in India's long history of oral traditions while aligning perfectly with modern theories of how humans construct knowledge through shared experiences. Despite its clear value, there is still a need to better understand how these storytelling techniques are being integrated into the classroom under the current policy. This study sets out to examine the existing research on narrative-based teaching in relation to the goals of NEP 2020. By looking at academic studies and theoretical papers published between 2015 and 2025, the research identifies the most important trends and obstacles in this field. The analysis brings together global perspectives on storytelling with the specific cultural goals of the Indian education system to provide a clear picture of how teachers are using these methods today.

The findings highlight several vital areas where storytelling makes a difference. First, it serves as a powerful way for students to actively participate in their own learning and develop stronger critical thinking skills. It also makes education more hands-on by incorporating the arts, such as drama and role-playing, as well as modern digital formats. Furthermore, storytelling is essential for bringing Indian Knowledge Systems, including local folklore and traditional heritage, back into the daily lives of students. This process does more than just share information; it supports a child's cognitive development, their language skills, and their emotional well-being. While digital tools have expanded how stories can be told, the study also points out that teachers still face significant challenges, particularly the need for better training and more effective ways to measure student progress. Ultimately, using stories in the classroom fulfills the core mission of NEP 2020 by creating inclusive and joyful learning environments, if educators receive the support and resources, they need to master this timeless art.

Keywords: Storytelling-Based Pedagogy, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, narrative-based teaching, Indian Knowledge Systems, joyful learning, experiential learning

1. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a deeply human-centered shift in India's approach to schooling, moving away from mechanical rote learning toward a philosophy that values the whole person. This policy focuses on nurturing a student's natural curiosity, creative spirit, and ability to solve real-world problems through

meaningful connection rather than simple memorization. This evolution aligns with the belief that we learn best when we are active participants in our own education, building knowledge through personal reflection and social engagement. By placing experiential learning at the heart of the classroom, the policy encourages teachers to use techniques like storytelling and inquiry that honour a student's lived experiences. Storytelling has become a vital way to support a child's emotional and intellectual growth simultaneously. By framing lessons as stories, educators can turn abstract concepts into relatable human experiences, making the curriculum feel much more accessible. This approach also draws on India's ancient oral traditions, ensuring that modern education remains rooted in the cultural stories and values that have shaped generations (Ministry of Education, 2020; Kumar & Vats, 2023; Agnihotri & Mishra, 2025; Mondal, 2024).

At its core, storytelling pedagogy is the practice of using narratives to help students find meaning and connection in their studies. It is based on the fundamental truth that the human mind is naturally designed to understand the world through stories. Educational theories suggest that while we use logic to solve problems, we use a "narrative mode" of thinking to understand our lives and the lives of others, making stories a powerful bridge for deep learning. In a modern classroom, this takes many forms, including drama, role-playing, and sharing personal narratives, all of which require active human interaction. These methods invite students to engage with their feelings and their thoughts at the same time, fostering a sense of empathy and shared understanding. Furthermore, storytelling is recognized as a profound way to capture the real-life experiences of people in academic research, as it allows for a much deeper exploration of the human condition. By linking new ideas to what a student already knows and feels, storytelling encourages them to think critically and reflect on different perspectives, making the learning process a truly transformative human experience. This multifaceted approach successfully integrates the cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions of learning (Bruner, 1991; Sarkar & Singh, 2026; Gallagher, 2011; Landrum et al., 2019; Banu, 2025).

2. Rationale of the Study

This research started because there's a massive blind spot in how we use storytelling within the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 framework. We all know that stories are a fundamental part of how we learn, but current research is a bit of a mess—it's too focused on apps or specific language drills rather than the actual bond between a teacher and a student. We're missing the big picture: how this ancient art form can bridge India's cultural roots with the needs of a modern classroom. Researchers chose a qualitative approach because you can't capture human insight with just numbers. By pulling these different perspectives together, Researchers want to show how storytelling can truly change the game for both educators and learners.

3. Research Objectives

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyze the role of storytelling-based pedagogy within the framework of NEP 2020.
2. To identify and synthesize key themes emerging from literature on storytelling in education.
3. To examine the pedagogical benefits of storytelling in enhancing learning outcomes.
4. To explore the challenges and limitations associated with the implementation of storytelling-based pedagogy.

4. Research Questions

In alignment with the above objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How is storytelling pedagogy conceptualized within the framework of NEP 2020?
2. What pedagogical benefits of storytelling-based learning are reported in existing literature?
3. What challenges and barriers exist in the implementation of storytelling pedagogy in educational settings?

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design: To see how storytelling functions within the NEP 2020 framework, this study uses a qualitative systematic review. Instead of focusing solely on statistics, this method allows me to bridge the gap between a decade of academic research and real-world classroom experiences. By applying a thematic synthesis, I can look past the raw data to identify the common threads and human insights that define how we teach today.

5.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy: For this review, I pulled sources from major databases like Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate. I limited the search to the decade between 2015 and 2025, as this period covers both the global move toward experiential learning and the specific rollout of the NEP 2020. Using targeted search terms like "narrative learning in education," "experiential learning," and "Indian Knowledge Systems," I was able to capture the most relevant scholarly discussions without missing the broader context.

5.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: To maintain a clear focus, I established specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature review. The study included peer-reviewed articles and book chapters that specifically examined storytelling within educational or constructivist frameworks. I prioritized English-language works that aligned with the core pillars of NEP 2020. To ensure the reliability of the findings, I excluded opinion pieces, duplicates, and papers that lacked complete research data, ensuring the final selection was academically rigorous.

5.4 Screening Process and Data Extraction: Using the PRISMA guidelines, Researchers narrowed down the research in four stages: identifying initial records, screening for relevance, checking full texts for eligibility, and selecting the final group of studies. From these papers, Researchers pulled out the key details, including the authors, classroom contexts, and the types of storytelling employed. Researchers also made sure to note the actual outcomes—both the successes and the obstacles—that the authors encountered in their work.

5.5 Data Analysis: Researchers followed a six-step thematic analysis to identify and organize the core findings. The process began with a thorough review of the selected papers to build familiarity with the data, followed by the generation of initial codes for recurring ideas. These codes were then grouped into broader themes, which Researchers refined and named to accurately represent the research insights. This interpretive approach allows for a deeper understanding of how the role of the teacher is evolving, rather than just providing a surface-level summary of the literature.

5.6 Coding Framework: To organize these diverse insights, we developed a structured framework. For instance, ideas related to how students build their own knowledge were grouped under "Constructivist Learning," while the use of folklore and traditional epics was categorized as "Cultural Integration." We also tracked the cognitive benefits, such as improved memory and empathy, alongside the practical challenges teachers face, like a lack of specific training or rigid curriculum schedules that can sometimes stifle creative storytelling.

Code	Category	Description	Example from Literature
STP1	Constructivist Learning	How stories help students build their own understanding.	Using narratives to spark active classroom engagement.
STP2	Experiential Learning	Learning through doing, drama, and role-play.	Bringing history to life through story-based simulations.
STP3	Cultural Integration	Honoring folklore and traditional Indian wisdom.	Using the Panchatantra to explore ethics and values.
STP4	Human Development	Building memory, empathy, and critical thinking.	Stories that help children develop emotional intelligence.
STP5	Digital Narratives	Using modern media to tell human stories.	Using animation or video to share personal experiences.
STP6	Teacher Hurdles	The struggle to find time or gain the right skills.	Educators finding it difficult to fit stories into rigid syllabi.

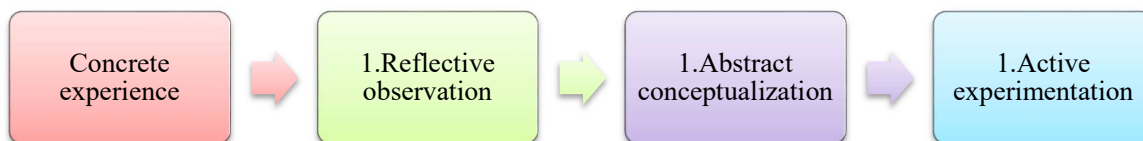
5.7 Reliability, Validity, and Ethics: To ensure our findings are trustworthy and dependable, we looked at multiple sources to confirm our observations—a process known as triangulation. We maintained a transparent set of rules for selecting research and followed a systematic coding process to stay consistent. Because this study relies on existing scholarly work, we didn't involve direct human participants, but we remained deeply committed to academic ethics by properly crediting every researcher whose work helped shape this exploration.

6. Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored by three interconnected theoretical frameworks—constructivism, narrative theory, and experiential learning—which together offer a solid conceptual basis for exploring storytelling-based pedagogy within the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. These perspectives clarify how narratives drive meaningful learning, maintain student engagement, and support the policy’s move toward a more holistic, competency-based educational model. Constructivism serves as a primary lens, suggesting that knowledge is not a commodity to be passively received but is actively built by learners as they interact with their surroundings. Drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1972), this view highlights the roles of prior experience, social dialogue, and context in shaping how a student understands the world. Storytelling-based pedagogy is naturally aligned with these principles because it places abstract concepts within relatable narratives that students can interpret and connect to their own lives. By embedding complex ideas in familiar contexts, storytelling allows for easier knowledge construction while encouraging the kind of reflection and collaboration essential to constructivist classrooms. Within the framework of NEP 2020, these ideas are visible in the shift away from rote memorization toward experiential learning, where students are expected to engage deeply with content and sharpen their higher-order thinking skills (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Complementing this, narrative theory offers a critical way to understand why stories are so effective in the classroom. Bruner (1991) famously argued that human thought operates in two distinct ways: the logical-scientific (paradigmatic) mode and the narrative mode. While the former deals with abstract rules, the narrative mode is how people actually organize their experiences and make sense of reality. In an educational setting, using stories helps structure knowledge in a way that provides coherence and emotional resonance. As students engage with these narratives, they learn to navigate multiple perspectives and build meaning from lived experiences. This approach is also recognized as a valid methodological tool in qualitative research; Gallagher (2011) notes that storytelling allows for a deeper exploration of meaning by grounding knowledge in human life, while Landrum et al. (2019) suggest that narratives align perfectly with how the human brain naturally processes and retains information. For the NEP 2020, this narrative focus is particularly relevant to the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). By utilizing traditional folklore, epics, and local histories as pedagogical tools, educators can increase cultural relevance while fostering ethical and value-based development in their students.

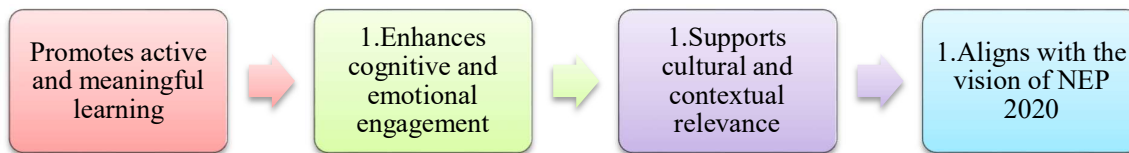
Finally, experiential learning theory, as developed by Kolb (1984), emphasizes that true learning occurs through a continuous cycle of experience, reflection, and application. Kolb views learning as a four-stage process that begins with a concrete experience, followed by reflective observation where the learner thinks about that experience. This leads to abstract conceptualization, where the learner forms new ideas or modifies existing ones, and ends with active experimentation, where these new concepts are tested in real-world scenarios. Storytelling acts as a bridge in this cycle, often serving as the "concrete experience" or the catalyst for "reflective observation." When students hear or create stories, they are not just absorbing facts; they are participating in a simulated experience that demands active mental involvement. This mirrors the NEP 2020’s vision of a student-centered classroom where the curriculum is lived and felt rather than just read, ensuring that the learning process is as much about the journey of discovery as it is about the outcome. According to Kolb, learning is a cyclical process involving four stages:



Storytelling-based pedagogy naturally mirrors the experiential learning cycle by providing a concrete narrative experience that students can instantly relate to. As learners participate in discussions or reflections on these stories, they move into a phase of reflective observation. From there, they begin to distill general principles through abstract conceptualization and eventually test these ideas in real-life contexts via active experimentation. The NEP 2020 explicitly calls for this kind of experiential learning to ensure that education remains engaging, relevant, and effective (Ministry of Education, 2020). By shifting the classroom from a space of passive listening to one of active interpretation and application, storytelling fulfills this policy goal. This often involves techniques like role-play, dramatization, or simulation, which further immerse students in realistic scenarios to build not

only academic knowledge but also critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and emotional intelligence (Smeda et al., 2014).

Taken together, constructivism, narrative theory, and experiential learning form a robust framework for understanding storytelling as a high-impact pedagogy. While constructivism explains the internal process of knowledge building, narrative theory provides the structural vehicle for that knowledge, and experiential learning ensures the entire process is grounded in active engagement and reflection. This synthesis reveals that storytelling is far more than a simple teaching technique; it is a holistic approach that centers the learner, honors cultural context, and bridges the gap between traditional wisdom and modern academic requirements. By grounding the curriculum in human-centered narratives, this theoretical framework positions storytelling as a vital tool for meeting the ambitious, student-centered goals of contemporary education. Together, these theories demonstrate that storytelling is not merely a teaching technique but a holistic pedagogical approach that:



7. Thematic Analysis and Findings

The thematic analysis of the literature, conducted through the lens of Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, produced seven distinct themes that illustrate how storytelling functions in a modern classroom. These findings don't just show that stories are "nice to have"; they demonstrate a deep alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's vision for a more student-centered India. The first and perhaps most vital theme is that storytelling serves as a powerful constructivist strategy. Rather than forcing students to be passive observers, stories invite them to be active builders of their own knowledge. By connecting new concepts to their own lived experiences, students move away from the "lecture-and-repeat" model toward a process of genuine meaning-making. As Bruner (1991) and the Ministry of Education (2020) suggest, this shift is essential for moving toward a competency-based education where interpretation and critical thinking take center stage.

Building on this, the research highlights a strong link between narrative pedagogy and experiential learning. Storytelling in the classroom rarely stops at simple narration; it frequently branches out into role-play, dramatization, and simulations. This immersive approach fits perfectly within Kolb's (1984) experiential cycle, where a story provides the "concrete experience" that triggers deeper reflection. By engaging with content in such a dynamic way, students don't just memorize facts—they experience them, which leads to better retention and higher-order thinking (Smeda et al., 2014). Furthermore, storytelling acts as a crucial bridge for integrating cultural and indigenous knowledge. The NEP 2020 emphasizes bringing India's oral traditions, such as the Panchatantra and Jataka tales, into the curriculum. Modern research shows that using these local narratives helps ground abstract lessons in a familiar cultural context, making the classroom feel more inclusive and relevant to the student's own identity (Mondal, 2024).

From a developmental perspective, the analysis confirms that stories are a natural fuel for cognitive and linguistic growth. Because stories are structured sequentially, they help the human brain organize and recall information more effectively than isolated facts. Studies by Landrum et al. (2019) and Du (2021) point to significant gains in vocabulary, memory, and general communication skills when storytelling is used. Beyond just "brain power," however, narratives also drive socio-emotional and ethical development. By navigating moral dilemmas and diverse perspectives within a story, students develop a sense of empathy and social awareness that is hard to teach through a textbook alone. This emotional resonance is exactly what the NEP 2020 aims for when it speaks of "holistic development" and value-based education (Banu, 2025).

The move toward digital storytelling represents a more modern, technological evolution of this ancient art. By using multimedia tools like video and animation, students transition from being passive consumers to active content creators. This not only boosts engagement but also builds the digital literacy skills required in the 21st century (Wu & Chen, 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2021). However, the literature also offers a necessary reality check regarding implementation. Despite the obvious benefits, teachers often run into significant hurdles, such as a lack

of specialized training and the pressure of rigid, exam-heavy curricula. Standardized tests still tend to favor rote recall, which can make it difficult for educators to find the time or flexibility for narrative-based methods (Sarica, 2023). Ultimately, while storytelling is clearly a multidimensional tool that can transform Indian education, its success depends on systemic changes—like better teacher support and assessment reform—to truly bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and modern classroom demands.

8. Discussion

This analysis identifies storytelling-based pedagogy as a versatile instructional framework that aligns deeply with the transformative goals of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. By examining themes such as constructivist learning, experiential engagement, and cultural integration alongside the practical hurdles of implementation, we can see how storytelling functions as both a localized reform tool and a globally recognized pedagogical strategy. The findings clearly suggest that storytelling does more than just make lessons "interesting"; it operationalizes the NEP 2020's core move away from rote memorization toward a competency-based model that prizes critical thinking and creativity (Ministry of Education, 2020). Because storytelling is inherently constructivist, it transforms the student from a passive listener into an active participant who must interpret narratives and build knowledge based on their own context, a process Bruner (1991) identified as fundamental to how humans learn.

This "learning by doing" aspect is further strengthened when storytelling is paired with experiential methods like role-play or dramatization. These immersive environments mirror the experiential learning cycle described by Kolb (1984), significantly boosting student engagement and long-term retention. Perhaps most importantly for the Indian context, storytelling serves as a vital bridge for integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the modern classroom. By using traditional narratives like the Panchatantra, Jataka tales, and regional folklore, educators can meet the NEP's mandate to include indigenous wisdom and local traditions in the curriculum. As Mondal (2024) points out, this doesn't just improve conceptual understanding—it gives students a sense of identity and cultural belonging. Globally, this shift reflects a broader movement toward culturally responsive pedagogy, where scholars like Gay (2018) argue that grounding education in local knowledge is essential for creating inclusive and engaging learning spaces.

The review also highlights a powerful dual impact on both cognitive and socio-emotional development. While structured narratives help the brain process and recall information more effectively (Landrum et al., 2019), they also trigger emotional engagement, allowing students to navigate moral dilemmas and build empathy. This integration of the "head and heart" is exactly what the NEP 2020 means by "holistic education." It aligns storytelling with global Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks, which recognize that emotional intelligence is just as critical to academic success as intellectual ability (CASEL, 2020). By presenting diverse perspectives and real-life ethical challenges, stories provide a safe, natural platform for students to develop these essential human competencies.

In the modern age, this ancient practice has evolved into digital storytelling, using multimedia tools to turn students into active creators of knowledge. This trend supports the development of 21st-century skills like digital literacy and collaborative innovation, directly supporting the NEP's focus on technology integration (Wu & Chen, 2020). Research across various disciplines confirms that digital narratives enhance motivation and multimodal learning (Rodríguez et al., 2021), though we must remain mindful of the "digital divide" that still limits access in many parts of India. Despite these promising benefits, there is a clear "policy-practice gap." The ideals of the NEP 2020 often hit a wall in the classroom due to a lack of teacher training and the persistent pressure of rigid, exam-oriented curricula. Many teachers are still tethered to traditional methods and lack the professional support needed to facilitate creative, interactive storytelling. As Fullan (2016) notes, systemic resistance and institutional constraints are common hurdles for any educational reform.

Ultimately, storytelling-based pedagogy should be viewed as a transformative force rather than a mere supplement to the curriculum. It effectively bridges the gap between traditional and modern knowledge, connects the cognitive and emotional sides of learning, and provides a roadmap for turning policy aspirations into classroom realities. However, its success is not guaranteed. Realizing the full potential of this approach will require a sustained, systemic effort—one that includes comprehensive curriculum redesign, a shift in how we

assess students, and a deep investment in teacher capacity-building. Without these structural changes, the "art of the story" may remain an underutilized tool in the effort to modernize Indian education.

9. Implications

The findings from this review make it clear that storytelling is not just a creative "extra"—it is a major instructional shift that directly supports the transformative goals of the NEP 2020. By bringing narrative-based pedagogy into the classroom, educators can finally move away from abstract lecturing and toward a more constructivist, learner-centered environment. When teachers use tools like story circles, role-play, or case-based narratives, they help students connect complex ideas to real-world contexts, making the entire learning process feel more meaningful. This approach is particularly effective for the multidisciplinary goals of the NEP 2020, as a single narrative can easily weave together threads of history, social science, and ethics (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, as Landrum et al. (2019) warn, storytelling requires real pedagogical skill to be effective. Without proper professional development, there is a risk that these methods will be used superficially rather than as a deep tool for building knowledge.

For storytelling to become a core pedagogical strategy, it must be systematically integrated into the curriculum rather than treated as an optional activity. This means designing story-based modules and narrative-driven case studies that draw from local oral traditions and cultural histories, which aligns with the NEP's focus on flexibility and contextual learning. Naturally, this shift also requires a rethink of how we assess student progress. Traditional exams are often poorly suited to measure the kind of deep, reflective understanding that narratives provide. Instead, schools should adopt alternative methods like reflective writing and performance-based tasks that prioritize creative expression and analysis over simple rote recall (Smeda et al., 2014).

On a policy level, the vision laid out in the NEP 2020 will only succeed if it is backed by institutional readiness and proper resource allocation. This involves creating structured teacher training programs, redesigning curricula to include narrative methods, and building digital repositories for culturally relevant stories. We also have to be mindful of the "digital divide." While digital storytelling tools like video editing and animation can turn students into active creators rather than passive consumers (Wu & Chen, 2020), these benefits will remain out of reach for many rural or under-resourced schools unless policymakers prioritize equitable access to technology.

Finally, while this study provides a strong thematic foundation, the field would benefit greatly from more empirical and longitudinal research. We need a better understanding of how storytelling specifically impacts cognitive and emotional development over several years, especially within the unique context of the Indian classroom. Future studies should compare narrative-based methods with traditional teaching across different subjects to provide evidence-based insights for teachers and policymakers alike. Ultimately, transforming Indian education through storytelling will require a coordinated effort between researchers, curriculum developers, and the educators working on the ground to bridge the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

10. Conclusion

This qualitative review confirms that storytelling-based pedagogy is far more than just a creative teaching technique; it is a complete instructional framework that aligns perfectly with the transformative goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The literature consistently shows that stories move students from being passive listeners to active participants in their own learning process. By embedding information within a narrative, teachers can boost comprehension, long-term retention, and critical thinking in a way that dry facts simply cannot. This directly supports the NEP 2020's focus on holistic development, touching on everything from linguistic and cognitive skills to emotional and ethical growth (Ministry of Education, 2020).

One of the most significant contributions of this pedagogy is its ability to bring Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the modern classroom. By utilizing epics, folklore, and traditional narratives, storytelling bridges the gap between India's rich cultural heritage and contemporary learning needs. This doesn't just make the material more relevant; it helps students develop a stronger sense of identity and cultural awareness. The move toward digital storytelling further evolves this practice, using multimedia tools to build 21st-century skills like digital literacy, creativity, and collaboration. However, as this technology advances, we must ensure that access is equitable so that the digital divide doesn't hinder the policy's inclusive goals.

Despite these clear benefits, the review identifies several persistent hurdles that slow down the adoption of narrative-based teaching. Many educators haven't yet received the specialized training needed to lead these types of lessons, and our current assessment systems still largely favor rote memorization over conceptual understanding. This gap between policy intentions and classroom reality highlights a need for systemic reforms, including curriculum redesign and better institutional support. Ultimately, while the NEP 2020 provides a strong policy foundation, the success of storytelling-based pedagogy depends on a coordinated effort to empower teachers and modernize how we measure student success. Future research should focus on empirical studies across diverse settings to further strengthen the evidence base for this innovative, learner-centered approach.

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