



## **LOCATING INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS IN EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper looks at the need to reshape education by placing Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) at the core of learning. It points out that current education is still guided largely by Western thinking, leaving little space for indigenous knowledge. Through a conceptual discussion, the paper shows how IKS promotes a more balanced, value-based, and context-oriented approach to learning. It also discusses teaching methods like experiential learning and open dialogue. The study suggests that including IKS can help make education more relevant, inclusive, and closely connected to everyday life.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Knowledge Systems, Decolonization of Education, Indigenous Knowledge, Epistemology, Pedagogy, Holistic Learning, Experiential Learning, Educational Transformation*

### **Introduction**

Education plays a vital role in shaping human understanding, cultural continuity, and social development. It not only transmits knowledge but also influences values, identities, and ways of interpreting the world. In India, however, the structure of modern education has been largely influenced by colonial frameworks that privileged Western epistemological traditions while gradually marginalising indigenous modes of knowledge and learning. As a result, educational practices increasingly became associated with standardized curricula, fragmented disciplines, examination-oriented learning, and uniform teaching methods that often remained disconnected from local realities and lived experiences.

Such educational orientations narrowed the understanding of knowledge by giving greater importance to measurable and standardized learning while overlooking culturally grounded and experiential forms of understanding. Many indigenous traditions rooted in ethics, oral practices, ecological awareness, community life, and practical engagement received limited recognition within formal education. Consequently, learning often became confined to information acquisition rather than a meaningful process connected with life, society, and human development.

In recent years, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) have emerged as an important area of educational discussion and intellectual reflection. Indian intellectual traditions include diverse streams of knowledge related to philosophy, science, language, mathematics, medicine, arts, ecology, spirituality, and pedagogy. Developed through centuries of reflection, observation, dialogue, and lived experience, these traditions present knowledge as interconnected, context-sensitive, and closely related to ethical and social life. Within this perspective, education is understood not merely as preparation for examinations or employment but as a process contributing to the holistic development of the individual.

The growing interest in Indian Knowledge Systems is also linked with wider discussions on decolonizing education. Decolonization does not imply rejecting Western knowledge traditions altogether; rather, it seeks to question the dominance of singular epistemological frameworks that have historically shaped educational institutions and definitions of valid knowledge. It encourages the recognition of multiple ways of knowing emerging from different cultural and social contexts. In this sense, indigenous epistemologies contribute to developing a more inclusive and balanced understanding of education.

Scholars have pointed out that colonial education influenced not only institutional structures but also patterns of intellectual thought and cultural perception. Indigenous traditions were often viewed as secondary or outdated while Western models were treated as universal standards of knowledge. This intellectual imbalance has generated renewed academic interest in culturally rooted approaches to learning and educational practice.

The relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems has also been acknowledged in the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes the inclusion of Indian languages, indigenous traditions, ethics, arts, and multidisciplinary learning within education. The policy reflects an increasing recognition that meaningful education must remain connected with cultural heritage, lived realities, and experiential learning processes.

Against this background, the present paper examines the significance of Indian Knowledge Systems within contemporary educational discourse. It explores how indigenous epistemological perspectives contribute to decolonizing education, reshaping understandings of knowledge, and opening new pedagogical possibilities for more inclusive, reflective, and culturally grounded educational practices.

### **Locating Indian Knowledge Systems in Educational Discourse**

Indian Knowledge Systems cannot be seen merely as a collection of ancient texts or cultural practices; they reflect a distinct way of understanding knowledge itself. Within contemporary educational discourse, this perspective has remained largely under-recognized, shaped by the long-standing dominance of Western frameworks. To locate IKS, therefore, is to bring it into meaningful dialogue with existing knowledge structures and to question what is accepted as valid knowledge. It highlights ways of knowing that are experiential, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded, rather than purely abstract or standardized. In doing so, IKS unsettles rigid boundaries between theory and practice, and between learning and lived experience. Repositioning it within education is not about replacement, but about restoring balance allowing diverse knowledge traditions to coexist and contribute to more meaningful and grounded educational practices.

Existing studies on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) show a clear concern about how modern education has been largely shaped by Western ways of thinking, often leaving limited space for indigenous and context-based knowledge traditions. In decolonial discussions, many scholars point out the need to move away from a single, universal idea of knowledge and instead recognise multiple ways of knowing that are rooted in culture and lived experience.

Within this space, IKS is often seen as a more holistic approach to learning, where knowledge is not separate from values, ethics, and everyday life. It shifts the focus from simply transferring information to a more reflective and meaningful way of learning.

At the same time, the literature also shows a gap. While IKS is widely discussed at a conceptual level, its presence in actual classroom practice is still limited. This gap makes it important to think more seriously about how these ideas can move from theory into real educational settings.

### **Decolonizing Educational Discourse: A Critical Perspective**

Decolonizing educational discourse begins with a simple but important question—whose knowledge shapes what is taught and learned in classrooms. In many present-day systems,

education still reflects a strong influence of Western frameworks, where certain forms of knowledge are treated as standard while others are seen as secondary or peripheral. This creates an uneven space where indigenous perspectives often remain underrepresented. From a critical point of view, decolonization is not about replacing one system with another. Instead, it is about opening up space for multiple ways of understanding knowledge. It invites a shift from uniform thinking to a more inclusive and reflective approach, where different traditions are given equal intellectual respect. Within this context, Indian Knowledge Systems provide a meaningful reference point. They highlight ways of learning that are closely connected to lived experience, values, and context. Bringing such perspectives into educational discourse encourages a more balanced view of knowledge one that is not limited to a single worldview but is open, plural, and grounded in diversity.

### **Epistemic Transformations through Indian Knowledge Systems**

Indian Knowledge Systems offer more than alternative content for education; they introduce a different way of understanding what knowledge itself means. In dominant educational models, knowledge is often treated as fixed, measurable, and separated from lived experience. In contrast, IKS views knowledge as dynamic, relational, and deeply connected to context, ethics, and everyday life. This shift leads to what can be understood as an epistemic transformation. It reshapes not only what is taught, but also how knowledge is understood and validated. Learning, in this sense, moves beyond memorisation and abstract reasoning towards reflection, experience, and deeper understanding. Knowledge is not simply transferred from teacher to learner; it emerges through engagement and lived connection. Such a perspective also questions the existing hierarchy of knowledge that tends to privilege certain academic traditions over others. When Indian Knowledge Systems are brought into educational thinking, the boundaries between theory and practice, and between formal and lived knowledge, begin to soften. In this way, epistemic transformation is not an abrupt change but a gradual shift in awareness towards a more inclusive and balanced understanding of knowledge that respects multiple ways of knowing.

### **Pedagogical Possibilities in Contemporary Education**

Indian Knowledge Systems provide meaningful insights for rethinking contemporary educational practices. Present systems of education often place greater emphasis on examinations, content completion, and standardized methods of instruction, leaving limited space for reflective and experience-based learning. Indigenous pedagogical traditions, however, encourage forms of learning that are participatory, context-sensitive, and closely

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connected with human development. Such perspectives help create educational environments that are more inclusive, thoughtful, and socially relevant.

### **Learning through Experience**

Indian traditions of learning have historically attached importance to experience and practical engagement as important sources of understanding. Learning develops not only through formal instruction but also through observation, participation, reflection, and everyday interaction with life situations. This approach allows learners to connect knowledge with real experiences instead of treating learning as mere memorisation of information.

### **Dialogue and Reflective Learning**

Dialogue, discussion, and inquiry have remained important elements within many indigenous traditions of education. Learning through interaction encourages learners to think critically, ask questions, and engage actively with ideas. Such an approach moves beyond one-sided teaching and creates opportunities for collective reflection and deeper understanding within the classroom.

### **Ethical Dimensions of Education**

Another significant feature of Indian pedagogical thought is its emphasis on ethical and value-oriented learning. Education is viewed not only as intellectual training but also as a process related to character, responsibility, empathy, and social awareness. This broadens the meaning of education beyond academic achievement and highlights its role in human and social development.

### **Education in Relation to Context**

Indigenous educational perspectives also stress the importance of connecting learning with culture, language, environment, and community life. Educational experiences become more meaningful when learners can relate them to their own social realities and lived contexts. Such approaches help make learning more relevant and culturally responsive.

### **Holistic Understanding of Development**

Indian Knowledge Systems generally view human development as multidimensional. Intellectual growth is understood alongside emotional, social, ethical, and personal development. Education, therefore, is seen as a process that nurtures the individual in a balanced and integrated manner rather than focusing only on performance-based outcomes.

Taken together, these pedagogical perspectives suggest that indigenous knowledge traditions can contribute towards more reflective, context-sensitive, and human-centred educational practices. At the same time, incorporating such approaches within formal educational institutions also involves several practical and structural challenges.

### **Challenges in Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems**

Bringing Indian Knowledge Systems into formal education involves several academic and practical difficulties. Existing educational systems are still largely shaped by examination-centred learning and standardized teaching practices, which often provide limited opportunities for experiential, reflective, and culturally connected forms of learning.

Another challenge relates to curriculum organisation, where indigenous knowledge traditions continue to receive comparatively less space within mainstream academic structures. Teacher preparedness also remains an important concern, as many educators are not sufficiently familiar with indigenous perspectives or context-based pedagogical approaches.

Difficulties further arise because a large part of traditional knowledge is preserved through regional languages, oral transmission, and local community practices. Integrating such knowledge into formal education without losing its original context and meaning remains a complex task. There is also the possibility of presenting indigenous traditions in an oversimplified manner without engaging with their depth and diversity.

Even with these limitations, the increasing educational interest in Indian Knowledge Systems reflects a gradual movement towards more inclusive, culturally aware, and context-sensitive approaches to learning.

The discussion of this study brings together the key ideas emerging from the exploration of Indian Knowledge Systems within educational discourse. One of the central observations is that contemporary education continues to function within structured and often narrow frameworks that limit the recognition of alternative ways of knowing. In contrast, Indian Knowledge Systems offer a more integrated understanding of knowledge, where learning is closely connected to life, values, and context.

It becomes evident that the inclusion of IKS is not merely about introducing additional content into the curriculum. Rather, it involves a subtle but important shift in how knowledge itself is perceived and experienced. It challenges the idea that learning is only about the accumulation of information and instead highlights learning as an ongoing process of reflection, engagement, and meaning-making.

At the same time, this perspective does not advocate the replacement of existing systems. Instead, it supports a more balanced and inclusive approach, where multiple knowledge traditions can coexist and enrich educational practice. Such an orientation is particularly relevant in diverse societies, where learning must respond to varied cultural and lived realities.

Overall, the discussion suggests that Indian Knowledge Systems can contribute meaningfully to reshaping both the philosophy and practice of education towards a more grounded, inclusive, and human-centred direction.

### **Implications of the Study**

The following points highlights the educational Implications of this paper.

- **Epistemic Pluralism in Education**-This paper recognises Indian Knowledge Systems as a meaningful epistemic framework, encouraging a more plural and balanced understanding of knowledge within education.
- **Shift Towards Experiential Pedagogy**-It highlights the need for a gradual shift towards experiential, reflective, and context-sensitive learning that connects classroom knowledge with real-life situations.
- **Curriculum Enrichment through Integration**-The paper emphasises the importance of thoughtfully integrating indigenous knowledge systems into curriculum design without replacing existing academic content.
- **Moving Beyond Rote Learning**-It suggests the need to move beyond rote-based instruction towards deeper understanding, engagement, and meaningful learning experiences.
- **Towards Holistic and Culturally Grounded Education**-It underlines that incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems can support a more culturally rooted, inclusive, and holistic approach to education.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examined the role of Indian Knowledge Systems in rethinking contemporary educational discourse. The discussion highlights that present-day education often operates within structured and standardized frameworks that can limit the recognition of diverse ways of knowing. Against this backdrop, Indian Knowledge Systems offer a more integrated understanding of knowledge, where learning is closely tied to lived experience, values, and context.

A key insight from this conceptual exploration is that integrating IKS is not about adding traditional elements into an existing system. Instead, it involves a gradual shift in perspective that reconsiders how knowledge is defined, taught, and experienced. It moves education beyond a purely information-centred approach towards a more reflective and meaning-oriented process of learning.

At the same time, this does not suggest replacing current educational structures. Rather, it encourages a more inclusive approach where multiple knowledge traditions can coexist and enrich one another. This is particularly relevant in diverse societies, where education must remain sensitive to varied cultural and social realities.

Overall, Indian Knowledge Systems offer a meaningful pathway for rethinking education in a way that is more balanced, context-sensitive, and human-centred.

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