

Integrating Folk Narratives into School Education: Global Practices and the Indian NEP 2020 Framework

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Abstract: This study examines the integration of folk narratives into school education through the lens of India's National Education Policy 2020 and international pedagogical models. Using a comparative literature review approach, we analysed educational practices from eight countries (Finland, South Africa, Canada, Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand, USA, and Japan) alongside India's policy framework and regional case studies. The analysis reveals that folk narratives contribute significantly to language development, emotional intelligence, moral education, and cultural identity when embedded through structured teacher training, culturally responsive curriculum design, and community engagement. International evidence demonstrates that success depends on institutional support, teacher professional development, flexible curriculum structures, and integration with digital technologies. In India, while NEP 2020 provides progressive policy openings for cultural knowledge integration, significant gaps exist in implementation: lack of teacher training modules, absence of curated curricular materials, limited assessment frameworks recognizing narrative-based learning, and minimal support for scaling practices beyond pilot initiatives. This paper bridges policy and practice by proposing evidence-informed strategies for systematic folk narrative integration at primary, upper primary and secondary levels, with explicit curriculum frameworks, teacher competency models, and technology-enabled resource systems. The study contributes to the growing scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy and provides actionable recommendations for operationalizing NEP 2020's vision of culturally rooted, holistic education.

Keywords: *cultural education, folk literature, multilingual pedagogy, national education policy 2020, traditional knowledge systems*

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Introduction: Folk narratives, encompassing myths, legends, proverbs, and oral histories, have long served as vessels of cultural knowledge, ethical reasoning, and collective memory across civilizations. In India, where diversity defines the cultural landscape, such narratives are deeply embedded in the oral traditions of its many communities. Historically, storytelling has played a central role in shaping value systems, preserving indigenous knowledge, and fostering emotional intelligence among younger generations. Gurukul systems and village-based storytelling practices sustained moral and spiritual instruction long before the institutionalization of formal education.

Globally, educational systems are increasingly recognizing the pedagogical power of indigenous and folk knowledge systems. The

integration of these narratives within classrooms contributes to the decolonization of curricula and supports inclusive education models that reflect learners' lived realities. Countries such as Finland, South Africa, and Canada have pioneered approaches to embed storytelling into curriculum design, reinforcing the idea that education must resonate with students' cultural and cognitive worlds.

In this context, India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers a pivotal opportunity to reimagine education as a process not just of information delivery, but of identity formation and community engagement. By embedding folk narratives into the school curriculum, NEP 2020 opens pathways for a pedagogical shift that is culturally rooted and future-ready. In an increasingly globalized world,

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education systems are under pressure to produce learners who are not only skilled and knowledgeable but also culturally grounded and ethically aware. Traditional forms of knowledge, especially those transmitted through oral traditions and folk narratives, are increasingly recognized as powerful tools in the educational landscape. Rooted in collective memory and community identity, these narratives possess the capacity to nurture creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and ethical reasoning.

However, despite these promising directions, the practical incorporation of folk narratives into school syllabi remains fragmented and under-theorised. There is a notable gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities, often due to lack of teacher training, curricular materials, and scholarly frameworks. To address this, it is essential to study how other countries have embedded folklore in their education systems, and to draw lessons that can enrich the Indian context.

Research Objectives:

In response to these research questions, this article:

1. Synthesizes international evidence on pedagogical effectiveness, implementation models, and success factors for folk narrative-based education across eight countries.
2. Critically analyses the NEP 2020 policy framework to identify explicit and implicit mechanisms for folk narrative integration and to highlight implementation gaps.
3. Documents Indian case studies from West Bengal, Kerala, North East India, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh to illustrate localized practices and regional adaptations.
4. Proposes evidence-informed strategies for curriculum development, teacher capacity building, community engagement, and assessment to operationalize folk narrative pedagogy within the NEP 2020 framework.
5. Identifies research gaps and future directions for empirical investigation, policy refinement, and interdisciplinary collaboration to strengthen the evidence base for narrative-based pedagogy in Indian schools.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative systematic literature review and policy analysis approach to examine global practices related to the integration of folk narratives in school education and to situate these practices within the framework of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Peer reviewed research articles, books and policy documents published between 2010 and 2025 were reviewed using academic database such as Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR and Taylor and Francis Online. The

selection focused on studies addressing pedagogical implementation strategies, curriculum integration and the educational role of folk and indigenous narratives at the school level.

The selected literature was analysed thematically to identify recurring pedagogical principles, modes of classroom integration and cultural-educational outcomes across global contexts. In parallel, a qualitative analysis of NEP 2020 was conducted to examine its emphasis on cultural rootedness, Indian Knowledge Systems and narrative-based learning. Insights from the global review and policy analysis were synthesised to propose a conceptual curriculum framework for integrating folk narratives into school education. As the study is based on secondary sources and publicly available documents, no ethical approval was required.

Literature Review:

This section examines research and policy literature on the integration of folk narratives in school education, drawing on academic studies, books and policy documents to examine global pedagogical and curriculum practices.

The research paper "The effects of Integrating Folklore and Mixed Reality toward Student's Cultural Literacy" (Yunus Abidin, 2023) states that literature collectively supports that integrating folklore with mixed reality revitalizes student interest, enhances cultural literacy and improves educational outcomes. While challenges remain in teacher training and technological access, the positive impact on student engagement, empathy and cultural understanding underscores the transformative potential of this approach. This review demonstrates a growing consensus: leveraging mixed reality for folklore education represents a significant advance in culturally responsive pedagogy and digital literacy for the 21st century classroom.

Although this study reveals several gaps: limited validation with actual students and teachers, challenges in technological infrastructure and cost, and insufficient teacher training for effective MR use. Additionally, concerns about cultural sensitivity, data privacy, accessibility, and equity remain underexplored. There is also a lack of long-term evaluation on the impact of MR-based folklore learning on students' cultural literacy. These gaps highlight the need for further research and practical implementation strategies. The study "Teachers' perspective on the use of local folk stories and narratives in social studies education" by Kübra Melis Avcu (AVCU, 2025) provides insightful empirical evidence on the pedagogical advantages and challenges of incorporating local folk stories in social studies classrooms. It emphasizes the role of folk

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narratives in strengthening cultural identity, boosting student engagement, and developing critical thinking and communication skills. Importantly, the research sheds light on teachers' practical experiences and the contextual realities affecting the effective use of these narratives, such as limited resources, time constraints, and the need for adequate training and curricular support. (Etherington, 2019) In a study, Matthew Etherington uses visual prompts to explore how Finnish school teachers understand pride in education. He employs narrative inquiry to gather authentic responses from teachers across elementary and high school levels. The teachers reject "hubristic" pride as disruptive to classroom unity, and they accept "authentic" pride when it reflects genuine achievement. They emphasize *sisu*, resilience and collective responsibility as central to moral development. They highlight collaboration over individual competition to reinforce cultural values of equality. They draw on traditional narratives like the *Kalevala* to teach that success stems from supporting others and working for the common good. Etherington warns that global trends toward competition may clash with Finland's collectivist approach. He concludes that Finland's educational success relies on moral education through community-focused storytelling.

(Moore, 2011) In their article, Iseke and Moore examine four community-based digital storytelling projects that pair elders with youth in Alberta and Nova Scotia. They structure their inquiry around process-oriented research protocols, and they actively engage participants in every phase of production. The authors describe how they convened intergenerational circles in which elders shared traditional narratives and youths devised multimedia representations combining video, audio, and digital illustration to honor and extend oral traditions. They coordinate participatory workshops that scaffold technical skills while reinforcing relational ethics, and they facilitate reflective dialogues that surface cultural values embedded in each story. Throughout the paper, Iseke and Moore foreground collaborative decision making: they enlist community advisory committees to guide story selection, vet consent processes, and ensure cultural protocols receive uncompromised respect. By situating digital tools within decolonizing frameworks, the authors demonstrate how technology can amplify Indigenous epistemologies rather than displace them. Their findings reveal that youth participants gained confidence in both cultural knowledge and media production, and that elders experienced

renewed purpose as knowledge keepers. Iseke and Moore conclude by advocating for sustained institutional support and flexible funding models that honor community timelines and acknowledge storytelling as a form of cultural resurgence.

Maluleke and others (Maluleke, 2023) in their paper demonstrate that incorporating local folktales into the Grade 9 English First Additional Language classroom makes abstract social themes such as justice, empathy, and resilience, immediately tangible for learners, thereby bridging linguistic diversity and fostering deeper cultural relevance in instruction. Mzimela (Mzimela, 2016) shows that embedding isiZulu riddles, legends, and folktales in Grade R enriches children's vocabulary and moral reasoning, anchoring young learners' emerging identities in ancestral worldviews and communal norms.

(Rockie Sibanda, 2024) in their paper observe that teachers in multilingual township schools fluidly code-switch between English and isiZulu proverbs and folktales when presenting abstract concepts. This dynamic alternation validates learners' home languages, promotes additive bilingualism, and reduces the exclusion of non-English speakers. Collectively, these studies confirm that weaving folk narratives into South African education promotes additive bilingualism, reinforces cultural resonance, cultivates critical social reflection, and forges authentic partnerships with elders as knowledge-holders. In U.S. K-12 education, folk narratives are integrated through folk life education and culturally responsive pedagogy that position community stories, oral histories, and traditional arts as standards-aligned texts to build literacy, inquiry, identity, and civic belonging. Implementation commonly includes classroom use of local folktales and legends; student ethnographic projects (family interviews, story documentation); and partnerships with community tradition bearers and museums, all framed by ELA and social studies objectives and assessments. National networks and repositories such as Local Learning and the Journal of Folklore and Education, along with Library of Congress primary-source toolkits, supply lesson plans and methods, while field recognition like the Dorothy Howard Folklore and Education Prize signals a mature, standards-mapped practice. Reported outcomes include increased engagement, relevance, and belonging for diverse learners, alongside strengthened skills in evidence gathering, analysis, and writing that align with contemporary culturally responsive

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teaching aims in U.S. schooling. (Deafenbaugh, 2015 (Vol 2))

In Finland, storytelling is woven into early childhood and primary education as a vehicle for social-emotional learning, critical thinking, and literacy development. The Finnish National Core Curriculum emphasizes holistic development, where stories from folklore and children's literature support the growth of empathy and moral understanding. Teachers are encouraged to use local myths and global tales to connect learning with lived experiences. (Kangas, 2010)

South Africa offers another compelling case through its post-apartheid curriculum reforms, which prioritize indigenous knowledge systems. Storytelling is utilized not only as a linguistic tool in multilingual classrooms but also as a cultural bridge to connect students with their communities' historical memory and resistance narratives. This practice supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's educational goals to foster unity and social justice. (Rose N. Uchem, 2014)

In Canada, particularly within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) communities, storytelling remains a critical pedagogical practice. Many school districts in provinces like British Columbia and Ontario have incorporated indigenous oral traditions into curricular frameworks to support reconciliation and inclusion. (Battiste, 2002) Marie Battiste argues that these practices help decolonize education and affirm indigenous identities, offering models for culturally responsive pedagogy.

New Zealand's Te Whāriki curriculum includes Māori legends and oral traditions as foundational tools for identity development in early education. These stories are used to foster language revitalization, environmental awareness, and bicultural competence. (Ritchie, 2018)

These global examples illustrate that folk narratives are not limited to language instruction but extend across disciplines, facilitating interdisciplinary learning, emotional development, and ethical reasoning. They also underscore the necessity of teacher training, curriculum design, and community engagement in effectively implementing such pedagogies.

While these theoretical and empirical contributions provide a strong foundation for narrative-based education, their application in Indian schooling especially in light of NEP 2020 remains underexplored. Existing studies tend to focus either on linguistic benefits or on folklore as a subject of study, rather than as a dynamic pedagogical tool. This paper contributes to filling this gap by linking global theories of storytelling

with the specific context of Indian educational reform.

Results and Discussion:

India's National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes the revitalization of Indian knowledge systems and aims to foster a holistic, learner-centered, and culturally-rooted education. Among its recommendations, the NEP promotes the integration of local culture, heritage, and languages into the school curriculum. (Government, 2020)

While these objectives align well with the pedagogical strengths of folk narratives, the document remains largely prescriptive and lacks detailed frameworks for practical implementation. NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of storytelling and traditional arts in foundational literacy and numeracy development, especially in the early grades. However, it does not offer explicit guidelines on how educators should source, adapt, and assess folk content within curricular and co-curricular domains. Furthermore, teacher education programs under the NEP must evolve to include methodologies for incorporating oral traditions and culturally diverse materials into pedagogy.

The policy's multilingual focus offers a critical entry point for the revival of regional folktales in vernacular instruction. By using stories in students' mother tongues, educators can enhance comprehension and foster emotional connections with content. However, in practice, the dominance of English and the standardized curriculum across states have limited the scope for incorporating community-specific narratives. Additionally, there is a lack of published anthologies, teacher guides, and audio-visual resources that curate folk content for classroom use. In-service teacher training modules rarely include components on storytelling as a pedagogical tool. Without institutional support and policy incentives, the integration of folk narratives risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

To bridge this gap, it is imperative to adapt successful models from global practices that include community participation, interdisciplinary integration, and flexible curriculum structures. The next section outlines such strategies and recommends actionable reforms to realize the full potential of folk narratives in Indian classrooms. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a paradigm shift in India's educational framework, aiming to cultivate holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary learning. One of its key principles is the integration of local context and cultural

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knowledge within the curriculum, which creates a policy opening for folk narratives to be included meaningfully in mainstream education. NEP 2020 emphasizes foundational literacy and numeracy in the early years while also recognizing the value of cultural rootedness. The policy highlights the need to promote India’s rich heritage through storytelling, local languages, and traditional knowledge systems (Ministry of Education, 2020). It specifically recommends using story-based pedagogy to improve conceptual understanding and emotional development, particularly in foundational and preparatory stages. Furthermore, NEP encourages the creation of joyful classrooms through play-based, discovery-based, and experiential learning. Folk tales and oral traditions naturally align with these goals. When implemented effectively, storytelling can bridge the gap between textbook knowledge and lived experience, offering students a culturally affirming learning environment that enhances both cognitive and affective domains.

However, the operationalization of this vision requires clear curricular guidelines, capacity building for teachers, and resource development. Many teachers may lack familiarity with regional folk traditions or feel ill-equipped to incorporate them into structured lesson plans. Additionally, standardized textbooks and exam-oriented teaching models may pose challenges to flexible and narrative-rich pedagogy.

Addressing these barriers involves designing teacher training modules that focus on the educational value of folk storytelling, curating accessible archives of regional tales, and creating assessment rubrics that recognize creativity, empathy, and cultural literacy. Partnerships with local artists, storytellers, and cultural organizations can also play a vital role in bringing NEP’s vision to life in the classroom.

Proposing Curricular Frameworks for Folk Narratives Integration: Incorporating folk narratives into school curricula requires thoughtful alignment with existing subject structures and learning outcomes. A flexible curricular framework should allow educators to embed storytelling within both language and non-language subjects, using narratives as entry points for interdisciplinary exploration.

Curriculum Table 1 – Primary Section (Kindergarten – V)

Grade Level	Kindergarten - II	III-V
Learning Outcomes	Developing and making skills-	Developing fluency and comprehension,

	Recognize moral values – honesty, kindness Build emotional literacy- enhance vocabulary in other language	Identify characters’ motivation and emotions, understand cause-effect relationships, recognize cultural values embedded in stories, develop critical thinking.
Recommended Folk Narratives	Panchtantra, Fables, Regional folktales, Panch Fairy Tales	Panchtantra stories with slightly longer narratives, Panch Fairy Tales (simplified) : stories about passion-regional legends, stories of local heroes, traditional myths appropriate for age
Thematic Focus	Kindness, courage, honesty, helping others	Understanding sequences, empathy, cultural pride, cooperation
Pedagogical Strategies	Storytelling with picture cards, props, puppetry, role-play and dramatization Listening activities, Guided reading with varied sessions.	Guided reading for all groups, Story mapping activities, Character analysis on wheels, Compare and contrast exercises (two versions of a tale), Involvement of parents in story telling circles
Assessment Methods	Storytelling by kids, Drawing and narrations, Daily classroom discussions, Behaviour observation, Evaluation	Storytelling with sequencing cards, Drawn/illustrate retellings, Group discussions on character choices, Comprehension

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**Curriculum Table 2 – (Middle & Secondary)
VI-XII**

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	learning	
nmend Folk atives	atantra, Tales, nal epics lified), s from oral ons, bres onmental rdship, history, tion and unity nce, nal ales ssing change gender mporary pre from ple es (India Global) arative ous priate pts , l ives and ons of onal	al folklore es: emic es on ogy, al rvation, onization tives: ore about re, how es ve and nit ons, ore in / contexts: 2020. SCO ives, al heritage es, Student d tions and ve ations of arratives
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<p>Limitations and Future Research Directions: This literature review has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is primarily based on English-language and</p>					

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international English-language publications, which may exclude valuable insights from regional educational contexts and non-English scholarship. Second, while the paper draws on evidence from eight countries, the depth of implementation varies, and detailed comparative data on measurable learning outcomes remains limited in published literature. Third, this study does not include original empirical data on student learning or teacher experiences in Indian classrooms, relying instead on existing literature and policy documents.

Future research should address these gaps through rigorous empirical investigation. Longitudinal studies are needed to measure the sustained impact of folk narrative pedagogy on student achievement, emotional development, and cultural awareness. Mixed-method research combining quantitative assessment data with qualitative interviews and classroom observations would strengthen the evidence base. Additionally, research examining teachers' perspectives and implementation fidelity would inform professional development design. Finally, comparative studies across Indian states implementing NEP 2020 could elucidate factors enabling or hindering effective folk narrative integration at scale.

Conclusion:

The integration of folk narratives into school education is not merely an exercise in cultural preservation; it is a transformative pedagogical approach that enriches student learning by making it more inclusive, imaginative, and rooted in real-life contexts. As this paper has demonstrated, countries around the world have already embedded storytelling in education with remarkable results, promoting language proficiency, moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and intercultural understanding. Such narratives serve not only as instructional tools but also as mechanisms for cultural identity formation, conflict resolution, and the promotion of empathy among learners.

In the Indian context, the National Education Policy 2020 presents a timely opportunity to embrace and expand these practices. However, to truly embed folk traditions within the Indian education system, there must be concrete mechanisms for implementation, curriculum development, teacher capacity building, and community partnerships. NEP 2020's vision must be translated into actionable and measurable reforms that are locally relevant yet globally informed. A comprehensive curriculum audit should be conducted to identify gaps where folk elements can be integrated. Additionally, school leadership should be trained to support

and champion culturally responsive pedagogy within their institutions.

Future research should investigate the impact of folk narrative-based pedagogies through empirical studies, assessing improvements in student engagement, comprehension, and socio-emotional development. For instance, longitudinal studies could measure how students exposed to structured storytelling interventions perform across language acquisition, creativity, and ethical reasoning compared to control groups. Classroom-based action research can also document best practices in using storytelling for interdisciplinary teaching. Additionally, comparative studies between rural and urban schools can reveal how cultural context shapes the reception and impact of folk narratives.

Interdisciplinary scholarship involving education, anthropology, folklore studies, and linguistics can help refine frameworks for content selection, assessment methods, and digital adaptation. For example, collaborations between folklorists and curriculum designers can yield regionally tailored learning materials. Linguists can contribute to the translation and adaptation of tales across languages while retaining cultural authenticity. Moreover, digital humanities projects can aid in preserving and disseminating folk material through accessible platforms such as interactive e-books and mobile apps, thus ensuring their reach in under-resourced regions.

Policy-makers, educators, and cultural practitioners must work together to ensure that India's pluralistic narrative heritage becomes an integral part of classroom learning. Pilot projects and policy trials in select districts can help establish proof of concept and inform nationwide rollouts. Private-public partnerships may be leveraged to fund content creation and teacher training initiatives. Education conferences and professional networks should feature case studies and workshops to mainstream the discourse on narrative-based learning.

Only then can we create educational spaces that are not only knowledge-driven but also culturally resonant and emotionally nurturing. By positioning folk narratives at the heart of the educational experience, India can foster a generation of learners who are imaginative, rooted in their heritage, and equipped to navigate a diverse and interconnected world.

Furthermore, by embedding narrative-based learning into foundational teacher training and classroom strategies, India's educational landscape can shift toward one that is inclusive, reflective, and adaptive. Addressing gaps in regional representation, digital access, and

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empirical validation will be critical to scaling this practice sustainably.

In sum, a strategic and inclusive integration of folk pedagogy, backed by empirical research, teacher involvement, and policy reform can help redefine the educational experience in India. It is through such holistic and context-sensitive interventions that education can be made truly meaningful, equitable, and reflective of India's pluralistic heritage.

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