



Theatre In Education Under NEP 2020: A Policy–Practice Analysis Of Secondary Schools In Delhi

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Abstract

This paper will look at how the use of Theatre in Education (TIE) can be applied in secondary schools in Delhi based on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Although the policy promotes the inclusion of experiential and arts based learning, its institutional implementation is still disproportional. The study applies an interdisciplinary paradigm of integrating critical pedagogy, applied theatre, experiential learning, and policy implementation theory in order to examine the level of stakeholder awareness, institutional practices, and the perceptions. Surveys were conducted on students, teachers, parents, and theatre practitioners of the city of Delhi to collect primary data. The results also show high perceived benefits of theatre-based pedagogy, especially in the improvement of communication, confidence, and socio-emotional learning. Nevertheless, there are still important implementation gaps that can be attributed to academic pressure, insufficient training of teachers, ineffective infrastructure and insufficient policy clarity. The analysis finds that the integration of theatre can be symbolic and not systematic. It concludes that policy practice gaps will be bridged only through organized curricular structures, institutional back up and sustained capacity building exercises.

Keywords: Theatre in education, NEP 2020, experiential learning, arts-integrated learning, policy implementation, secondary education, Delhi.

Introduction

Education has always been considered to be a key tool of empowering individuals and transforming society, which influences not only cognitive skills but also values, identities and civic awareness. Education in democratic societies is supposed to develop critical thinking, moral reasoning and social responsibility along with academic competence. Nevertheless, historically the system of Indian education was marked with great attention to rote memorizing, standardized exams, and teacher centered learning. Although this model has helped to increase access to education and enhance quantifiable academic performance, it has frequently limited the growth of creativity, emotional intelligence and applied problem solving capacity. With the global economies and societies becoming more and more in need of being flexible, innovative and interpersonally competent, the disadvantages of such traditional pedagogical strategies have become more vivid.

As a reaction to these issues, the modern discourse of education has turned to models of learning that are holistic and experiential with emphasis on the construction of the whole learner. This paradigm does not only focus on cognitive development but also on the affective and social aspect of education, which promotes active learning, reflection and practical implementation of knowledge. The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a major milestone in the educational reform process of India since it officially supports these principles. The policy promotes the learning approach which is multidisciplinary, competency based evaluation, and incorporation of arts into mainstream education. NEP 2020 aims to bridge the divide between theory and experience by ensuring that arts are not seen as a peripheral activity but rather a central part of the pedagogical approach that will result in a better engagement and transfer of knowledge to practice.

In this paradigm of change, Theatre in Education (TIE) becomes an especially topical and dynamic method of pedagogy. TIE is the application of theatrical methods like role play, improvisation, storytelling and performance to support learning of any discipline. Compared to the conventional teaching strategies that are based on the passive delivery of knowledge, the theatre based pedagogy is participatory with most students being expected to learn through interpretation, acting and reflecting on complicated ideas and social contexts. This participatory form of learning is in line with the goals of experiential learning whereby students are able to be equipped with communication skills, empathy, collaboration, and critical thinking competencies that are critical in enabling them to navigate social and professional environments today.

Besides, theatre provides a distinctive means of incorporating cognitive and socio emotional learning. Embodied experiences and narrative exploration enable students to bridge the gap between abstract academic knowledge and real life situations, therefore, promoting understanding and memory. Theatre can also be used to address social concerns, increase inclusiveness and promote democratic discourse in

the classroom. In this respect, it does not only assist in the development of the academic domain, but also helps to cultivate reflective and socially aware people.

Research Gap

Although it is to a significant extent consistent with the goals of NEP 2020, the practical application of the Theatre in Education to school systems is still lopsided and poorly knowledgeable. The act of policy articulation does not necessarily translate to a good classroom practice because institutional variables like teacher readiness, the design of the curriculum, the availability of infrastructure, and the awareness of the stakeholders play a big role in determining the outcomes of the implementation. With regard to the context of Delhi, where a number of creative educational programs have been launched, we should explicitly question the fact whether there is a systematic institutionalization of the integration of theatre or it is still confined to the peripheral or symbolic work.

This research attempts to fill this gap by examining the use of Theatre in Education in India and the application in secondary schools in Delhi. It is oriented towards measuring the stakeholder awareness, investigating the institutional practices, and gauging student views about theatre-based learning. Placing the analysis within a policy practice frame, the study will seek to identify whether TIE is a substantive pedagogical change that is in line with NEP 2020 or is more of a symbolic compliance system in the overall education governance system.

Research Questions

This research takes the following research questions:

1. How well do stakeholders know about Theatre in Education as a pedagogical strategy under NEP 2020?
2. What is the policy of implementing the theatre in the secondary schools of Delhi?
3. What is the perception of students about theatre based learning in terms of engagement, understanding and development of skills?

Literature Review

The topic of Theatre in Education (TIE) in formal education has been widely discussed in the fields of pedagogical, psychological, and policy oriented literature. An intersection of theories such as critical pedagogy, experiential learning, and applied theatre places theatre in an educative powerhouse. Nevertheless, to this day, the systematic institutionalization of theatre in the school systems, especially in the Indian context, does not develop evenly, although it has a solid theoretical support and an increasing

empirical evidence. This part summarises the main academic findings, and correlates them with the latest research to determine the topicality and the gap in research that the current research holds.

Theatre in Education has a strong conceptual base by the use of critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire (1970) critiqued the old model of banking of education by advocating dialogical and participatory learning practices that would help the students to critically analyze their social realities. Carrying this philosophy into the performative practice, Augusto Boal (1979) formulated the idea of theatre as a democratic sphere by his *The Theatre of the Oppressed* in which students cease being passive observers but become active so called spect actors. Through these frameworks, theatre is defined as a tool of critical inquiry, reflection and social change. Relying on this, O'Toole (2019) pointed out that drama learning should be intellectually rigorous and organized contemplation in order not to become a performance or ornament. These scholars combine to package theatre as a dynamic, dialogical and liberating pedagogy.

The modern studies also support the theoretical assertions by showing the cognitive and socio-emotional advantages of learning through drama. Empirical studies of late show that theatre pedagogy is a significant instrument that improves critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. As an example, Hu and Shu (2025) conducted a study that revealed that structured drama activities have a positive impact on the critical thinking development of students as a result of collaborative engagement and communication with peers and the focus on 21st-century skills, including creativity and awareness of culture. Equally, Eratay, (2021) and other researchers confirm that inventive drama intervention enhances communication, empathy, self-confidence, and social awareness in learners, in addition to teaching learners how to work as a team and solve problems (Eratay, 2021). These results are consistent with the previous studies done by Kolb (1984), whose theory of experiential learning assumes that knowledge is built through experience, reflections, and application, which are inherent processes of the theatre as pedagogy.

Along with cognitive development, theatre has been identified to be important in socio-emotional learning (SEL). The works of researchers Levett Jones et al. (2024) and Gunay and Dertli (2024) prove the effectiveness of drama based methods in increasing empathy, emotional self control, and interpersonal sensitivity. On the same note, research in the teacher education setting has shown that creative drama is a method of developing reflective thinking skills, ethical awareness and perspective taking amongst the participants. Indicatively, the interventions involving the use of forum theatre have been identified to go a long way in enhancing the level of empathy and social moral sensitivity among pre-service teachers in the case of forum theatre interventions . The latter conclusions are also supported by the studies stating that drama pedagogy helps to develop psychological well being and core competencies, especially in terms of self expression and emotional participation. The evidence of this nature highlights the fact that theatre can facilitate both the cognitive and affective aspects of learning, hence its seemingly conformity to holistic education models.

The use of theatre in an interdisciplinary approach to education has also been a recent focus of scholarship. The research has proven that drama might contribute to improving literacy and conceptual comprehension; as well as subject specific learning outcomes. As an example, Giera (2025) demonstrates that in inclusive classroom settings, reading skills and social interaction can be enhanced with the help of participatory theatre projects. On the same note, studies on the use of drama based pedagogy in language and literacy education show that embodied forms of learning are useful in moving students out of simple knowledge to those of abstract conceptualization, which enhances learning outcomes. Besides, interdisciplinary teaching methods that integrate storytelling and theatre are also noted to enhance student engagement and motivation in more complex courses like physics, which could indicate that theatre is applicable in other subjects more broadly.

In educating teachers, the use of theatres has earned more and more recognition as a professional development tool. Research has shown that the incorporation of creative drama during teacher training programs improves pedagogical competence, confidence, and strategies of classroom engagement. Indicatively, Tuncdemir (2025) established that creative drama modules considerably enhanced the power of teachers to establish interactive learning environments and integrate experiential techniques into their instructional activities. On the same note, the studies of the simulated teacher education show that the use of the theatre approach significantly promotes the practices of authenticity, immersion, and critical consciousness, thus, equipping educators to face real world classroom situations. The results have special significance to the practice of Theatre in Education since teacher readiness is a pivotal factor in the successful integration.

In spite of the solid pedagogical and empirical grounds, the literature is always keen to point out great hurdles in the provision of theatre based education. Institutional barriers like time constraint, insufficient resources and untrained teachers remain as barriers to large scale adoption. Research on curriculum integration shows that there are practical challenges of time management, allocation of resources and resistance of the stakeholders especially in examination-based education systems. In addition, studies have also shown a consistent disconnect between policy ideals and classroom practice whereby most institutions integrate theatre practices in a sporadic or cosmetic manner.

Arts integrated and experiential learning has been formally acknowledged as significant in policy level discourse, especially under NEP 2020. The policy promotes the incorporation of drama and other forms of art as key pedagogic methods of a holistic development. Nevertheless, current literature holds that policy endorsement is not enough to provide a successful implementation. As advocated by scholars like Panjani and others (2024) and Anshuman (2025), the resulting institutional adoption is uneven because of the lack of standardized frameworks of the curricula, monitoring mechanisms and long term training of teachers. This is consistent with the greater policy implementation theory that highlights the importance

of institutional capacity, stakeholder awareness and administrative support in the decision of policy outcomes.

Critical views also warn against the outwardly embracement of theatre in educational institutions. Wooster (2016) claims that theatre can turn into a sort of performative compliance as long as it is enacted as a compliance tool, instead of an attempt at depth. The issue is especially pertinent in the policy based situations, as schools can implement theatre activities symbolically without incorporating them into the institutional framework of the curriculum. With this kind of critique it becomes essential to consider not only the existence of theatre in schools, but also the intensity and quality of integration as well.

Overall, the literature confirms the statement that Theatre in Education is theoretically sound, empirically tested, and supported by the policy as a transformative pedagogical teaching method. It can play a major role in cognitive, socio emotional, and collaborative skills development and can be aligned with the modern changes in education like NEP 2020. Nonetheless, the continuity of the implementation problems and risk of superficial adoption demonstrate the existence of a major disparity between the vision of the policy and institutional practice. It is important to note that little is done in terms of comprehensive research that looks at stakeholder awareness, institutional readiness and dynamics of implementation in a regional context like the city of Delhi. This paper fills this gap by offering a combined account of Theatre in Education as a pedagogical innovation and process of implementation of policies.

Research Methodology

This paper looks at Theatre in Education (TIE) in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and their impact on secondary schools in Delhi. It will seek to measure the level of awareness to the stakeholders, institutionalization and perceived results of theatre-based pedagogy, and determine the major challenges to its integration. The research is quantitative in character, with a few qualitative evaluations that contribute to the background knowledge.

The structured questionnaire to be used in the collection of primary data was conducted via Google Forms. The instrument helped to address the most important dimensions, such as NEP 2020 awareness, perception of theatre as a pedagogical tool, institutional implementation level, and the challenges that accompany them, including infrastructural limitations, academic pressure, and insufficiently trained educators. The questionnaire mainly had Likert scale and multiple choice items with some open ended questions so as to capture other insights.

To pick the participants who were officially engaged in the educational ecosystem, purposive sampling was used. A sample of about seventy respondents were included in the sample which included students,

teachers, parents and theatre practitioners in different parts of Delhi and in government and private institutions which were diverse in terms of stakeholders.

Analyzing quantitative data was done by descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage analysis and the qualitative responses analyzed by simple thematic grouping. The comparative analysis was also done between the stakeholder groups and the types of institutions in order to determine the variations in implementation. A standardized questionnaire was used to ensure reliability, and validity was ensured in accordance with research objectives, as well as the incorporation of the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The ethical standards were maintained by use of voluntary participation, informed consent and secrecy of response.

Results

The research of primary sources gathered by the stakeholders of the city of Delhi offers the important information on the awareness, implementation, and perceived results of the Theatre in Education (TIE) in accordance with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The results are shown against the research questions and are based on the stakeholder awareness, the perceived educational outcomes, institutional implementation, and the major challenges.

Stakeholder Theoretical Knowledge and Awareness

Answering the first research question, the results show that awareness of Theatre in Education as a method of pedagogical affiliation to NEP 2020 rated as moderate to high. Most of the respondents identified theatre as one of the most effective tools of holistic learning, especially in the process of mastering communication skills, confidence, and classroom engagement.

Nonetheless, there is no uniform distribution of awareness among all the stakeholder groups. There was a relative familiarity with theatre based approach to learning among students and teachers, and a relative lack of familiarity among parents and institutional authorities. This difference reflects disproportional distribution of policy knowledge and shows the lack of awareness among stakeholders.

Perceived Educational Results of Theatre in Education

Concerning the third research question, the results are that there is a strong agreement on the beneficial role of theatre based pedagogy in the development of students. According to respondents, theatre outperforms socio emotional competencies like confidence, self expression, and teamworking.

Also, it was believed that theatre would be an efficient way to enhance conceptual knowledge through connecting theoretical material and real life events. More classroom participation and classroom engagement were also mentioned by participants which meant that learning environments were

transitioned to be active as opposed to passive. These reactions indicate that theatre plays a positive role in academic and developmental performance.

Institutional Implementation and Practice

In the context of answering the second research question, the results show that the introductions of Theatre in Education in the secondary schools of Delhi are still scarce and intermittent. Activities in theatrical form are rather held as an occasional or extracurricular activity like annual functions as opposed to regular classroom based teaching.

A large number of respondents claimed that theatre is still being viewed as an additional activity as opposed to a pedagogical approach. The lack of systematic curriculum implementation and specific time allocation in school schedules only limits its constancy even more. Such results indicate a discrepancy between the policies and the reality of institutions.

Important Implementation Issues

The review reveals that a number of challenges continue to be common to the execution of Theatre in Education. The most important constraint comes out as academic pressure, and the respondents point out the prevalence of examined based systems and the heavy syllabus prerequisites.

Another significant obstacle is the untrained teaching staff since most of the respondents claimed that teachers do not have the skills or the guidance on how to successfully utilize theatre based pedagogy.

Other constraints that limit the implementation of theatre activities include infrastructural related issues such as lack of specific areas like rehearsal rooms and stage facilities. Also, available institutional support is low, funding sources are low and there is no administrative priority, which leads to the disjointedness of the theatre implementation in schools.

The attitude of society and parents is also an obstacle and theatre is often considered less significant than school. This lessens the involvement and institutional focus on learning in theatre.

Improvement Recommendations

Several suggestions were given by the respondents in order to improve the use of Theatre in Education. One of the recommendations is to institutionalize theatre in the school curriculum as a structured pedagogical unit not as extracurricular.

Professional development and teacher training were recognized as keys to enhance the implementation, and the respondents were keen on the importance of special training programs.

There was also the enhancement of awareness to parents and stakeholders that were noted to be important in enhancing acceptance and participation. Besides, the respondents proposed infrastructure enhancement, time setting, and further policy articulation, as the solution to successful integration.

Synthesis of Findings

The results show that there is a distinct discrepancy between the perceived benefits of Theatre in Education and actual application of the same in schools. Although the stakeholders see its importance in strengthening the development of students, institutional constraints and systemic barriers do not allow it to be integrated successfully. Theatre is only partially institutionalized into the educational system since it is still a peripheral practice.

Discussion

The results of this research point out that there is a major disconnect between the vision of the policy as enshrined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its practice in the framework of Theatre in Education (TIE) in Delhi in the secondary schools. Although the perception of theatre as a pedagogical tool by the stakeholders is largely positive, the institutionalization of the same has been minimal and ad hoc.

Academic pressure is the most important obstacle that comes out as the most important to the extent that the system of Indian education still relies on examination based methods of learning. This observation can be connected to the previous criticism of NCERT (2018), which highlights that firm curricula and assessment frameworks limit the use of experiential and arts based pedagogies. Although NEP 2020 focuses on the holistic approach in education, the existence of such structures shows that institutions do not want their pedagogical change.

The training gap is also supported by the absence of trained educators. Respondents noted that educators usually have inadequate skills and real life instructions to incorporate theatre in classroom instruction. This confirms the conclusions of Panjani et al. (2024) who justify that lack of institutional support and training is a strong barrier to the successful introduction of arts integrated learning. Equally, the lack of infrastructure and resources dedicated is an extension of deeper problems in policy implementation, where the successful implementation of the policy needs administrative capacity and resource allocation.

Also, social and parental attitudes remain the shape of educational priorities. The theatre is often considered to be a secondary aspect of academic success, which restricts the possible acceptance and institutional priorities. This observation rings with the criticism of Wooster (2016), who criticizes the concept of performative compliance, in which theatre is implemented symbolically, not as a real pedagogical model.

In general, the results indicate that Theatre in Education has not yet taken its place in the very fabric of education but is still peripheral in most institutions. It means that the obstacles are systemic, that is, they have structural, cultural, and institutional aspects instead of individual limitations.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that Theatre in Education is a promising strategy that can be used as a transformational pedagogical tool in line with the NEP 2020 objectives. According to the results of the find, the stakeholders have discovered its usefulness in communication skills, confidence, engagement, and socio emotional development. Nevertheless, it is still in pieces and is quite superficial in the implementation into secondary schools in Delhi.

The study establishes the fact that there is indeed a policy practice gap in which the progressive policy provisions have not been translated into classroom realities. The major obstacles such as the academic pressures, insufficiently trained teachers, infrastructural constraints and the social perception remain as the major barriers to effective implementation of theatre based pedagogical systems.

The way to effectively implement it is to go beyond the symbolic level of adoption and to concentrate on systemic changes. This encompasses the inclusion of theatre in curriculum plans, upgrading of teacher training courses, institutional infrastructure, and amplification of the awareness of stakeholders. These factors are important to address in order to achieve the transformative vision of NEP 2020 and make Theatre in Education a significant part of a holistic learning process.

Limitation and Future Scope

There are some limitations that the study is affected by. The sample size is quite small and geographically narrowed down to the city of Delhi thereby potentially influencing the extrapolation of the results to the rest of the world. Also, the research is mainly based on self reported data obtained by means of structured questionnaires with the possibility of respondent bias.

The study takes a more quantitative, rather than qualitative, form where little qualitative information is given to restrict the study to exploring more on the stakeholder experiences and the dynamics within the institutions. Further studies might include detailed interviews, observations at the classroom, and longitudinal studies to offer a more detailed insight into the Theatre in Education practice.

Future research can also be conducted to investigate comparative analysis between various states or education boards and also investigate the long term effects of theatre based pedagogy on the learning outcome of students. Further investigations along such lines would help to build a more robust evidence base to implement the policies and pedagogies.

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