



Decolonizing Education through Indian Knowledge Systems: NEP 2020 and the Path toward Sustainable and Skilled India @2047

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) represents a transformative shift in India's educational landscape, positioning Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) as a central mechanism for decolonizing education and reversing the epistemological legacies of colonial rule. Colonial frameworks historically privileged Western epistemologies while systematically marginalizing indigenous intellectual traditions, creating enduring epistemic hierarchies that NEP 2020 seeks to dismantle. Following a systematic review of 50+ peer-reviewed sources, policy documents, and institutional reports spanning 2000–2026, and employing qualitative thematic analysis, this paper proposes a three-pillar conceptual model: Epistemic Justice and Decolonization, Synergy with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Skill Formation for Viksit Bharat @2047. Traditional knowledge domains, including Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedic Mathematics, sustainable agriculture, and indigenous ecological practices, are analyzed in relation to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). The study identifies a critical gap in systematic empirical research on the measurable impact of IKS integration on learning outcomes, cognitive development, and employability. Drawing on emerging institutional evidence, illustrative case studies, and global comparative models from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Finland, the findings demonstrate that IKS enhances cognitive capabilities, cultural identity, sustainability awareness, and vocational competencies. Key implementation challenges, including faculty preparedness, regional disparities, and epistemic bias, are critically examined. The paper concludes with five actionable policy recommendations for the sustainable, community-anchored implementation of IKS, aligned with the Viksit Bharat @2047 vision.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems, National Education Policy 2020, Decolonizing Education, Sustainable Development Goals, Viksit Bharat @2047, Epistemic Justice, Skill Development

1. Introduction

Education systems worldwide are increasingly engaging with indigenous knowledge traditions to address challenges related to sustainability, cultural diversity, and inclusive development (UNESCO, 2022). India's NEP 2020 represents a transformative initiative aimed at revitalizing Indian Knowledge Systems and integrating them into formal educational frameworks at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2020). Colonial education policies, particularly following Macaulay's Minute on Education (1835), institutionalised Western epistemologies while marginalising indigenous traditions (Fanon, 1961). Despite independence, structural biases persist in curricula and institutional practices, privileging imported frameworks over local epistemologies (Ranganathan, 2021).

Indian Knowledge Systems encompass diverse domains including mathematics, medicine, agriculture, philosophy, and environmental science (Bhushan & Rao, 2022). These systems emphasize holistic understanding, sustainability ethics, and community engagement that align with contemporary educational priorities such as experiential learning and skill-based education (Verma, 2025). However, systematic empirical investigations into IKS's impact on learning outcomes and

employability remain limited (Narayan, 2026; Amin, 2026). This paper addresses the research question: How does IKS integration under NEP 2020 contribute to epistemic inclusivity, sustainable development, and skill formation aligned with Viksit Bharat @2047? Three objectives guide the study: (1) to examine IKS in decolonizing India's education and restoring epistemic justice; (2) to analyze alignment between IKS domains and key SDGs; and (3) to evaluate IKS's contribution to skill development and employability.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

UNESCO (2022) emphasizes that indigenous knowledge traditions provide contextualized understanding of ecology, health, and human behaviour, complementing dominant scientific paradigms. Briggs (2013) argues that indigenous knowledge promotes social agency and cultural continuity, while Battiste (2013) and Dei (2000) highlight its role in culturally responsive pedagogy. In the Indian context, NEP 2020 marks a shift toward inclusive epistemologies recognizing Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and advocating integration of traditional knowledge across education levels (Ministry of Education, 2020). Ranganathan (2021) and Bhushan & Rao (2022) describe NEP 2020 as broadening the epistemic base by incorporating traditional domains such as Ayurveda, Yoga, classical languages, and arts. Despite positive developments, most studies remain qualitative, with limited empirical data on measurable IKS effects on achievement or cognitive development (Debbarma, 2025; Narayan, 2026). Table A summarizes the literature reviewed across four thematic domains.

Table A: Summary of Literature Reviewed by Theme

Theme	Key Sources	No. of Sources	Dominant Finding
Decolonization & Epistemic Justice	Fanon (1961), Said (1978), Spivak (1988), Briggs (2013), Battiste (2013)	12	Colonial education institutionalized epistemic hierarchies marginalizing indigenous knowledge.
IKS & NEP 2020	Ministry of Education (2020, 2024), Ranganathan (2021), Bhushan & Rao (2022)	14	NEP 2020 marks a significant policy shift toward epistemic pluralism
IKS & SDGs	UNESCO (2022), Verma (2025), Debbarma (2025)	10	Strong alignment between IKS domains and sustainability goals
Skill Development	Narayan (2026), Amin (2026), NCERT (2024)	14	IKS contributes to vocational competencies but lacks rigorous evaluation

Note. No. of Sources = number of peer-reviewed papers, books, and policy documents reviewed under each theme.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three intersecting theoretical perspectives. Postcolonial theory provides a lens to understand how colonial education privileged Western epistemologies while marginalizing indigenous knowledge, creating enduring epistemic hierarchies (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). Epistemic justice emphasizes fairness in recognizing diverse knowledge systems; epistemic injustice occurs when traditions are excluded from dominant academic discourse (Fricker, 2007). NEP 2020 addresses this by promoting epistemic pluralism, enabling multiple knowledge traditions to coexist (Dei, 2000; Battiste, 2013). Curriculum theory informs the shift from content-based to competency-based education, aligning with the holistic and practice-based nature of IKS as exemplified in the traditional Gurukul model (Tyler, 1949; Ministry of Education, 2020).

3. Research Gap

Despite NEP 2020's emphasis on IKS, a significant gap exists in systematic empirical research assessing measurable impact on student learning outcomes, cognitive skills, and employability (Debbarma, 2025; Narayan, 2026; Amin, 2026).

Existing studies are largely qualitative or conceptual, focusing on Sanskrit-based knowledge systems, while tribal, vernacular, and minority knowledge traditions remain underrepresented. Table B maps the specific gaps this paper identifies and addresses.

Table B: Research Gap Analysis

Gap Identified	What Exists	What is Missing	How This Paper Responds
Empirical assessment of IKS impact	Conceptual studies only	Mixed-method longitudinal data	Synthesizes institutional evidence; proposes an evaluation framework
Inclusive knowledge representation	Sanskrit-based IKS focus	Tribal, vernacular traditions	Highlights underrepresentation; calls for inclusive policy
Global comparative learning	Isolated national studies	Cross-country evidence-based adaptation	Compares Canada, Australia, NZ, and Finland with lessons for India
Skill development measurement	Anecdotal reports only	Standardized outcome metrics	Proposes National IKS Assessment Framework

Note. This paper addresses each identified gap through its three-pillar analytical framework and five policy recommendations.

4. IKS Integration under NEP 2020

NEP 2020 emphasizes IKS integration across school, higher, and vocational education through curriculum reform, interdisciplinary programs, and knowledge hubs. Fifty-one IKS Centres have been established to support research, teaching, and dissemination (Ministry of Education, 2024). Thirty-eight IKS courses have been launched across 12 institutions, covering Vedic Mathematics, classical Indian philosophy, traditional health sciences, and indigenous arts. Over 8,000 HEIs have adopted IKS modules, and approximately 5,527 internships in IKS-related fields have been offered. Digitization of over 1.5 lakh traditional manuscripts further enriches learning resources (Ministry of Education, 2024). Figure 1 illustrates the institutional timeline.

2020	NEP 2020 announced. IKS integration is mandated across school, higher, and vocational education.
2022	IKS Centres established. UNESCO endorses indigenous knowledge integration globally (UNESCO, 2022).
2023	Faculty training initiated. 1,000 faculty members and 200 master trainers trained (Ministry of Education, 2024).
2024	51 IKS Centres are operational. 8,000+ HEIs adopting IKS modules. 5,527 internships. 1.5 lakh manuscripts digitized (Ministry of Education, 2024).
2047	Target: Fully integrated, empirically validated IKS framework supporting Viksit Bharat @2047.

Figure 1. Timeline of IKS Integration under NEP 2020 (2020-2047).

Illustrative case examples from reported institutional practices (NCERT, 2024) show early impact: a Kerala secondary school student engaging with a Vedic Mathematics module for three months showed a 40% reduction in problem-solving time, while an Uttarakhand student in a Yoga program exhibited improved concentration and stress management. These examples are indicative rather than conclusive; controlled longitudinal studies are necessary to establish causal relationships. A significant concern is the urban-rural disparity in IKS adoption. Urban institutions benefit from better infrastructure and trained faculty, while rural and tribal institutions — with the most authentic connection to indigenous traditions — receive the least support (Narayan, 2026; Verma, 2025).

5. Thematic Findings from Literature Synthesis

The qualitative thematic analysis reveals four key dimensions of transformation from IKS integration under NEP 2020. Table C summarizes the supporting evidence.

Table C: Summary of Evidence Supporting Thematic Findings

Finding	Supporting Evidence	Source	Evidence Strength
IKS improves mathematical proficiency	40% reduction in problem-solving time	NCERT, 2024	Moderate
IKS enhances student well-being	Improved stress management and concentration	Debbarma, 2025	Moderate
Broad institutional adoption	8,000+ HEIs adopting IKS modules	MoE, 2024	Strong
Student engagement in IKS fields	5,527 internships offered	MoE, 2024	Strong
Faculty shortage persists	Only ~1,000 trained vs 8,000+ HEIs	Narayan, 2026	Strong
Rural-urban disparity in adoption	Urban institutions adopt IKS faster	Verma, 2025	Moderate

Note. Evidence strength: Strong = policy records or large-scale institutional data; Moderate = qualitative or single-case evidence.

5.1. Pillar 1: Epistemic Justice and Decolonization

IKS integration contributes significantly to restoring epistemic justice by challenging the historical dominance of Western knowledge systems (Fanon, 1961; Fricker, 2007). The establishment of 51 IKS Centres and the mandate of 5% IKS credits at the undergraduate level demonstrate a systemic shift toward inclusivity (Ministry of Education, 2024). Digitization of 1.5 lakh manuscripts transforms previously marginalized knowledge into accessible academic resources, enhancing their legitimacy (Ranganathan, 2021). However, uneven implementation persists due to institutional disparities in infrastructure and faculty preparedness (Narayan, 2026).

5.2 Pillar 2: Synergy between IKS and SDGs

The findings reveal strong alignment between IKS domains and Sustainable Development Goals. Ayurveda and Yoga contribute to SDG 3 by promoting preventive healthcare and holistic wellness (Debbarma, 2025). Traditional water systems and agro-ecological practices align with SDG 6 and SDG 13 (UNESCO, 2022). IKS functions as a living laboratory embedding sustainability within daily practices rather than treating it as abstract knowledge (Verma, 2025). Table 1 illustrates this alignment systematically.

Table 1: Alignment of Indian Knowledge Systems with Sustainable Development Goals

IKS Domain	SDG	Contribution
Ayurveda & Yoga	SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being	Promotes holistic healing and preventive healthcare (Debbarma, 2025)
Vedic Mathematics	SDG 4: Quality Education	Enhances computational speed, accuracy, and cognitive ability (Yadav, Singh, & Dutt, 2025)
Traditional Water Systems	SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Ensures sustainable community-based water management (UNESCO, 2022)
Indigenous Ecology	SDG 13: Climate Action	Supports ecological balance and traditional environmental ethics (Bhushan & Rao, 2022)
Sustainable Agriculture	SDG 15: Life on Land	Promotes biodiversity conservation and sustainable farming (Verma, 2025)

Note. Table 1 highlights the role of IKS in achieving SDGs through holistic, sustainable, and context-specific approaches.

5.3 Pillar 3: Skill Formation and Viksit Bharat @2047

The 5,527 internships documented indicate increased student engagement in applying traditional knowledge in sectors such as sustainable agriculture, architecture, and herbal entrepreneurship (Ministry of Education, 2024). IKS contributes to problem-solving skills, creativity, and entrepreneurial abilities (Debbarma, 2025). IKS-associated vocational competencies, including traditional crafts, herbal medicine, and ecological conservation provide pathways to livelihood opportunities complementing formal vocational training and bolstering employability (Narayan, 2026).

5.4 Pillar 4: Challenges and Structural Barriers

Faculty preparedness remains the most critical barrier. Despite training approximately 1,000 faculty members and 200 master trainers, the scale of IKS integration across 8,000+ HEIs demands far greater investment in human resources (Narayan, 2026). Regional disparities compound challenges, with urban institutions disproportionately benefiting from existing infrastructure. A risk of epistemic bias persists, as current implementation disproportionately emphasizes Sanskrit-based classical systems while oral traditions, tribal ecological knowledge, and vernacular practices remain largely absent from formal curricula (Fricker, 2007; Amin, 2026).

6. Critical Analysis: IKS, Sustainability, and Skill Development

IKS holds significant potential for addressing contemporary educational and developmental goals, particularly in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Empirical evidence from 5,527 internships and 88 interdisciplinary research projects suggests that IKS integration fosters student engagement well beyond traditional classroom boundaries (Amin, 2026). From a cognitive development perspective, practices rooted in IKS — particularly Vedic Mathematics — demonstrate measurable improvements in computational speed, accuracy, and mental flexibility. Experiential learning approaches supported by Yoga and mindfulness programs contribute to emotional regulation and stress management, both of which are essential for sustained academic success (Debbarma, 2025). Skill development represents another critical dimension: IKS-associated vocational competencies such as traditional crafts, sustainable agriculture, herbal medicine preparation, and ecological conservation provide concrete pathways to livelihood opportunities and entrepreneurship, complementing formal vocational training and enhancing employability in both local and global contexts (Narayan, 2026). However, it is equally important to critically examine the limitations of IKS as an educational intervention. Not all traditional knowledge systems have undergone rigorous scientific validation, and uncritical romanticization of indigenous practices risks introducing unverified or contextually inappropriate content into formal curricula (Shiva, 2016). Effective IKS integration, therefore, requires robust quality assurance mechanisms built on interdisciplinary dialogue between IKS practitioners, scientists, and educators, rather than wholesale or tokenistic adoption. Furthermore, the current evidence base remains largely institutional and self-reported. Independent, peer-reviewed evaluations of IKS outcomes are critically needed to move the field decisively from policy aspiration toward genuine evidence-based educational practice.

7. Global Comparisons and Lessons

A comparative perspective provides insights into varied approaches to indigenous knowledge integration. Table 2 presents a structured comparison across five countries.

Table 2: Global Comparison of Indigenous Knowledge Integration in Education Systems

Country	Knowledge Focus	Implementation	Lessons for India
Canada	First Nations, Inuit, Metis	Community-led curriculum, co-teaching, participatory research	Emphasises community ownership; avoids tokenistic inclusion (UNESCO, 2022)
Australia	Aboriginal knowledge	Curriculum integration, teacher training, cultural immersion	Highlights the importance of faculty preparedness and culturally responsive pedagogy (Briggs, 2013)

Country	Knowledge Focus	Implementation	Lessons for India
New Zealand	Maori knowledge	Bicultural curriculum, inclusive assessment, project-based learning	Demonstrates strong policy-evaluation alignment and continuous curriculum reform (Battiste, 2013)
Finland	Sami indigenous knowledge	Bilingual education, knowledge holders as educational authorities	Shows how majority-culture nations give minority indigenous knowledge full academic legitimacy
India	Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedic Mathematics, tribal knowledge	Policy mandate via NEP 2020, IKS Centres, credit-based courses	Needs stronger community participation, rigorous evaluation, and inclusive representation (Ministry of Education, 2024)

Note. Adapted from UNESCO (2022), Briggs (2013), and Battiste (2013). Finland added by Deepak.

India's approach is predominantly policy-driven, unlike the community-led Canadian or bicultural New Zealand model. From Canada, India should adopt formal community co-ownership mechanisms in curriculum design (UNESCO, 2022). From Australia, a mandatory IKS Teacher Certification Programme would strengthen faculty preparedness (Briggs, 2013). In New Zealand, structured policy evaluation cycles every three years would enable continuous curriculum reform (Battiste, 2013). Finland's integration of Sami knowledge demonstrates how majority-culture nations can give minority indigenous knowledge full academic legitimacy — a model India should adapt for tribal and minority knowledge traditions.

8. Discussion and Policy Implications

The empirical scale of IKS integration under NEP 2020 reflects a strong policy commitment. Mandating that 5% of undergraduate credits derive from IKS embeds traditional knowledge meaningfully into curricula (Ministry of Education, 2024). However, effective implementation requires capacity building far beyond current levels. Regional disparities persist, with urban institutions benefiting from infrastructure and faculty availability. Addressing inequities requires digital resources, localized curriculum planning, and mentorship networks (Verma, 2025). Community involvement through community-academic partnerships, elder participation, and recognition of local knowledge holders strengthens cultural relevance and epistemic integrity (Amin, 2026).

8.1 Theoretical Contribution

This paper makes a distinct theoretical contribution by proposing a three-pillar conceptual framework — Epistemic Justice and Decolonization, SDG Synergy, and Skill Formation for Viksit Bharat @2047 — to systematically analyze IKS integration under NEP 2020. This framework operationalizes abstract concepts of epistemic justice into concrete, measurable policy dimensions and provides a replicable analytical structure for future researchers examining IKS integration across different states, institutional types, and knowledge traditions.

8.2 Limitations

This study relies predominantly on secondary sources, including policy documents, institutional reports, and existing literature, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships between IKS integration and specific educational outcomes. Student case examples are illustrative and drawn from institutional reports rather than independent research. Literature reviewed may not capture all relevant regional language scholarship on IKS. Future research should employ mixed-method longitudinal studies and independent third-party evaluation of IKS programs across diverse institutional contexts.

9. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems under NEP 2020 represents a critical step toward decolonizing education and fostering epistemic inclusivity. By incorporating traditional knowledge domains into formal curricula at school, higher, and vocational levels, NEP 2020 challenges the historical dominance of Western epistemologies and creates space for indigenous perspectives that shaped Indian intellectual traditions for millennia. Evidence from over 8,000 HEIs

adopting IKS modules, 5,527 internships, and 88 interdisciplinary research projects indicates growing institutional traction, while case examples demonstrate improvements in mathematical proficiency, cognitive flexibility, and stress management. However, challenges persist, including faculty preparation gaps, regional disparities, epistemic bias toward Sanskrit-based traditions, and the need for longitudinal assessment. Based on the analysis presented, **five policy recommendations** are proposed:

1. **Community Co-Ownership:** Formal Community Academic Partnership Agreements should involve indigenous knowledge holders, tribal communities, and local practitioners directly in IKS curriculum design, delivery, and review, ensuring cultural authenticity and epistemic integrity.
2. **National IKS Assessment Framework:** A standardised framework should measure IKS's impact on student learning outcomes, cognitive development, cultural identity, and employability through independent evaluations at three-year intervals.
3. **Mandatory IKS Teacher Certification:** A structured IKS Teacher Certification Programme should be a mandatory prerequisite for educators delivering IKS courses, combining content knowledge, culturally responsive pedagogy, and community immersion experiences.
4. **Rural IKS Resource Centres:** Dedicated rural IKS Resource Centres with digital infrastructure, digitized manuscript access, and trained facilitators should address the urban-rural disparity in IKS access and institutional adoption.
5. **Longitudinal Impact Studies:** Multi-site, mixed-method longitudinal studies tracking IKS integration impact over five and ten-year periods should specifically include tribal, vernacular, and minority knowledge traditions to ensure inclusive evidence generation.

When strategically implemented, continuously evaluated, and genuinely supported by communities, IKS can transform India's education system into a more inclusive, sustainable, and culturally rooted endeavour — directly advancing Viksit Bharat @2047 while preserving India's rich intellectual heritage for future generations.

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