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Bridging the Gap: The Role of Interpersonal Skills in Enhancing Teacher Effectiveness as Perceived by Students

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of teachers' interpersonal skills on their perceived effectiveness as evaluated by students in secondary and higher secondary schools in India. Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) and the Student–Teacher Relationship Model (Pianta, 2001), this research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative survey (N = 450) with semi-structured focus groups. Quantitative data were analysed using multiple regression to assess the predictive power of empathy, clarity, immediacy, and conflict-management on student-rated effectiveness (Gorham, 1988; Andersen, 1979; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987). Qualitative insights were drawn using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to contextualise the quantitative findings. Results indicate that teacher immediacy and empathy significantly predict student perceptions of instructional quality and classroom climate, accounting for 62% of variance in perceived effectiveness ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). Clarity of communication also emerged as a strong contributor ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$). In contrast, conflict-management skills, though valued, had a more negligible effect ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). The study outlines practical implications for teacher training programmes, emphasising interpersonal skill development as essential for enhancing educational outcomes.

Keywords: *Teacher Interpersonal Skills, Immediacy and Empathy, Verbal Clarity, Conflict-Management, Student-Perceived Effectiveness, Social Cognitive Theory, Student–Teacher Relationship Model.*

Introduction

Effective teaching transcends content delivery, encompassing teachers' and learners' relational and communicative exchanges. Interpersonal skills—the behaviours facilitating effective and appropriate interaction—are pivotal in shaping student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Hattie, 2009). In the Indian educational context, where large class sizes and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds present unique challenges, the quality of teacher–student interactions assumes heightened importance (Singh & Sharma, 2017; Arora & Rangnekar, 2010). Students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness reflect cognitive learning and affective classroom experiences (Cornelius-White, 2007; Emmer & Stough, 2001). Behaviours such as verbal clarity, nonverbal immediacy, empathy, and constructive conflict resolution foster a supportive learning environment (Gorham, 1988; Andersen, 1979; Richmond et al., 1987). Deficits in these areas can undermine student trust and engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Thus, understanding which interpersonal dimensions influence student perceptions is critical for theoretical advancement and teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

This paper addresses two primary research questions:

1. Which interpersonal skills are strongly associated with student-perceived teacher effectiveness?
2. How do students qualitative insights explain the influence of these skills on classroom experiences?

By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study offers comprehensive insights into the interpersonal underpinnings of effective teaching in Indian secondary schools.

Theoretical Framework

A robust theoretical framework situates empirical inquiry within established constructs, guiding both the selection of variables and the interpretation of findings. This study draws principally on three interrelated theories: Social Cognitive Theory, the Student–Teacher Relationship Model, and theories of instructional communication, specifically, communication immediacy and clarity. They provide a coherent lens to examine how teachers’ interpersonal skills shape students’ perceptions of effectiveness.

Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1977) posits that learning transpires through reciprocal interactions among personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour. Central to this perspective is **observational learning**, whereby individuals internalise and reproduce behaviours modelled in their social milieu. Teachers’ interpersonal behaviours—such as gestures of warmth, empathic responses, and clear demonstrations—function as **social models** that students attend to, encode, and emulate. Moreover, Bandura emphasises **self-efficacy** (“belief in one’s capabilities to organise and execute courses of action,” p. 3), which is bolstered when students perceive their teachers as approachable and supportive (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Thus, when teachers display high immediacy and empathy, they foster a favourable affective climate and enhance students’ confidence in their learning processes.

Student–Teacher Relationship Model

Pianta’s Student–Teacher Relationship Model (2001) delineates key dimensions of the interpersonal bond between educators and learners: **closeness**, **conflict**, and **dependency**.

- **Closeness** refers to warmth, open communication, and mutual respect, which promote secure, trusting relationships.
- **Conflict** captures friction, negativity, and power struggles, which can diminish engagement and well-being.
- **Dependency** describes overreliance on the teacher, potentially undermining student autonomy.

Empirical studies demonstrate that high closeness and low conflict predict positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). By mapping our interpersonal skill constructs, immediacy aligns with closeness, conflict-management addresses the conflict dimension, and empathy tempers dependency—this model directly informs the selection of predictor variables and the expected direction of their effects on perceived teacher effectiveness.

Instructional Communication: Immediacy and Clarity

Communication immediacy—originally conceptualised by Gorham (1988) and Andersen (1979)—encompasses both **verbal** (e.g., inclusive language, personal anecdotes) and **nonverbal** (e.g., eye contact, open posture, smiling) behaviours that reduce psychological distance between communicators. Richmond, Gorham, and McCroskey (1987) later demonstrated that higher teacher immediacy fosters increased student motivation, attention, and affective learning. Nonverbal immediacy cues signal approachability and reinforce verbal messages (Mehrabian, 1971; Richmond & McCroskey, 2000).

Verbal clarity refers to spoken instructions' organisation, simplicity, and coherence (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Elements such as clearly stated objectives, structured transitions, exemplar illustrations, and periodic summaries help manage cognitive load, enabling students to construct mental schemata efficiently (Hattie & Yates, 2014). Clarity also mitigates misunderstandings and fosters learner autonomy by making expectations explicit (Emmer & Stough, 2001).

Integrative Perspective and Hypotheses

Integrating these theories yields a clear rationale for our hypotheses. Social Cognitive Theory suggests that teachers' interpersonal displays (immediacy, empathy) serve as models that shape students' engagement and self-efficacy. The Student–Teacher Relationship Model predicts that relationship quality (closeness, low conflict) underpins favourable student outcomes. Instructional communication theory further specifies that clarity and immediacy bolster cognitive and affective learning. Accordingly, this study hypothesises that higher levels of teacher immediacy, empathy, verbal clarity, and effective conflict management will each contribute positively—and in varying magnitudes—to students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness.

Literature Review

Empathy and Emotional Support

Empathy enables teachers to recognise and respond to students' emotional states (Cooper, 2004). Studies show that empathic teaching correlates with higher student motivation and reduced anxiety (Van Petegem, Creemers, Rossel, & Aelterman, 2008; Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011). In India, Bhattacharya (2015) reported that students value teachers' concern for their welfare nearly as much as instructional expertise.

Verbal Clarity and Instructional Communication

Marzano et al. (2001) identified clear communication as one of nine high-yield teaching strategies. Teacher clarity predicts student achievement and perceived competence (Hattie & Yates, 2014; Emmer & Stough, 2001). Kumar (2012) found that the clarity of instruction significantly influences students' ability to organise and process information.

Nonverbal Immediacy

Nonverbal immediacy behaviours—smiling, eye contact, open posture—enhance affective learning and rapport (Mehrabian, 1971; Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Meta-analyses confirm that higher teacher immediacy relates to increased student motivation and satisfaction (Roberts & Friedman, 2008; Liu & Hallinger, 2018).

Conflict Management and Classroom Climate

Effective conflict management fosters a favourable classroom climate, reducing disruptive behaviour and supporting collaborative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). In Indian classrooms, where teacher-centred norms prevail, collaborative conflict-resolution remains underutilised (Singh & Sharma, 2017).

Gaps in Existing Research

Prior work in India has primarily been qualitative or limited in scale (Arora & Rangnekar, 2010; Singh & Sharma, 2017). Few studies integrate rigorous quantitative analyses with rich qualitative data to substantiate the unique contribution of each interpersonal dimension to perceived teacher effectiveness.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), allowing simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data to produce a holistic understanding.

Participants

The sample comprised 450 students (ages 15–18) from six urban and rural secondary schools in Gujarat, selected via stratified random sampling (Babbie, 2013; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Instruments

1. **Interpersonal Skills Questionnaire (ISQ):** Adapted from Richmond et al. (1987) and Cooper (2004), this 32-item Likert-scale instrument measures empathy, verbal clarity, immediacy (verbal and nonverbal), and conflict management. Cronbach's α ranged from .82 to .89 across subscales (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).
2. **Teacher Effectiveness Scale (TES):** A 20-item scale based on Hattie (2009) and Marzano et al. (2001), assessing instructional quality, classroom climate, and motivational support ($\alpha = .91$).
3. **Focus Groups:** Six focus groups (8–10 students each) explored students' experiences of teacher interpersonal behaviours. A semi-structured guide probed perceptions of empathy, clarity, immediacy, and conflict resolution (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Procedure

Surveys were administered in classroom settings under researcher supervision. Focus groups were conducted in school halls, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS 25.0. Multiple regression analysis tested the predictive influence of each interpersonal skill on TES scores (Field, 2018). Qualitative data were coded inductively and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Table 1. Multiple Regression Results Predicting Student-Rated Teacher Effectiveness

Predictor	β	SE	T	p-value	95% CI for β	Interpretation
Immediacy	.54	.04	13.50	< .001	[.46, .62]	Largest contributor: warmth and approachability powerfully boost ratings.
Empathy	.42	.05	8.40	< .001	[.32, .52]	Significant: Emotional attunement fosters trust and engagement.
Verbal Clarity	.31	.06	5.17	< .01	[.19, .43]	Clear explanations help students follow and learn more effectively.
Conflict-Management	.18	.07	2.57	< .05	[.04, .32]	Modest but meaningful: fair handling of disagreements supports classroom order.
Model Fit						$R^2 = .62$, $F(4, 445) = 182.3$, $p < .001$

Table 2. Qualitative Themes from Student Focus Groups

Theme Label	Description	Supporting Quotes
“A Teacher Who Listens, Understands, and Cares”	Students valued it when teachers acknowledged their feelings and offered tailored support.	“She hears me out when I am stuck.”
“When It is Clear, It is Near”	Well-structured lessons, examples, and summaries made content accessible and reduced confusion.	“Once he breaks it down, it all makes sense.”
“A Smile Goes a Long Way”	Simple nonverbal cues: eye contact, smiles, open posture—created a welcoming atmosphere and eased anxiety.	“Her smile makes me comfortable asking questions.”
“Peace Over Power”	Constructive conflict resolution—mediated discussions, explicit norms—fostered mutual respect, though observed less often.	“He solves fights calmly, not by yelling.”

The analysis first examined how teachers’ interpersonal skills collectively predicted students’ perceptions of teacher effectiveness. A multiple regression model including immediacy, empathy, verbal clarity, and conflict-management accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in students’ ratings ($R^2 = .62$, $F(4, 445) = 182.3$, $p < .001$). Knowing how warm, understanding, transparent, and fair a teacher is explains 62% of the differences in how students evaluate their effectiveness. Among these skills, **immediacy**—the degree of warmth and approachability—emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$), indicating that each incremental increase in perceived immediacy led to the most significant boost in students’ effectiveness ratings. **Empathy** followed ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), showing that students valued teachers who genuinely understood and responded to their feelings.

Verbal clarity also contributed significantly ($\beta = .31$, $p < .01$), reflecting the importance of well-structured explanations, examples, and summaries. Finally, **conflict-management** skills had a more minor yet meaningful effect ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), suggesting that fair and calm resolution of classroom disagreements supports a respectful learning environment. Qualitative data from six focus groups enriched these numerical findings by revealing how students experience these interpersonal behaviours in real classrooms. Four themes encapsulate their perspectives:

1. **“A Teacher Who Listens, Understands, and Cares.”**

Students repeatedly described feeling motivated when teachers validated their concerns, offered encouragement, and adapted support to their emotional needs, underscoring the critical role of empathy (Cooper, 2004; Van Petegem et al., 2008).

2. **“When It is Clear, It is Near.”**

Clear communication—breaking down complex ideas, using concrete examples, and recapping key points—helped students follow lessons confidently and reduced confusion (Marzano et al., 2001; Emmer & Stough, 2001).

3. **“A Smile Goes a Long Way.”**

Nonverbal immediacy behaviours such as eye contact, open posture, and positive facial expressions created a welcoming atmosphere that encouraged participation and reduced anxiety (Mehrabian, 1971; Roberts & Friedman, 2008).

4. **“Peace Over Power.”**

Although less frequently observed, constructive conflict-management—facilitating respectful peer discussions and setting clear behavioural expectations—was praised for maintaining classroom harmony and mutual respect (Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015).

Discussion

The present study demonstrates that teachers’ interpersonal skills—particularly immediacy, empathy, and verbal clarity—play a pivotal role in shaping students’ perceptions of instructional effectiveness. Consistent with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977), teachers’ warm and approachable behaviours (immediacy) function as powerful social models, enhancing students’ engagement and self-efficacy. The finding that immediacy was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .54, p < .001$) aligns with Gorham’s (1988) assertion that reducing psychological distance fosters greater attention and motivation. In the Indian context, where hierarchical teacher–student dynamics often prevail, immediacy may humanise the educator role, encouraging more active participation (Bhattacharya, 2015; Arora & Rangnekar, 2010).

Empathy’s substantial influence ($\beta = .42, p < .001$) underscores the importance of emotional attunement in teaching. By acknowledging students’ feelings and concerns, empathic teachers create a trusting climate that promotes risk-taking and persistence (Cooper, 2004; Van Petegem et al., 2008). This finding extends prior work in Western settings (Allen et al., 2011) by confirming that empathic responsiveness holds equal merit in diverse cultural milieus, where relational connectedness is highly valued (Singh & Sharma, 2017).

Verbal clarity also significantly predicted perceived effectiveness ($\beta = .31, p < .01$), corroborating Marzano et al.’s (2001) high-yield strategy of clear instructional communication. When teachers articulate objectives, organise content logically, and provide illustrative examples, students can construct mental schemas more efficiently, improving comprehension and confidence (Hattie & Yates, 2014; Emmer & Stough, 2001). A clarity deficit, in contrast, may exacerbate cognitive load and hinder learning, particularly in large classrooms with varied proficiency levels (Kumar, 2012).

Although conflict-management demonstrated a more negligible effect ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), qualitative data revealed its critical role in sustaining a respectful classroom climate. Effective resolution of disagreements minimises disruption and models collaborative problem-solving skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). The relatively modest quantitative weight may reflect the scarcity of constructive conflict-management strategies in traditional Indian classrooms, suggesting an area ripe for targeted professional development.

Practical Implications

Teacher preparation programmes should incorporate explicit training on nonverbal immediacy and empathic communication, utilising role-plays, video-based feedback, and reflective journaling to foster these competencies (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Cooper, 2004). Workshops on structuring clear lessons—including learning objective framing, transitional signalling, and summarisation techniques can strengthen verbal clarity (Marzano et al., 2001). Moreover, school leaders should promote peer observation and mentoring focused on conflict-management practices to enrich collaborative classroom cultures (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal or experimental studies would clarify how interpersonal skill development over time impacts student outcomes. Additionally, reliance on self-report measures may introduce social desirability bias. Future work could incorporate classroom observations and student performance metrics to triangulate findings. Exploring the interplay between interpersonal skills and contextual variables, such as class size, subject matter, and socio-economic background, would further refine our understanding of these dynamics.

In sum, this study affirms that interpersonal skills constitute foundational pillars of effective teaching. By systematically nurturing immediacy, empathy, clarity, and conflict management, educators can meaningfully enhance students' learning experiences and academic success.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that teachers' interpersonal skills—particularly immediacy, empathy, and clarity—significantly shape students' perceptions of effectiveness. By prioritising these skills' cultivation in pre-service and in-service contexts, educational stakeholders can foster more engaging and supportive learning environments. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of interpersonal skills development on student achievement and well-being.

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An Exploration of Women's Identity and Agency in Indian Literature through Selected Authors

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Abstract

This paper investigates the nuanced representations of women's identity and agency in Indian literature through the works of five prominent authors: *Forbidden Desires* by Madhuri Banerjee, *It Rained All Night* by Buddhadev Bose, *The Dark Room* by R.K. Narayan, *My Story* by Kamala Das, and *Lifting the Veil* by Ismat Chughtai. The study reveals how narratives from colonial to contemporary India challenge patriarchal expectations, emphasize female subjectivity, and reconstruct the concept of womanhood. Each piece addresses the politics of gender, sexuality, and domestic space, despite their distinct literary styles and historical contexts. The comparative lens uncovers how the female protagonists negotiate, resist, or succumb to the socio-cultural constraints imposed upon them. In the end, this paper argues that literature becomes an essential venue for reimagining women's agency outside of traditional roles and moral boundaries.

Keywords: *women's identity, female agency, Indian literature, feminist critique, patriarchy.*

INTRODUCTION

In literary discourse, '**agency**' refers to the capacity of individuals. In this article we are discussing the agency of women in the context of Indian literature to make autonomous choices, act independently, and bring about a change in the sociocultural structures that generally constrain them. In Indian literature, women's agency is frequently depicted through acts of defiance, resilience, or even quiet subversion against traditional gender roles, caste hierarchies, and societal expectations. This concept is central to examining how female characters assert control over their bodies, relationships, and destinies, often within rigid familial systems. For example, in novels by authors such as Kamala Das or Mahasweta Devi, agency is depicted not only in the act of rebellion but also in the everyday decisions women make to reclaim power within oppressive environments.

Identity refers to the way individuals perceive and construct their sense of self, influenced by factors like gender, caste, class, religion, and culture. In Indian literature, women's identity is often shaped by socio-political forces, familial roles, and historical contexts. This context evolves when viewed through the lens of tradition and modernity. Literature is the space where women characters and women authors assert their identities amidst marginalization. In the works of writers like Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai, women characters are dynamic; they evolve through their personal desires, societal pressures, and political realities. In Indian literature, the representation of women has historically oscillated between deeply entrenched binaries—virtuous vs. fallen, submissive vs. rebellious, and mother vs. seductress. The literary imagination has been shaped by these archetypes, which are frequently based on religious, cultural, and colonial pasts.

These archetypes have also confined female subjectivity within predetermined boundaries. According to Tharu and Lalita (1991), the ideal woman was frequently depicted as silent, selfless, and spiritually pure, whereas women who expressed desire, rage, or autonomy were portrayed as morally questionable or tragic. However, a growing body of literature written in various Indian languages and periods has attempted to challenge these stereotypes by portraying women as complex individuals with internal conflicts, sexual agency, and political consciousness rather than as symbols. This paper focuses on five distinct literary texts that engage deeply with the construction and evolution of women's identity and agency in Indian society: Madhuri Banerjee's *Forbidden Desires*, Buddhadev Bose's *It Rained All Night*, R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room*, *My Story* by Kamala Das, and *Lifting the Veil* by Ismat Chughtai. These works are all about bringing the female experience to the forefront within a patriarchal framework that aims to control women's bodies, emotions, and voices, despite their disparate tone, era, and form. *Forbidden Desires* (2012), a contemporary narrative set in urban India by Madhuri Banerjee, looks at the emotional and sexual dissatisfaction of modern women as they try to balance careers, marriage, and being mothers. The protagonist's decisions—particularly her extramarital affair—are neither glorified nor condemned; instead, they are portrayed as an attempt to reclaim lost agency within the monotony and invisibility of her domestic life. This novel reflects what Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) described as the necessity to recognize "the complexity of female subject positions" in postcolonial contexts, as women's roles are shaped simultaneously by tradition and neoliberal modernity. Buddhadev Bose broke the Bengali literary taboo on female desire in *It Rained All Night* (1967). His female protagonist, Malati, chooses to remain emotionally and sexually distant from her husband, not out of cruelty but in pursuit of emotional authenticity. Bose renders her decisions with psychological depth and empathy rather than moralizing them. According to Amit Chaudhuri (2013), Bose's works were among the first in Indian fiction to treat female sexual agency as existentially significant rather than scandalous. R.K. Narayan offers a new perspective on the everyday suffocation of middle-class Indian women within the confines of the home in his portrayal of Savitri, a housewife, in *The Dark Room* (1938). Although Narayan is frequently regarded as a gentle satirist of Indian life, she offers a moving critique of the patriarchal family, in which a woman's worth is solely determined by her service and silence. In a world that denies her personhood, Savitri's brief departure from home is a symbolic rebellion and a brief assertion of identity (Mukherjee, 1989). This rebellion is brought into the realm of autobiography by Kamala Das in her 1976 novel *My Story*, which presents the reader with unfiltered confessions of emotional trauma, sexual longing, and psychological turmoil. Due to its unflinching depiction of the female body and mind, Das's memoir was revolutionary as well as controversial. She wrote from a space of lived truth, challenging both literary convention and societal expectation. As Devika (2006) notes, Das's text reclaims the act of storytelling as a feminist gesture, where the confessional becomes a form of resistance against imposed roles of virtue and silence. Ismat Chughtai's *Lifting the Veil* (2009), a collection of essays and stories, is both literary and political. Chughtai criticizes religious and feudal practices that limit women's autonomy, particularly the purdah practice, which she saw as not only a physical barrier but also a metaphorical way to silence women's voices.

Her bold and humorous style undercuts oppressive ideologies, offering sharp insight into the lives of Muslim women in early 20th-century India. As Aamir Mufti (1995) contends, Chughtai's writing "renders the domestic realm not as a refuge but as a contested political space."

These texts portray the woman as a subject of thought, emotion, and desire, often at odds with the world around her. Reflecting the diverse nature of Indian society and its literary heritage, these narratives span linguistic (Urdu, English, Bengali), temporal (colonial, post-independence, contemporary), and stylistic (memoir, fiction, satire) boundaries. Nevertheless, despite their differences, they share a deep commitment to reimagining women not as fixed archetypes but as dynamic agents who question, defy, and reconstruct the structures around them.

This paper aims to discover how identity and agency are shaped in these narratives by employing a multidisciplinary lens that draws from feminist literary theory, psychoanalysis, and socio-cultural critique. The study also examines how literature serves as a platform for the negotiation, challenge, and rewriting of gender norms in Indian society. These authors, in their unique ways, use the written word to challenge hegemonic discourses and create alternate modes of being, thinking, and resisting.

1. FEMALE DESIRE AND EMOTIONAL REBELLION

In Indian literature and society, desire, particularly female desire, has long been regulated, frequently depicting it as dangerous or invisible. Women characters who express sexual or emotional needs are frequently marginalized or punished in this setting. However, the selected texts in this study subvert this narrative by placing desire at the core of female subjectivity. Through emotionally complex and sexually aware female characters, the authors expose how repression of desire not only curtails women's autonomy but also distorts the foundations of relationships and societal expectations.

Madhuri Banerjee's *Forbidden Desires* (2012) offers a striking portrayal of a modern Indian woman, Naina, who embarks on an extramarital affair to reclaim her emotional and sexual self. Unlike earlier portrayals in Indian literature that framed such transgressions within the logic of punishment or guilt, Banerjee presents Naina's choices with empathy and psychological depth. She is not reduced to a stereotype of the "fallen woman" or the "empowered feminist" in the novel. Instead, the novel illustrates how modern marriage often fails to meet women's emotional needs by placing them at the intersection of love, loneliness, and longing. According to Banerjee, her work aims to "give voice to the silenced modern woman," whose sexuality is often compared to patriarchal norms (Banerjee, 2012). Similarly, Buddhadev Bose's *It Rained All Night* (1967) explores the emotional and physical disintegration of a marriage. Malati, the central female character, chooses not to consummate her marriage, rejecting both emotional and sexual intimacy with her husband. For its time, Bose's treatment of Malati's agency is remarkable progress. Her decision is neither framed as pathological nor sinful, but rather as a deeply personal form of resistance against a relationship devoid of mutual understanding. Her emotional alienation is not a result of irrationality but a pursuit of authenticity. Chaudhuri (2013) highlights that Bose "broke new ground by presenting female sexual autonomy not as a social threat but as an existential truth," thus highlighting this psychological nuance. Malati's rebellion is expressed through withdrawal, whereas Naina's extramarital affair in Banerjee seeks emotional relief.

Both are acts of resistance that defy the social expectation that women must only find fulfilment in their conjugal responsibilities. These characters' emotional rebellion is inward, quiet, and frequently painful—it is neither flamboyant nor violent. And yet, it is through this pain that their identities are forged.

Kamala Das, in *My Story* (1976), transforms female desire into both confession and rebellion. Das candidly recounts her experiences with love, lust, loneliness, and longing, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. In post-colonial India, where even educated women were frequently discouraged from acknowledging their bodily needs, her openness about sexual desire was radical. In her memoir, she writes, “The female has always been regarded as the object of passion, not as one who could be passionate herself.” Her narrative challenges this view by reclaiming the female voice as one of desiring subjectivity. Das does not romanticize her sexual experiences; instead, she explores them as moments of revelation and resistance. Devika (2006) observes that “Das performs a feminist reclamation of the body—not as spectacle, but as a site of selfhood and authorship.”

In contrast, R.K. Narayan, in his 1938 film *The Dark Room*, depicts rebellion in a manner that is more subdued. Savitri, the protagonist, temporarily abandons her domestic life after her husband humiliates her. Though she ultimately returns, this departure becomes a symbolic rejection of the oppressive structures of marriage. Savitri does not articulate her desires in sexual terms, but her longing for respect and self-worth is no less significant. “Savitri's silence is a scream—a scream against a life denied and a self-erased,” says Mukherjee (1989). While less overt than Das or Banerjee’s protagonists, Savitri’s emotional rebellion is rooted in the same impulse: the desire for recognition and agency.

Ismat Chughtai’s work *Lifting the Veil* (2009) consistently returns to the theme of suppressed female desire, despite its more fragmented and essayistic style. Chughtai exposes how religious and cultural norms ensnare women in roles that deny them the space to articulate or act on their desires, whether she writes about her childhood or fictional characters. Chughtai describes in her autobiographical sketches how the veil becomes a metaphorical barrier that separates women from their bodies. She critiques not only external institutions but also the internalization of guilt and shame that shapes women’s self-perceptions. As Mufti (1995) notes, “Chughtai’s writing renders the domestic not as sanctuary but as prison—a site of both repression and revolt.” These stories show, taken as a whole, that desire is not just physical but also deeply emotional and psychological. These female protagonists break the long-imposed silence by expressing their longing for sexual fulfilment, respect, companionship, or self-understanding. Their acts of rebellion may differ in form, but they are united by a shared refusal to be passive subjects in stories written by others. As feminist theorist Hélène Cixous (1976) suggests, “Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing. By creating characters who dare to desire and, as a result, to exist on their own terms, these authors answer that call.

2. DOMESTIC SPACES AS SITES OF ENTRAPMENT

The domestic sphere—often idealized as a place of comfort, security, and moral purity—takes on a very different meaning in the selected literary works. The home transforms into a location of psychological entrapment, emotional confinement, and surveillance in each of the narratives under consideration.

Women's roles in the household—wife, mother, caretaker—are exposed as instruments for maintaining patriarchal authority and suppressing female autonomy, and the walls that are supposed to protect also serve to confine. These works expose the hidden costs of familial roles that deny women the right to be themselves and challenge the myth of the happy domestic woman. In R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* (1938), the titular space itself serves as a powerful metaphor for Savitri's condition within the family. The dark room becomes her physical and emotional refuge—a place where she can cry unseen, a symbolic representation of her invisibility within the home. Her husband, Ramani, is domineering and emotionally distant, and her role is largely reduced to caregiving and obedience. This novel presents a deeply unsettling depiction of gender roles in middle-class Indian households, despite Narayan's reputation for subtle satire and gentle storytelling. Although Savitri's decision to temporarily leave her marital home was eventually reversed, her motive is radical: she wants to be recognized, not escape. Mukherjee (1989) observes, "Narayan's domestic realism reveals the quiet tyranny of the home—where love is conditional, respect is rare, and individuality is non-existent."

Lifting the Veil by Ismat Chughtai also centers on the concept of entrapment. Chughtai critiques the purdah system and the associated cultural expectations that render women invisible, not only in public life but within their homes. The veil, both literal and metaphorical, conceals not only women's faces but also their voices, ambitions, and desires. She provides an insider's critique of the suffocating domestic and religious norms that restrict female agency in her stories and essays, which draw from her experiences as a Muslim woman in India prior to independence. Chughtai "pulls back the curtain not just on women's lives, but on the patriarchal imagination that designs the very architecture of domesticity," according to Tharu and Lalita (1991). Kamala Das transforms the domestic into a theater of emotional collapse, whereas Chughtai reveals the gendered violence of religious and social customs. The home is not a nurturing space in *My Story* (1976), but rather a place of suppression and betrayal. Das describes how her early marriage and domestic life's expectations sapped her sense of freedom. The sacred matrimonial bond is shattered when she describes marital sex as an act without intimacy or connection. The bed, which should symbolize intimacy and companionship, becomes for Das a battleground of coercion and resentment. Her choice to have extramarital affairs is not considered a sign of moral decline; rather, it is seen as a desperate defense of her right to feel, choose, and live. Devika (2006) says, "Das's rejection of the domestic ideal was both personal and political—it was an indictment of a society that glorified womanhood while erasing the woman." Das's rejection of the domestic ideal was both personal and political. Buddhadev Bose in *It Rained All Night* (1967), while writing from a male perspective, also problematizes the domestic setting. Emotional warmth and respect are absent from Malati and her husband's marital home. Malati's refusal to perform the expected duties of a wife is not framed as dysfunction but as moral resistance.

Here, the house is shown to be a cold, unfeeling place that is held together not by love but by obligation. Because of Bose's psychological realism, we are able to see how unbalanced relationships cause emotional damage. The story is a compelling case study in how emotional isolation and physical proximity can coexist (Chaudhuri, 2013) due to his ability to portray the subtle tensions of domestic life. In Madhuri Banerjee's *Forbidden Desires* (2012), the home becomes the very site of identity loss for the protagonists.

Their domestic lives are empty, shaped by routine and emotional neglect, despite their material security. Lack of interest from the spouse and the expectations of society prevent her from expressing her inner self. Banerjee shows a modern Indian home with careers, children, and vacations, but she also shows that being empowered by education or work does not always mean being emotionally or psychologically free. "I am a wife, a mother, and a daughter-in-law—but I don't know who I am," Naina says in the book. This statement sums up the feeling of alienation that many women who play roles rather than have identities experience. Mohanty (2003) argues that modern patriarchy frequently conceals its progress while still stifling women's ability to express their emotions and sexuality. Therefore, the home is more than just a physical location in all five texts; it is also a symbolic structure by which patriarchy is sustained. Women are not just confined within its walls; they are shaped by its moral codes, emotional expectations, and disciplinary rituals. These narratives dismantle the ideal of the domestic goddess by portraying women as thinking, feeling, rebelling, and rebellious, whose psychological landscapes are scarred by the demands of domestic conformity.

The authors highlight the contradictions that define women's lives in patriarchal societies by depicting the home as a place of both familiarity and alienation. The female characters do more than just live in their homes; they also fight against, reimagine, and eventually leave them. Their stories underscore the importance of redefining domestic spaces not as sites of duty, but as spaces where identity, freedom, and mutual respect can be nurtured.

3. EMBODIED IDENTITY AND SEXUAL CONFESSION

The articulation of the female self through the body has long been a battleground in Indian literature and society. Acknowledging bodily experiences, let alone sexual desire, becomes a radical act in a culture that traditionally venerates the spiritual over the physical, especially in the case of women. The female body is often seen not as a site of knowledge or power, but as a terrain to be disciplined, covered, controlled, and silenced. The selected texts demonstrate effective writing in this setting by focusing on bodily experience—not as a spectacle but as an essential part of identity, authorship, and rebellion. Kamala Das's *My Story* (1976) is perhaps the most explicit and unapologetic exploration of female embodiment in Indian literature. Das talks openly about her menstruation, sexual desires, unhappy marriage, and emotional turmoil. Her autobiography demolishes the Indian woman's ideal of selflessness and purity. She instead presents herself as fragmented but self-aware, wanting but conflicted, maternal yet erotic, and conflicted but wanting. Rigid social identities are put to the test by her willingness to play multiple roles. In one of the most discussed passages, she declares, "I always wanted love, and if love was not to be had, I wanted to be wanted."

This admission reclaims both emotional and sexual needs as essential aspects of womanhood by blurring the distinction between them. As Devika (2006) notes, Das's confession is not merely personal—it is a political intervention into the ways women's bodies are narrated and policed in Indian society.

Das's work resonates with Ismat Chughtai's *Lifting the Veil* (2009), where the veil becomes a symbol of the disconnect between a woman's external identity and her inner life. While Das lifts the veil through autobiographical honesty, Chughtai lifts it through satire and subversive fiction. When Chughtai's characters confront the shame associated with bodily processes like menstruation, childbirth, and sexual pleasure.

She makes the private public. The absurdity of taboos that treat the female body as impure or dangerous is brought to the reader's attention in her writings. As Tharu and Lalita (1991) assert, Chughtai's language "restores the body to literature not as fetish but as everyday truth."

Rebellion also manifests itself in more subdued forms. Malati, the character in Buddhadev Bose's *It Rained All Night* (1967), uses her body to resist rather than assert sexuality. Her rejection of physical intimacy within her marriage becomes an act of control—a refusal to submit to emotional and sexual expectations she finds meaningless. Malati's body becomes a fortress of autonomy rather than being there for male pleasure or cultural approval. Bose's rendering of this silent resistance aligns with what Judith Butler (1993) would later describe as "performative disobedience"—where not conforming to expected gender behaviors is itself a subversive act. The idea that women's moral worth is determined by their fidelity or self-denial is further challenged by Malati's decision to eventually pursue emotional connection outside of her marriage. The protagonist's sexual relationship with another man in Madhuri Banerjee's *Forbidden Desires* (2012) is more than just a plot device; it is also a reclaiming of bodily agency. Her decisions are framed not in terms of sin or scandal but rather in terms of her hunger—for affection, intimacy, and validation. Banerjee brings contemporary urban femininity into sharp focus, challenging the idea that modern women, despite being financially and socially liberated, are emotionally fulfilled. In portraying bodily choices as expressions of personal truth, Banerjee aligns with the post-feminist belief that agency resides in the power to choose, irrespective of societal judgment (Banerjee, 2012).

Even in King Narayan's *The Dark Room* (1938), where female sexuality is more subdued, embodiment is still a key theme. Savitri's physical retreat into the dark room is a withdrawal from a life of objectification and psychological despair. Her temporary escape from the domestic space can be read through Luce Irigaray's theory of female subjectivity with phallogocentric systems. Her withdrawal into the dark room is not mere passivity but a space of silent rebellion—what Kristeva might call a semiotic chora, where the maternal body withdraws from linguistic and social order. Her return is not surrender but a forced re-entry into a system that offers no viable alternatives. Although she does not overtly claim sexual agency, her withdrawal is still embodied; her refusal to perform the duties expected of her as a wife and mother manifests as a rebellion expressed through physical absence. Mukherjee (1989) suggests Narayan's novel quietly "acknowledges the pain that comes when a woman's body is treated only as functional, not emotional."

Across all these works, the body becomes a site of narrative intervention. Whether through sexual confession, resistance, or reclamation, these texts reposition the female body from object to subject, from silence to speech. They challenge the patriarchal tendency to treat the female form as either sacred or obscene—offering instead a nuanced spectrum where the body can be vulnerable, powerful, desiring, defiant, or simply human.

In writing about bodies: bleeding, aging, yearning and resisting, these authors perform a literary act of decolonization and depatriarchization. They restore to women not only the right to feel but also the right to articulate their feelings through their language, rhythm, and metaphors. "Write yourself," famously stated Hélène Cixous (1976). Your body must be heard."

4. COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS: RESISTANCE IN CONTEXT

A comparative reading of the five chosen works—*Forbidden Desires*, *It Rained All Night*, *The Dark Room*, *My Story*, and *Lifting the Veil*—shows a wide range of ways women's identity and agency are expressed in Indian literature. While each author operates within distinct temporal, linguistic, and cultural spaces, they converge in their shared intent to deconstruct socially constructed gender roles and to foreground women's lived experiences.

The portrayal of agency is significantly influenced by the authors' gender and narrative style. The books 'My Story' by Kamala Das and *Lifting the Veil* by *Ismat Chughtai provide insider perspectives and the perspectives of women who have experienced marginalization for themselves. Their works are unapologetically confessional and political, turning personal narratives into acts of defiance. The female body and its desires are at the center of both Das and Chughtai, creating space in literature for feelings and experiences that are often thought to be unspoken. These women do not merely create female characters—they write themselves into history, challenging the structural silencing of women's voices.

On the other hand, male authors like R.K. Narayan and Buddhadev Bose portray female inner lives in a critical, if restrained, manner. Savitri's emotional repression is acknowledged in Narayan's *The Dark Room*, but her return to the domestic setting ultimately reinscribes traditional structures. The rebellion is brief and suggests few changes. Bose, on the other hand, paints a more nuanced psychological portrait in *It Rained All Night*. Bose's work stands out among male-authored Indian texts of the time because Malati's agency is quietly radical—her refusal to perform normative roles is not “punished” by the narrative (Chaudhuri, 2013). A contemporary voice, Madhuri Banerjee's *Forbidden Desires* combines feminist assertion with emotional realism. Instead of being sinful, Naina's choices are considered as ways to survive in a society that demands perfection and obedience from women but does not provide them emotional or sexual autonomy. The conflicts in Banerjee's novel are framed not only by capitalism, performative modernity, and romantic alienation but also by tradition in a post-liberalized urban India. This theory is in line with Mohanty's (2003) argument that postcolonial women are burdened in two ways: first, by cultural conservatism, and second, by neoliberal pressures to be productive, perfect, and successful. The search for self-definition and the metaphor of confinement are common themes in these texts.

Each woman navigates a set of structural constraints—social, emotional, and sexual—and carves out some space of resistance, whether it is Savitri's dark room, Malati's silent silence, Das' poetic body, Chughtai's veil, or Naina's socially forbidden relationship. The moral frameworks and literary conventions that have historically suppressed or diluted women's voices are challenged in these stories. Crucially, not every character embodies heroic or powerful qualities. They are flawed, uncertain, and contradictory—exactly because they are human. Their power lies in their refusal to be reduced to labels. Identity, according to Butler (1990), is dynamic and performative rather than static. These texts echo that fluidity, showing how agency can manifest through speech, silence, desire, retreat, or even compromise.

Conclusions:

This paper has explored the literary construction of women's identity and agency in Indian literature through a critical engagement with five powerful texts. Even though these works come from a variety of genres—memoir, novel, short story, and personal essay—they all work against the stereotypes about women and offer new ways to understand female subjectivity. The characters aren't just victims of patriarchy; rather, they are actively participating in their development by negotiating their spaces within or against the structures that try to define them. R.K., Madhuri Banerjee, Ismat Chughtai, and Kamala Das Women in Narayan and Buddhadev Bose are portrayed as wanting, resisting, reflecting, and redefining. These authors demonstrate that identity is forged in the crucible of experience, choice, and rebellion and is never singular or fixed. Their works demonstrate that literature is a tool for change as well as a reflection of society. They challenge social norms, challenge patriarchy, and humanize the inner lives of women who have been too often silenced or simplified through their characters. We recognize these contributions and the continuous need for literature that confronts the unspoken and affirms the intricacies of women's experiences. These stories are not relics of the past; they are blueprints for the future—guiding how literature can become a radical space of expression, resistance, and empowerment for generations of readers and writers to come. Once considered taboo, these authors are now the subjects of study and research for their innovative ideas and writings, which have significantly influenced society to become more accepting of women's identity and agency.

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Visualizing Concepts of Visual Communication Pedagogy in India by 2050

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Abstract

The evolving landscape of visual communication pedagogy in India is poised to undergo significant transformations by 2050, reflecting advancements in technology, sociocultural shifts, and pedagogical innovation. This study explores the projected trajectory of visual communication education, emphasizing the integration of immersive technologies, interdisciplinary approaches, and localized content to foster inclusive and globally relevant curricula. By examining current educational trends and emerging technologies, such as Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Artificial Intelligence (AI), this paper outlines their potential to revolutionize teaching methodologies and learner engagement. The intersection of traditional Indian art forms and contemporary design practices emerges as a critical factor in preserving cultural heritage while promoting modernity (Choudhary, 2023; Reddy, 2021). The shift towards interdisciplinary education in visual communication is another notable trend. By integrating subjects such as psychology, anthropology, and environmental studies, curricula can provide a holistic understanding of communication design and its societal impact (Mehta, 2019). Localization of content and pedagogy is critical to ensuring accessibility and inclusivity. Tailoring curricula to regional languages, cultural contexts, and community needs can bridge the urban-rural divide in education. Initiatives to integrate vernacular design elements with contemporary tools can empower students from diverse backgrounds, thereby democratizing design education (Singh & Patel, 2023). The future of visual communication pedagogy in India by 2050 is characterized by technological integration, interdisciplinary frameworks, and cultural inclusivity. This vision necessitates sustained efforts from educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to build a robust and forward-looking ecosystem.

Keywords: *Visual Communication Pedagogy, Immersive Technologies, Interdisciplinary Education, Cultural Heritage, Inclusivity, India 2050*

Introduction

Visual communication pedagogy is undergoing a dynamic transformation globally, with India emerging as a pivotal region for innovative educational reforms. The increasing pace of technological advancement, the rise of interdisciplinary educational frameworks, and the growing recognition of cultural heritage as a valuable resource have positioned India as a potential leader in the global design education landscape. By 2050, the evolution of visual communication pedagogy in India is anticipated to reflect a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity, where cutting-edge technologies complement deeply rooted cultural practices.

This paper delves into the anticipated changes in this domain, highlighting the opportunities and challenges associated with this evolution. The 21st century has witnessed a rapid shift in how knowledge is imparted and acquired. In the field of design education, the emphasis has gradually moved from static, theory-oriented approaches to dynamic, experiential learning methodologies. This shift is evident in visual communication, a discipline that requires an intricate understanding of both aesthetic principles and functional design. India, with its diverse cultural history and burgeoning technology sector, is uniquely positioned to redefine visual communication education for the future. By 2050, it is expected that the country's educational institutions will fully integrate immersive technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their curricula, providing students with unparalleled opportunities to explore and experiment with design concepts in real-time, interactive environments (Gupta & Sharma, 2022).

Furthermore, the growing emphasis on interdisciplinary education will play a crucial role in shaping the future of visual communication pedagogy. By integrating fields such as behavioral psychology, anthropology, and environmental studies, visual communication programs in India can equip students with a comprehensive understanding of the societal impact of design. For example, user-centered design approaches rooted in behavioral psychology can lead to more empathetic and effective solutions, addressing real-world challenges in healthcare, urban planning, and digital accessibility (Mehta, 2019). Similarly, collaborations with disciplines such as environmental science can foster sustainable design practices, aligning with global efforts to combat climate change. Another significant aspect of this transformation is the integration of traditional Indian art forms into contemporary design education. India boasts a rich legacy of visual arts, including Madhubani, Kalamkari, and Pattachitra, which not only serve as aesthetic inspirations but also carry profound cultural and philosophical meanings. By incorporating these elements into modern curricula, educators can instill a sense of cultural pride and identity among students while fostering innovation and creativity (Choudhary, 2023). Moreover, such an approach ensures the preservation of these art forms, many of which are under threat due to urbanization and changing socio-economic conditions.

While the potential for growth in visual communication pedagogy is immense, achieving this vision requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including educational institutions, policymakers, and industry leaders. One of the primary challenges is the need for equitable access to resources and technology, especially in rural and underserved regions of India. Despite the increasing penetration of the internet and digital devices, a significant digital divide persists, limiting the reach and effectiveness of technologically driven education initiatives. Addressing this issue will require substantial investments in infrastructure and the development of localized content tailored to the linguistic and cultural contexts of diverse communities (Singh & Patel, 2023). In addition to technological and infrastructural advancements, the role of policy and institutional support cannot be overstated. Government initiatives aimed at promoting digital literacy and fostering industry-academia collaborations will be critical in ensuring the success of visual communication pedagogy reforms. Such policies should also emphasize faculty development programs, enabling educators to stay abreast of emerging trends and technologies in the field (Verma, 2022).

Industry partnerships, on the other hand, can provide students with real-world exposure, enhancing their employability and preparing them for the rapidly evolving job market. The paper also explores the potential of community-based learning models in bridging the gap between academia and local industries. By encouraging students to collaborate with artisans, craftsmen, and small-scale entrepreneurs, these models can provide practical insights into the application of design principles in real-world contexts. This approach not only enhances students' skills but also contributes to the economic upliftment of local communities, creating a symbiotic relationship between education and social development (Das, 2024). Looking ahead, the future of visual communication pedagogy in India is characterized by both challenges and opportunities. While the rapid pace of technological change necessitates continuous upskilling for both students and educators, it also opens new avenues for creativity and innovation. By embracing emerging technologies, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and preserving cultural heritage, India has the potential to become a global hub for design education. This paper seeks to provide an analysis of these trends, offering insights into the strategies and frameworks that can shape the future of visual communication pedagogy in India by 2050.

Technological Integration in Visual Communication Education

Technological integration in visual communication education has transformed traditional teaching methodologies, with immersive technologies like Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) leading the way. By 2050, these technologies are anticipated to become cornerstones of visual communication pedagogy, reshaping how students learn and engage with creative concepts. AR and VR offer highly interactive and immersive learning environments, enabling students to comprehend complex design concepts through experiential, hands-on learning. For example, VR can simulate real-world scenarios where students can test and refine design prototypes in a safe and controlled virtual space, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Gupta & Sharma, 2022).

AI is also playing a pivotal role by introducing personalized learning platforms that adapt to individual students' strengths and weaknesses. These platforms foster self-directed learning, allowing students to progress at their own pace while honing their creative abilities. Adaptive learning systems, powered by AI, further enhance this experience by dynamically adjusting content to cater to diverse learning needs, thereby improving knowledge retention and skill acquisition (Nair & Banerjee, 2020). Advancements in digital design tools and software have streamlined the creative process, preparing students to meet the fast-paced demands of the global creative economy. Technologies such as gamification are being incorporated to make learning more engaging, blending education with entertainment to sustain students' interest and motivation. Despite these advancements, challenges persist, particularly in ensuring equitable access to cutting-edge technologies in rural and underprivileged regions of India. Bridging this digital divide is crucial to ensuring that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, can benefit from these innovations. Investments in infrastructure, affordable technologies, and digital literacy programs will play a critical role in democratizing access to these transformative tools, paving the way for an inclusive and technology-driven future in visual communication education. The challenge lies in ensuring equitable access to these technologies, particularly in rural and underprivileged regions of India.

Interdisciplinary Education and Societal Impact

Interdisciplinary education in visual communication is pivotal in preparing students to tackle the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century. By integrating design principles with disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and environmental studies, students gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their field (Mehta, 2019). This interdisciplinary approach broadens their perspective, equipping them with the ability to create designs that are both aesthetically appealing and socially meaningful. For instance, the fusion of User Experience (UX) design principles with behavioural science can lead to solutions that enhance user engagement while addressing critical societal needs, such as accessibility for differently-abled individuals or promoting sustainable behaviours.

Interdisciplinary collaboration fosters critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, which are essential skills in today's rapidly evolving world. It enables students to connect the dots between diverse fields, resulting in designs that are culturally, socially, and environmentally relevant. Courses that combine traditional Indian art forms, such as Madhubani painting or Warli art, with modern design practices not only preserve India's rich cultural heritage but also introduce these narratives into global design conversations. This blend of traditional and contemporary design fosters a distinctive identity for Indian visual communication, making it both culturally rooted and globally impactful (Kumar, 2022).

An interdisciplinary approach in education nurtures a sense of social responsibility among students. By understanding the interplay between design and broader societal issues, students are better equipped to create solutions that contribute positively to communities. For example, integrating environmental studies into design curricula can inspire eco-friendly design practices, promoting sustainability.

As the boundaries between disciplines continue to blur, fostering interdisciplinary education in visual communication ensures that students remain versatile and relevant. This synthesis of knowledge and creativity not only elevates the quality of their work but also amplifies its societal impact, contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Preserving Cultural Heritage Through Design

Cultural preservation serves as a cornerstone of visual communication pedagogy in India, bridging the rich traditions of the past with contemporary design practices. The country's diverse artistic heritage, including Madhubani painting, Kalamkari, and Warli art, provides a vibrant palette of motifs, techniques, and narratives that can inspire modern creative expressions. By incorporating these traditional art forms into the curriculum, educators can nurture a sense of cultural pride and identity among students, while also fostering innovation. Such integration encourages young designers to explore the roots of their heritage, adapt traditional techniques to new mediums, and contribute to a broader dialogue that blends tradition with modernity (Choudhary, 2023).

Collaborations with local artisans and craft communities further enhance this process, offering an immersive, hands-on approach to learning. Workshops and field visits to rural art centers allow students to engage directly with artisans who have honed their craft over generations. These many interactions provide invaluable insights into the intricacies of traditional techniques, tools, and materials, fostering an appreciation for the effort and

cultural significance embedded in each art form. Moreover, these initiatives serve as a platform for knowledge exchange, where artisans and students can learn from one another, enriching both traditional practices and contemporary design perspectives. Beyond the educational benefits, such initiatives contribute to sustainable development. By creating opportunities for artisans to share their expertise, these programs empower local communities economically and socially, helping to sustain traditional crafts in the face of industrialization and globalization (Das, 2024). When students incorporate these elements into their work, they actively contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, ensuring its relevance in modern times. This symbiotic relationship between education, innovation, and cultural preservation not only enriches design pedagogy but also builds a more inclusive, culturally aware future for the creative industry.

Localized and Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches

Localized and inclusive pedagogical approaches are pivotal to democratizing visual communication education in India, ensuring that students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds can access quality learning experiences. Tailoring curricula to regional languages and cultural contexts can bridge the significant urban-rural divide, making education more relevant and relatable for students across the country. For instance, incorporating vernacular design elements—such as traditional motifs, scripts, and visual storytelling techniques—into coursework allows students to connect their creative learning with their cultural heritage. This not only fosters a sense of belonging but also empowers students to express themselves authentically, irrespective of their regional background (Singh & Patel, 2023).

Community-based learning models further enrich this localized approach by creating opportunities for students to collaborate with local industries, artisans, and craft communities. Engaging in practical, hands-on projects with these stakeholders provides students with invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities within the visual communication field. For example, students might co-develop branding solutions for local markets or create awareness campaigns for regional social issues. Such experiences not only enhance technical and creative skills but also instil a sense of social responsibility, as students recognize the transformative power of design in addressing real-world problems.

In addition to on-ground initiatives, online platforms, and open educational resources (OERs) can play a transformative role in expanding access to visual communication education, particularly in remote and underserved areas. By offering free or low-cost learning materials in multiple languages, these platforms democratize knowledge and reduce barriers to entry for aspiring designers. Digital tools can further support localized learning by enabling students to explore region-specific case studies, interact with peers from similar backgrounds, and share their work within broader creative communities (Rao & Menon, 2021). By combining localized content, community-driven practices, and accessible digital resources, inclusive pedagogical models can nurture a generation of designers who are not only skilled and innovative but also deeply connected to their roots and committed to societal progress. This holistic approach ensures that visual communication education remains equitable, diverse, and impactful.

Policy and Institutional Support

Policy and institutional frameworks play a transformative role in shaping the future of visual communication pedagogy in India. Strategic investments in educational infrastructure, faculty development, and research initiatives are fundamental to creating a vibrant and inclusive learning ecosystem. Upgrading infrastructure to include state-of-the-art design studios, digital labs, and collaborative spaces ensures that students have access to the tools and technology required for contemporary creative practices. Faculty development programs, focused on equipping educators with emerging pedagogical methods and technological competencies, further contribute to the overall quality of education. Additionally, fostering research initiatives in visual communication, such as exploring indigenous art forms or the impact of design on societal change, can position institutions as centers of innovation and thought leadership (Verma, 2022).

Government policies that prioritize digital literacy and the integration of technology into education can significantly enhance the reach and effectiveness of visual communication programs. Initiatives such as providing subsidized access to design software, promoting e-learning platforms, and introducing online certification courses can make education accessible to students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, including those in remote areas. Such policies bridge digital divides and prepare students for the rapidly evolving demands of the global creative industry.

Industry-academia partnerships are equally critical for fostering a practical and market-relevant education system. Collaborations with design firms and creative industries can provide students with hands-on experience through internships, workshops, and live projects, bridging the gap between academic learning and professional practice. These partnerships also help align curricula with current industry needs, ensuring students are job-ready upon graduation.

Furthermore, international collaborations can expose students to diverse cultural and creative perspectives, global design trends, and best practices. This exposure equips graduates with the skills and confidence needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. By prioritizing policy support, infrastructure, and collaborative initiatives, institutions can ensure that visual communication pedagogy remains innovative, inclusive, and globally competitive.

Challenges and Opportunities

The future of visual communication pedagogy in India is full of promise, but significant challenges must be addressed to unlock its full potential. One of the most pressing issues is ensuring equitable access to resources and technology. Many students in rural and underprivileged areas lack access to essential tools such as computers, design software, and high-speed internet, creating a digital divide that limits their participation in modern design education. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure and outdated curricula in many institutions hinder the ability to deliver high-quality education. The rapid pace of technological advancements further complicates this landscape, as both students and educators must constantly upskill to stay relevant in a field driven by innovation and evolving tools.

Despite these challenges, the opportunities for growth and transformation are immense. Emerging technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and immersive media offer new frontiers for creativity and storytelling in visual communication. Integrating these technologies into pedagogy can not only enhance learning outcomes but also prepare students to lead in a competitive global market. Collaboration across disciplines and communities offers another avenue for innovation. Partnerships between design schools, technology providers, and local artisans can foster a multidisciplinary approach that merges traditional craftsmanship with contemporary practices. This integration of cultural heritage and modern design methodologies creates a unique value proposition, ensuring that Indian visual communication education stands out on the global stage.

Additionally, initiatives promoting localized content, community-based learning, and international exchanges can further enrich the educational ecosystem. By addressing barriers to access, embracing technology, and leveraging India's cultural richness, visual communication pedagogy can thrive, ensuring its relevance and sustainability while positioning the country as a leader in creative education worldwide.

Conclusions: The future of visual communication pedagogy in India by 2050 will be defined by technological advancements, interdisciplinary integration, and cultural inclusivity. To prepare a generation of creative professionals capable of addressing the challenges of an evolving world, the education system must embrace these pillars. Achieving this vision will demand consistent commitment from educators, policymakers, and industry leaders. Through strategic investments and collaborative efforts, India can establish an innovative and inclusive framework for visual communication education that is both future-ready and globally relevant.

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NEP 2020: Implications of 21st Century Skills for Teachers and Students

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Abstract

In the 21st century, the education system must equip both teachers and students with essential skills to thrive in a digitally connected and knowledge-based society. The study examines how these 21st-century skills, categorized as learning, literacy, and life skills, enhance the personal and professional development of teachers and students. It also explores the implications of 21st-century skills for teachers and students as per NEP 2020, which promotes holistic, multidisciplinary, and skill-based learning. NEP 2020 emphasizes continuous professional development, technology integration, pedagogical innovation, and multilingual competencies for teachers. It highlights the need for foundational literacy and numeracy, holistic and multidisciplinary education, experiential learning, competency-based learning, vocational education, and global citizenship for students. The study identifies key challenges that occurred during implementation. Teachers face challenges such as technological advancements, diverse student needs, evolving learning needs, information overload & media literacy, while students face barriers such as lack of awareness and skill-based education, limited digital instruments, inadequate career guidance, and financial barriers, etc. Overall, the integration of 21st-century skills into the teaching and learning process is essential for preparing future citizens. In this context, NEP 2020 serves as a transformative framework to meet the demands of a dynamic global environment.

Keywords: *21st Century skills, NEP 2020, Teachers, Students, Implications, Challenges*

Introduction

The 21st century introduces new educational demands fostering quality in the teaching-learning process. Integration of skill-based activities at all stages is essential to apply learned skills in real-world situations (Jyothi, 2020). NEP 2020 aims to provide quality education that fosters rational thinking and self-sufficiency in students (Sarangi, 2022). Over the past 25 years, many international bodies have proposed comprehensive frameworks to enhance the capacity of teachers and students to meet emerging challenges and opportunities. The Delors Report (1996) identified four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. Wagner (2010) identified seven survival skills for 21st-century students: critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and leadership, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective oral & written communication, accessing and analyzing information, and curiosity and imagination. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) suggested three competencies:

knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for youth to cope with the changing work environment (CBSE, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) also identified five life skills for students, such as decision-making & problem-solving, creative & critical thinking, communication & interpersonal skills, self-awareness & empathy, and coping with emotions & stress. Similarly, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recognized 3 major dimensions for 21st-century skills: communication, information, and ethics and social impact. Assessment and Teaching of Twenty-first Century Skills (ATCs) also classified 21st-century skills into 4 types: ways of thinking, ways of working, tools for working, and living in the world (CBSE, 2020). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills & Ohio Department of Education (P21, 2007) provided 11 competencies, categorized into 3 sets of skills: learning and innovation skills, information, media and technological skills, life and career skills. Finally, a UNESCO working paper classified all the above research skills into three categories: learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live (CBSE, 2020). The primary focus of education is to transform curriculum and infrastructure, which provide equitable, quality education, promoting lifelong learning and the development of skills aligning with emerging demands (P21, 2007).

Perspectives of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 about 21ST-Century Skills

Emergence of new technological advances, the world requires a skilled workforce with multidisciplinary abilities across science, social science, and humanities, as well as professional, vocational, and technical disciplines. Therefore, to cope with the evolving landscape and prepare students for the future demands, the NEP 2020 advocates a transformative educational system aligned with 21st-century goals.

NEP 2020, not only aims to enhance cognitive abilities but also to nurture character and develop a holistic personality in individuals. It emphasizes reducing curriculum content in each subject to create space for promoting critical thinking and inquiry-based, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning. It also recommends adopting experiential learning through art-integrated and sport-integrated pedagogical approaches at every stage of education. Similarly, the policy suggested setting up a National Assessment Centre (NAC) that advises school boards to shift their assessment patterns to meet the 21st-century skill requirements. It also recommends the integration of humanities and arts with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to increase creativity and innovation, higher-order thinking capacities, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, communication skills, social and moral awareness, and comprehensive subject mastery. The NEP 2020 seeks to strengthen research and innovation in the 21st century, making India a strong and enlightened knowledge-based society worldwide.

The General Education Council (GEC), the fourth vertical of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), will formulate the National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) aligned with the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) to integrate vocational education into higher education and prepare students for 21st-century skills. Overall, the policy intends to enhance a holistic and multidisciplinary education approach to develop 21st-century capabilities among individuals to meet the challenges and demands across the field.

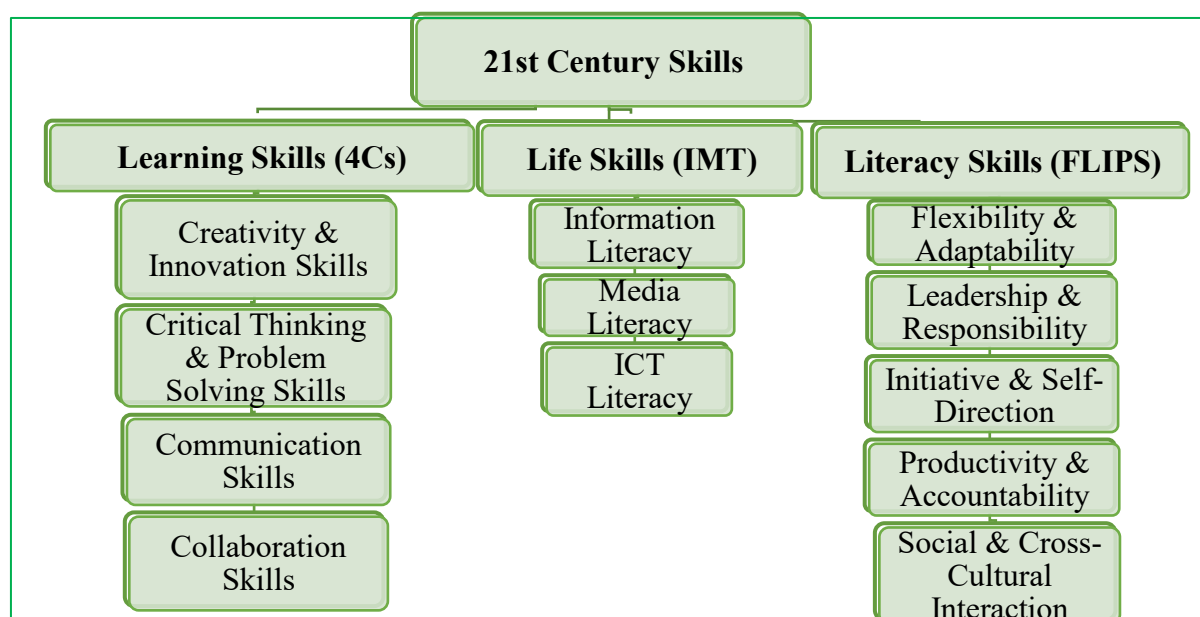
Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how 21st-century skills facilitate personal and professional development of students and teachers.
2. To study the implications of 21st-century skills for teachers and students as per NEP 2020.
3. To identify challenges of teachers while implementing 21st-century skills in teaching and learning practice.
4. To identify the challenges faced by students while practicing 21st-century skills.

Core Competencies of 21st-Century Skills

The term "21st-century skills" refers to a broad range of knowledge, abilities, work habits, and character traits that are necessary for students, teachers, and others to successfully navigate the challenges of today's complex world (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2016). Educational thinkers and organizations such as Delors, Wagner, APEC, OECD, WHO, ATCs, and UNESCO have conceptualized 21st-century skills through various frameworks. Despite variations in categorization, most of the organizations agreed on a few fundamental principles that are aligned with NEP 2020, which aims to create an educational system that promotes multidisciplinary, holistic, and skill-based learning. Among these, the P21 framework is widely accepted and classifies 21st-century skills into 3 broad categories: Learning skills (the 4Cs), Life skills (IMT), and Literacy skills (FLIPS), as described in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Core Competencies of 21st-Century Skills



1. Learning Skills

Learning skills are required for the sake of knowledge (CBSE, 2020). Nowadays, this skill means not just people having sufficient knowledge about the abilities they have. The development of a person's talents, such as questioning, thinking, understanding, and problem-solving, along with how this development enhances both academic and social performance of an individual (Onur & Kozikoglu, 2020).

Hence, learning skills include 4 types of learning sub-skills:

Creativity and Innovation Skills

According to the P21 framework (2007), this skill helps students to think ingeniously by using a wide range of idea-generation techniques like brainstorming, working creatively with others by adopting & sharing novel ideas, and implementing innovative ideas to provide a tangible and useful contribution to the field where the innovation will take place. It enables teachers to foster questioning, openness to new ideas, and learning from mistakes and the failure attitude among students (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

It refers to the ability to analyse, interpret, evaluate, summarize, and synthesize all information and solve problems efficiently (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The P21 framework (2007) empowers the learners to analyse problems, investigate questions, evaluate different perspectives, use various types of reasoning, make effective judgments, and draw conclusions by using both conventional and innovative ways. Whereas it enables teachers to use inductive and deductive reasoning, assess diverse perspectives, and critically reflect on their learning and institutional practices (Cortez & Ponsades, 2024). It also equips teachers to design fascinating lessons that foster students' analytical thinking and curiosity while equipping them with problem-solving skills to address classroom challenges effectively (Pathak, 2024).

Communication Skills

The P21 initiative highlights that communication skills enable students to interact clearly with others in a diverse setting through oral, written, and non-verbal skills, along with effective listening and critical use of multimedia technologies. Teachers can organize and express ideas effectively through various media formats, enhancing students' engagement and fostering deeper classroom understanding (Cortez & Ponsades, 2024).

Collaboration Skills

Collaboration means working together in a group that empowers students to develop their capacity to work effectively & respectfully with diverse members, sharing responsibility, achieving a common goal, and valuing each team member's unique contribution. Whereas it facilitates teachers to work cooperatively with colleagues, share responsibility for tasks, and foster professional relationships (Cortez & Ponsades, 2024).

2. Literacy Skills

According to the P21 framework, the technological explosion brought many challenges to our daily lives. Hence, to become an effective citizen and work flawlessly in the 21st-century environment, the learners must be proficient in functional and critical thinking skills related to information, media, and technology literacy.

Information Literacy

According to Trilling & Fadel (2009), it refers to accessing, evaluating, applying, managing, and utilizing information resources appropriately and effectively by teachers and students. It empowers teachers and students to comprehend the meaning of data and apply the data information in their personal and professional life to make informed decisions (Cortez & Ponsades, 2024).

Media Literacy refers to the method of delivering messages through print, graphics, animation, audio, video, and websites (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The P21 framework defines “analysing and understanding both why and how media messages are constructed and for what purposes, exploring how individuals interpret messages in different ways, and how media affects the beliefs and behaviours of individuals”.

ICT (Information, Communication, and Technology) Literacy

The teacher plays a critical role in students’ technological success; therefore, technological competency is an essential prerequisite for effective instructional performance (Drossel et al., 2016). The P21 framework (2007) defines applying digital technology to organize, evaluate, and share information effectively; utilize communication and networking tools efficiently; and access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information for successfully functioning in a knowledge-based economy.

3. Life Skills

To manage today's complex life and work environment, both students and teachers require skills more than content knowledge. Therefore, they give rigorous consideration to developing essential life and career skills (P21, 2007; & Cortez & Ponsades, 2024). The life skills include 5 types of sub-skills:

Flexibility and Adaptability

According to Trilling & Fadel (2009), flexibility is essential for work, learning, and citizenship in this era of profound transformations. The P21 framework defines that students should be able to adapt to the changes for new development, deal positively with challenges and criticism, and develop a high degree of flexibility to understand and balance diverse perspectives.

Initiative and Self-direction

The P21 framework defines that students should be able to set goals with tangible and intangible success criteria, balance their short-term and long-term goals, utilize and manage their time effectively, and work independently. It also enables individuals to go beyond basic mastery skills and expand their learning and opportunities to gain expertise.

Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

The P21 framework emphasizes that students should be able to interact politely and respectfully with others and develop a respect towards diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The Pacific Policy Research Centre (2010) highlights the importance of this skill for teachers to work well with their colleagues, present themselves professionally, and respect and embrace social and cultural differences.

Productivity and Accountability

This skill empowers both teachers and students to manage their learning projects and different educational programs effectively (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The P21 framework outlined that students should be able to plan and manage their work and time, solve problems independently, work positively and ethically, present themselves professionally with proper etiquette, and participate actively as well as be reliable and punctual.

Leadership and Responsibility

This skill empowers students to guide and lead others using interpersonal and problem-solving skills to achieve a common goal (P21, 2007). It assists teachers in fostering an inclusive classroom environment, inspiring students, and advancing their professional careers (Pathak, 2024).

Implications of 21st-Century Skills for Teachers as per NEP 2020

Teaching and learning are no longer confined to four walls in today's world. The roles and responsibilities of teachers are not confined to simply delivering teaching and assigning homework to students. We place greater emphasis on practical skills and competencies than on theory. In this context, the goal of NEP 2020 is to transform Indian education to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Therefore, NEP 2020 outlined the following key implications of 21st-century skills for teachers:

Continuous Professional Development

According to NEP 2020, teachers are the heart of the teaching-learning process. Therefore, teachers should have access to various workshop opportunities ranging from local to international levels, as well as online teacher development modules, to ensure they remain updated and relevant in 21st-century pedagogical skills.

Technology Integration

The NEP 2020 highlighted that nowadays, technology affects the education system in multiple ways. Therefore, a comprehensive training program using e-learning platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM should be organized for teachers to develop proficiency in techno-pedagogical skills and help them to foster critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills among students in line with the digital era.

Holistic Development

As suggested by NEP 2020, the teacher should go beyond subject-specific instruction to foster holistic development among students by integrating life skills, values, and multidisciplinary learning approaches into their teaching.

Pedagogical Innovation

NEP 2020 facilitates teachers to use various types of pedagogical approaches, like art-integrated, sports-integrated, etc., to enhance teaching effectiveness. Among these, the art-integrated learning approach fosters student engagement, creativity, and deep understanding by connecting knowledge to real-life experiences through artistic expression. Whereas, sports-integration pedagogical approach uses physical activities, like indigenous sports, in instructional practices to support the development of 21st-century abilities.

Multilingual Competencies

The NEP 2020 highlights that it empowers teachers to enhance their communication and social and cross-cultural skills and create opportunities for students to attain proficiency in multiple languages, including their mother tongue, Hindi, English, and other regional languages.

Shifting Assessment Technique

The NEP 2020 equips teachers to adopt new assessment techniques that not only evaluate students' academic knowledge but also support teachers to comprehensively assess students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities to meet the 21st-century skill requirements.

Prepared for Future Readiness

The NEP 2020 facilitates teachers preparing their students for future endeavors, job readiness, lifelong learning attitudes, digital fluency, and adaptability rather than just delivering content.

Implications of 21st-Century Skills for Students as per NEP 2020

Traditional survival techniques are no longer sufficient for students to thrive in this tech-driven world. The NEP 2020 intends to envision a learner-centric education system that will equip students to face the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. The key implications are:

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

According to NEP 2020, foundational literacy and numeracy refer to every student acquiring basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills by grade 3. This foundational base enables students to develop critical thinking, analytical reasoning and problem-solving skills, which are essential for future learning.

Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education

NEP 2020 promotes flexible and multidisciplinary education, which provides an opportunity for students to explore a broad range of subjects across various disciplines. This flexibility supports students to discover their interest area, strength, and fosters creativity, higher-order thinking capacities, problem-solving abilities, collaboration, and communication skills.

Experiential Learning

It includes hands-on learning, arts-integrated, sports-integrated, and storytelling-based pedagogy. This pedagogical approach encourages students to develop their 21st-century skills like collaboration, self-discipline, responsibility, citizenship, and self-initiative.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

NEP 2020 recommended reducing curriculum content and promoting inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning to encourage students to think critically, ask questions, and explore solutions.

Multilingualism and Global Citizenship

The NEP 2020 encourages students to learn multiple languages across the country, which enhances their communication skills and cognitive flexibility. While global citizenship education empowers them to understand diverse cultures, global issues, and perspectives and prepares them to actively participate in an interconnected and digitalized world.

Shift from Rote-Learning to Competency-based learning

The NEP 2020 highlights that a competency-based learning approach focuses on mastering concepts through understanding and practical application rather than memorization. It enables students to develop 21st-century skills by engaging them in real-life tasks, group projects, and self-paced learning.

Assessment Reforms

As stated by NEP 2020, the assessment culture of our schooling system should shift from summative to formative, which will provide a holistic, 360-degree multidimensional report of each learner's progress and uniqueness in all domains. This flexibility of assessment not only measures the achievement of basic learning outcomes but also enables students to develop 21st-century skills, including higher-order skills, real-world knowledge, etc.

Integration of Technology

The NEP 2020 acknowledges the significance of technology in skill development by integrating it throughout education, enabling students to become proficient in technological tools for personal and professional use.

Vocational and Skill-based Education

The NEP 2020 emphasizes the integration of vocational education into mainstream education across all educational institutions in a phased manner, enabling students to learn at least one vocation to gain hands-on learning experiences and develop practical and employable skills in areas like agriculture, industry, technology, etc.

Transforming the Regulatory System of Higher Education

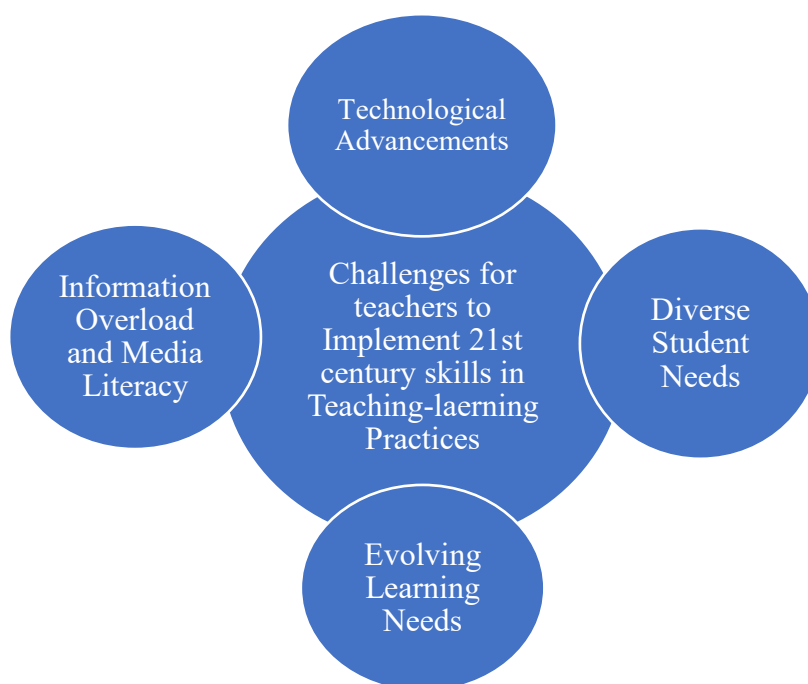
According to the NEP 2020 General Education Council (GEC) will be the fourth vertical of the Higher Education Council of India (HECI), mandated to determine specific skills that students acquire during their academic programs, for developing into well-rounded students with 21st-century capabilities.

Life-long Learning

The NEP 2020 promotes lifelong learning by creating a flexible, skill-based, and student-centred education system that equips students to succeed in a constantly evolving world.

Challenges for Teachers to Implement 21st-century Skills in Teaching-Learning Practice

As shown in Figure 2, in this contemporary world, while implementing 21st-century skills into teaching-learning practices, teachers are facing the following challenges: **Figure 2: Challenges for Teachers**



Technological Advancements

Technological initiatives create many more opportunities for students and teachers. Hence, traditional classrooms have been replaced by innovative learning environments (Eslit, 2023). To address this challenge, teachers need to learn how to use technology efficiently to empower and engage students (American University of Leadership Marbella, 2023).

Diverse Student Needs

The 21st-century classroom is diverse in nature, which creates both opportunities and difficulties for teachers. To cater each student's needs and provide an equitable and inclusive learning environment, teachers must address linguistic barriers, cultural disparities, and diverse educational backgrounds to ensure equal opportunities for success (American University of Leadership Marbella, 2023).

Evolving Learning Needs

In the modern era, traditional educational paradigms no longer meet the diverse learning demands of today's generation. The priorities of learning have shifted from rote memorization to competency-based approaches. Therefore, teachers must update their teaching strategies and professional knowledge to tackle this situation (American University of Leadership Marbella, 2023).

Information Overload and Media Literacy

Information overload and media literacy create a significant challenge for teachers to cope with the abundance of information, develop media literacy skills among students, and differentiate between biased and reliable data (Faraniza, 2022).

Challenges for Students to Practice 21st Century Skills: Our digitalized world, presents challenges to students like

Lack of Awareness

In a changing and drastically developing world, students are required to develop their skills, competencies, and ability to deal with the 21st-century. However, due to the lack of awareness of students about skill development courses, they face difficulties in enhancing their proficiency (21k School Team, 2023).

Lack of digital Instruments

In an increasingly digital environment, having access to technology and the internet has become essential for education. However, not every student has equal access to these tools, which creates disparities and hinders academic success (Eslit,2023).

Inadequate Guidance and Lack of Skill-Based Education

The shift from a traditional theory-based education system to one that emphasizes skill-based learning reflects the evolving demands of the 21st-century. To meet these demands, teachers must be aware of current societal and global trends to prepare the students accordingly. Nowadays, the educational landscape provides 100 specialized courses beyond traditional subjects. However, due to inadequate planning and lack of educational and career guidance, students struggle to choose the right career path (21k School Team, 2023).

Financial constraints for Higher Education

Financial barriers to higher education constitute the primary obstacle students face in their academic journey. Since ten years, the cost of higher education increased significantly. Thus, financial planning is vital for students and parents to cope with rising higher education costs (21k School Team, 2023).

Conclusions

This study examines the pivotal role of NEP 2020 in promoting 21st-century skills that enhance the personal and professional development of both teachers and students. By fostering 21st-century skills, including learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills, the policy aims to not only promote innovative teaching practices but also empower students to become lifelong learners and prepare for a rapidly changing world. The study reveals positive implications for teachers and students, like pedagogical innovation, continuous professional development, experiential learning, skill-based education, etc. However, it also identifies critical challenges like technological advancement, evolving learning needs, limited digital instruments, inadequate career guidance, etc. Addressing these gaps is essential to effectively implement 21st-century skills and accomplish the goals of NEP 2020.

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Examining Oppression in Indian Formal Education: Causes and Remedies through a Freirean Perspective

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Abstract

In India, social realities such as inequality, injustice, and deprivation still exist. Most Indian education is typified by teacher-centered classrooms, which typically prevent students from participating in discussions or asking too many questions. To prevent education from becoming only a mechanical means of teaching, it is crucial to spread knowledge of the value of advancing Freirean critical pedagogy. Teachers can encourage their pupils to think critically about arguments, doctrines, the educational process, and their society. Major themes are taken to examine oppression in Indian formal education, namely, (a) Causes of Oppression in Indian Education (acceptance of unfair situations by students, power imbalance, casteism, untouchability in schools, inefficacy of the National Policy of Education, and corporal punishment) and (b) Remedies to Oppression in Indian Education (necessity to change the purpose of education, developing critical self-improvement, fostering independent critical thinking and self-expression, promoting problem-posing and inquiry-based learning, practicing freedom, coping with the reservation quota, eradicating casteism, and abolishing corporal punishment at the grassroots level). The oppressions in the Indian educational system are discussed in this paper, along with valuable recommendations for enhancing formal education in India so that it may become a crucial instrument for social change, democracy, and a critical worldview, drawing on Freire's pedagogical theories. It is hoped that this book will eventually create a Freirean democratic classroom in contemporary Indian educational and social backgrounds.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, formal education, democratic classroom, social realities.

Introduction

Indian society faces social inequality, including casteism, untouchability, and corruption. Education lacks student-centred approaches, leading to passivity and social prejudice. To address these issues, education should be viewed as a form of communication, promoting self-awareness and critical thinking, and incorporating Paulo Freire's concepts into teaching styles. The Freirean approach in Indian education faces challenges such as exam-focused learning, rote learning, and minimal student participation. However, it can promote critical thinking, questioning, and creative criticism, contributing to social change and global recognition of India. The paper examines the impact of Freirean philosophy and pedagogy on Indian formal education, aiming to promote critical thinking, an inclusive society, and social transformation, with a focus on

teachers, educational systems, and students. This paper examines how Paulo Freire's democratic education literature positively influences Indian students' critical thinking, social responsibility, and awareness of gender bias, thereby fostering a reflective and democratic learning environment. The paper examines how Freirean philosophy and pedagogy can be applied in contemporary Indian education to better understand student-teacher relationships, improve educational processes, and promote social change regarding the causes and remedies of oppression.

Literature Review

Druliner (1992) developed a Christian education that integrates Gustavo Gutierrez's theological principles and Paulo Freire's educational method.

Guthrie (2003) identified flaws in critical pedagogy, contradicting Freire's essential theory of consciousness.

Haley (2004) examined the effectiveness of a guidebook focusing on learner needs using Freire's praxiological method.

Van Winkle (2004) studied Freire's role in proving education as a human right. Daniels (2005) investigated how adult women construct meaning from still photographs without accompanying text. Lee (2005) discussed Freire's dialogical pedagogy and its potential transformation in Taiwan's education environment.

Flood (2007) explored Freire's ideas and educational theory in Brazil.

Chem (2008) analysed verbal interactions between teachers and low-achieving students. Linda (2008) investigated Freire's work on school bullying in the United States.

Mehta (2009) explored the impact of Paulo Freire on educational philosophy.

Felderman (2010) explored second-grade classroom literacies.

Subramaniam (2011) explored the implications of critical pedagogy on Latino students.

Díaz (2012) explored radical democracy,

Kershaw (2012) examined higher education in criminal justice, and Mazier (2014) explored neoliberal educational restrictions in higher education.

The current study aims to determine whether Freirean philosophy and pedagogy are applicable in contemporary Indian education, considering the causes of oppression and their remedies. To improve the educational process, understand student-teachers, and gradually bring about social change in India, Freirean critical pedagogy, educational theory, and practice are essential.

The Significance of the Study

Today, self-empowerment requires adhering to Freire's dialogical pedagogy, also referred to as "democratic pedagogy," which advocates liberal classroom instruction to eliminate societal injustices and critical education for social change. Through mutual respect, humility, and trust, Freire's child-centred teaching methods can help students build self-reliance, confidence, and self-empowerment in their lives, in addition to improving the quality of their lives. The teachers, educational system, educational organisation, family, society, and students all have an impact on the breadth and success of the potential entry points of Freire in teacher education and schooling, as well as the applicability and relevance of Freirean philosophy and pedagogy.

METHODOLOGY: The study employs a qualitative approach to explore how student-teachers in B.Ed. Colleges understand Freirean pedagogy and philosophy, focusing on their experiences of oppression and the meaning of Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed.' It utilised the empirical, transcendental phenomenological method to discuss Freire's philosophy and pedagogy with student-teachers from a private college. The participants shared their experiences, reducing them to a central meaning. Data was analysed through constant comparison and unstructured focus group interviews. The study aimed to understand the relevance of Freirean critical pedagogy to student-teachers, using Moustakas's approach for systematic data analysis.

Participants of the study: The study involved 15 B.Ed. student-teachers from a private college of education in Mumbai, mostly aged 20-25. The participants were mostly from open and reserved categories, with some being graduates and others postgraduates. Most were Hindus, predominantly Marathi, from middle-class families. Most participants attended an intervention program and a focus group interview, which were conducted in a mix of English and vernacular mediums. The participants' sensitivity was overwhelmingly considerate and cooperative, indicating their active participation and commitment to learning.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection techniques included an interactive 24-hour intervention program that incorporated Freire's educational philosophy, supplemented with in-depth focus group interviews, videos, documentary evidence, and observations. A constant comparison method was employed for data analysis. The research instruments, including intervention program plans, focus group interview protocols, observation notes, transcription analysis reports, and video photography, were used in the research study.

Results: In the present study, the major themes taken to examine oppression in Indian formal education are "Causes of oppression in Indian education" and "Remedies to oppression in Indian education." Categories were identified within the themes, which are presented in a tabular format.

The following table illustrates the categories from which the themes emerged.

Categories

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Acceptance of unfair situations by students | 14. Promoting the problem-posing method |
| 2. Factors leading to power imbalance | 15. Promoting inquiry-based learning |
| 3. Oppressive aspects of education | 16. Being a democratic teacher |
| 4. Existing casteism | 17. Practising freedom |
| 5. Untouchability in schools, particularly in rural areas | 18. Creating a democratic classroom |
| 6. Inefficacy of National Policy on Education | 19. Discussion on freedom of religion |
| 7. Corporal Punishment Causes of Oppression in Indian Education | 20. Discussing oppressive aspects of education |
| 8. Necessity to change the purpose of education | 21. Overcoming child exploitation in society |
| 9. Developing critical self-improvement | 22. Coping with the reservation quota |
| 10. Fostering independent thinking | 23. Eradicating casteism |
| 11. Teaching self-expression to students | 24. Abolition of corporal punishment at the grassroots level |
| 12. Creating active classroom settings | 25. Remedies to Oppression in Indian Education |
| 13. Developing critical thinking | |

Themes

THEME 1: CAUSES OF OPPRESSION IN INDIAN EDUCATION

The following theme, which explores the causes of oppression in Indian education, is illustrated with categories and codes. This theme incorporated the following categories towards the causes of oppression in Indian education, such as conformity to unfair situations by students, power imbalance, oppressive aspects of education, casteism, untouchability in schools, particularly in rural areas, the inefficacy of the National Policy on Education, and corporal punishment.

The following section provides detailed information on the categories, along with indicators of the participants' responses.

(A) ACCEPTANCE OF UNFAIR SITUATIONS BY STUDENTS

Key issues include the lack of social acceptance, the need for awareness and education on power usage, and the concern about powerless exploitation.

(B) FACTORS LEADING TO POWER IMBALANCE

Individuals face numerous challenges in implementing change, including internal fear, external pressure, a belief in insurmountable obstacles, a lack of active contribution, communication barriers, government responses, corruption, population inertia, power and privilege, and systemic reinforcement.

(C) OPPRESSIVE ASPECTS OF EDUCATION

The education system faces challenges such as a lack of law enforcement, inadequate theoretical knowledge, insufficient leadership training, ineffective mechanical awareness campaigns, teacher dominance, a lack of practical knowledge, overemphasis on bookish knowledge, and blind competition.

(D) EXISTING CASTEISM

Addressing issues such as lack of awareness, corruption, anti-Dalit bias, constitutional rights, government overreliance, monitoring educational plans, collaboration with NGOs, and personal responsibility is crucial in combating casteism.

(E) UNTOUCHABILITY IN SCHOOLS, PARTICULARLY IN RURAL AREAS

Strict action is needed to address misleading education, high illiteracy among Dalits in rural areas, and human rights violations in intolerant areas, requiring frequent awareness campaigns and teacher protection.

(F) INEFFECTIVENESS OF NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

The challenges in education include impracticality, slow progress, status gap, syllabus-based education, physical punishment, gender bias, lack of experience, and child-centred education. It calls for policy orientation, compulsory elementary education, teacher involvement, and improved co-curricular classes.

(G) CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Issues include autocratic teachers, parental support for corporal punishment, and a lack of seriousness among students. Punishment should not humiliate, and socio-economic background influences student behaviour.

THEME 2: REMEDIES TO OPPRESSION IN INDIAN EDUCATION

This theme necessitates the change in the purpose of education, developing critical self-improvement, fostering independent thinking, teaching self-expression to students, creating active classroom settings, developing critical thinking, promoting problem-posing method and inquiry-based learning, being democratic teacher, practicing freedom, creating democratic classroom, discussion on freedom of religion, resolving oppressive aspects of education, overcoming child exploitation in the society, coping with reservation quota, eradication casteism and abolition of corporal punishment at the grass-root level.

The following section provides information about the categories and indicators of the participants' responses:

(A) NECESSITY TO CHANGE THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Education is crucial for achieving freedom, developing critical thinking, developing a humanitarian approach, building self-confidence, developing modern social perspectives, ensuring life security, developing morality, and promoting knowledge and awareness for a compassionate society.

(B) DEVELOPING CRITICAL SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Positive criticism, honesty, self-knowledge, introspection, and self-motivation are key to personal and professional growth, forming good habits, and promoting life progress.

(C) FOSTERING INDEPENDENT THINKING

A diverse learning environment promotes both lower- and higher-order thinking, encourages students to engage in activities, and highlights the role of teachers in guiding students toward self-expression.

(D) TEACHING SELF-EXPRESSION TO STUDENTS

Promoting self-expression, creativity, and the application of practical knowledge is crucial in creating an environment that upholds national freedom while inspiring students through exemplary models and a shared appreciation of knowledge.

(E) CREATING ACTIVE CLASSROOM SETTINGS

Effective classroom management involves open discussions, self-discipline, student growth, interactive learning experiences, performance evaluations, and parental guidance. It also promotes diversity, respect for diverse religions, and addressing student weaknesses.

(F) DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING

Teachers promote active participation, respecting students' voices, engaging in interactive discussions, upholding professional ethics, promoting collaboration, and promoting continuous inquiry.

(G) PROMOTING THE PROBLEM-POSING METHOD

The approach is suitable for all learners, except those struggling to keep pace, as it enhances understanding, encourages critical thinking, and fosters shifts in belief.

(H) PROMOTING INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

Practical experiences and abstract thinking significantly improve knowledge sharing and comprehension.

(I) BEING A DEMOCRATIC TEACHER

A skilled educator fosters strong student relationships, establishes a disciplined environment, and integrates effective teaching methods. They focus on overcoming weaknesses, treating students as unique, and emphasising co-curricular activities. They value originality, active participation, and adherence to regulations.

(J) PRACTICING FREEDOM

The primary objectives are to promote practical thinking, critical thinking, social change, and open communication among students.

(K) CREATING A DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM

A democratic classroom environment fosters critical thinking, student engagement, and creativity; promotes equitable practices; protects students' rights; and contributes to a better future.

(L) DISCUSSION ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION

It advocates for a united approach to education, focusing on humanism over caste and religious divisions. It calls for political parties to uphold equality, prioritise education, and foster liberalism, critical thinking, and respect for diverse beliefs.

(M) RESOLVING OPPRESSIVE ASPECTS OF EDUCATION

There is emphasis on the importance of equitable education, promoting a curriculum that prioritises morality, ethics, and practical knowledge, especially in rural areas, integrating life skills, and ensuring integrity through strict measures and law enforcement.

(N) OVERCOMING CHILD EXPLOITATION IN THE SOCIETY

Addressing the challenges faced by underprivileged children requires compulsory education and vocational training, strict regulations against poverty and child labour, the promotion of social workers, enforcement of penalties, support from educated individuals, a change in attitudes towards child labour, the provision of night schools, parental awareness, and individual initiative.

(O) COPING WITH RESERVATION QUOTA

The government is addressing religious and socio-economic barriers in education by offering high-quality education to underprivileged children in private colleges, implementing talent-based admissions, implementing strict reservations, and prioritising students from all castes and religions.

(P) ERADICATING CASTEISM

Education should prioritise human connections over academic content, promoting practical tools, initiative, and leadership for significant social change.

(Q) ABOLITION OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AT THE GRASS-ROOT LEVEL

Parents should express concerns about corporal punishment, collaborate with educators, and provide guidance on effective classroom management. Teachers should assess students' mental well-being and avoid biases, while actively opposing them can enhance parent-child relationships.

To summarise, the views of participants on the perceived meaning and essence of Freirean pedagogy and philosophy reveal an optimistic attitude towards its potential entry points and practicality in existing Indian education. Hence, considering the current opportunities and scope for change in the Indian education system, Freirean critical pedagogy is of relevance and significance to student-teachers in present-day Indian education, and it can indeed be reinvented and made practical in the Indian context to contribute to social transformation in India and achieve global recognition as a developed nation.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The study emphasises the practicality of critical pedagogy, based on Freirean educational theory, in Indian pedagogic culture. It suggests teachers can enhance problem-posing through motivation, audio-visual aids, and interactive classes. Freirean pedagogy promotes curiosity, activity-based learning, open dialogue, and curricular and co-curricular activities. The study suggests that the implementation of National Education policies can effectively implement Freirean educational thoughts and contribute to the development of a democratic society.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper aims to promote Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy in Indian education by educating teachers about its relevance, practicality, and resourcefulness. It suggests that teachers, students, parents, and organisations can work together to create an inclusive knowledge of Freirean philosophy and pedagogy in Indian classrooms. Student-teachers should be exposed to transformative pedagogy during their teacher education program and motivated to adopt it after graduation. The success of Freirean theory depends on teachers, the education system, organisations, parents, and students. Teachers should focus on student growth, using mutual love, humility, hope, faith, and trust as a key matrix for creating critical awareness and attitude. They should adapt to contemporary trends and be equipped with relevant content, technology, and pedagogical approaches. The paper also suggests applying Freirean pedagogy to create more lively, critical, and liberal classrooms that address corruption, power imbalances, and inequities in Indian education. The study aims to promote essential education in India, focusing on its potential to foster social change and promote genuine democracy. It will equip educators with a democratic perspective, emphasising students' critical curiosity, ability, and autonomy.

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Revisiting Combinatorial Thinking: A Content Analysis

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Abstract

Combinatorial thinking—the cognitive ability to generate novel outcomes through the integration of existing ideas—has been widely acknowledged as a foundational mechanism in creativity, innovation, and interdisciplinary knowledge construction. This content analysis examines and synthesizes findings from 42 empirical and theoretical works across domains such as cognitive science, education, and innovation studies. The review identifies combinatorial thinking as a key process underlying divergent thinking, analogical reasoning, and problem-solving. However, despite its relevance, it remains underemphasized in formal educational systems and is fragmented in both definition and application across academic literature. The study highlights five major themes: the role of combinatorial thinking in creative cognition; its cognitive and neurological basis; its application and limitations in current educational practices; its significance in innovation and entrepreneurship; and the need for a unified conceptual and pedagogical framework. Findings suggest that fostering environments conducive to cross-disciplinary integration and mental flexibility can substantially enhance students' and professionals' creative capacities.

Keywords: *Combinatorial thinking, creativity, innovation, interdisciplinary learning, meta-analysis, cognitive development, educational practice*

Introduction

Combinatorial thinking is the cognitive ability to generate new ideas, solutions, or frameworks by systematically reorganizing or synthesizing existing concepts. This mode of thinking plays a central role in creativity, innovation, and problem-solving, enabling individuals to draw connections across seemingly unrelated domains (Koestler, 1964; Johnson, 2010). As the demands of the 21st century emphasize interdisciplinary knowledge, adaptive reasoning, and integrative thinking, combinatorial thinking emerges as an essential skill for learners, educators, innovators, and policymakers alike (Miller, 2014; Sawyer, 2012).

The significance of combinatorial thinking lies in its universal applicability across cognitive, educational, and professional landscapes. In education, it fosters critical thinking, supports project-based learning, and enhances interdisciplinary understanding. In innovation and entrepreneurship, it enables the blending of technologies and concepts to generate breakthrough products and systems.

Cognitive scientists associate it with divergent thinking, abstract reasoning, and associative processing, all of which are crucial to higher-order thinking and creativity (Ward, Smith, & Finke, 1999).

Historically, the concept of combining discrete elements to generate new insights has been discussed across disciplines. In mathematics, the study of combinatorics—concerned with the arrangement and combination of elements—offers a structural foundation that parallels mental processes of synthesis and pattern recognition (Biggs, 2002). Arthur Koestler (1964), in his seminal work *The Act of Creation*, described creativity as the act of “bisociation,” or the intersection of previously unrelated matrices of thought. J.P. Guilford’s (1967) Structure of Intellect model similarly proposed that creative thinking arises through divergent production and reconfiguration of known concepts. Cognitive science has provided additional insights into how information is stored and accessed in neural networks, allowing for the formation of novel associations. Rumelhart and Norman (1981) emphasized the importance of schema-based learning, suggesting that innovation stems from the modification and recombination of existing cognitive structures. In more recent literature, Johnson (2010) underscored the principle that “good ideas come from the collision of smaller hunches,” echoing the essence of combinatorial creativity.

Given the breadth and interdisciplinary nature of the topic, a meta-analytical approach based on secondary data is both appropriate and necessary. Existing research on combinatorial thinking is dispersed across multiple fields—cognitive psychology, educational theory, creativity studies, and innovation research—making it difficult to synthesize a coherent understanding without a comprehensive review. Meta-analysis allows for the systematic evaluation and integration of prior findings, thereby enabling the identification of theoretical convergences, practical applications, and research gaps (Cooper, 2017). This methodological framework also provides a clearer picture of the impact of combinatorial thinking on cognitive development, academic achievement, and innovation across domains.

Review of Literature

Combinatorial thinking has been identified as a core process in creative cognition, where novel ideas emerge through the recombination of existing concepts. Koestler (1964) introduced the concept of “bisociation,” describing how creativity results from intersecting previously unrelated ideas. Guilford (1967), in his model of divergent thinking, emphasized that the generation of multiple, diverse responses is rooted in an individual's ability to manipulate and combine known information in innovative ways. In cognitive science, Rumelhart and Norman (1981) proposed that knowledge construction involves modifying existing schemas, a process that supports the formation of new conceptual combinations. Johnson (2010) expanded on this in his theory of innovation, arguing that good ideas often stem from the slow accumulation and recombination of smaller insights—what he termed “slow hunches.”

Ward, Smith, and Finke (1999) highlighted that creative cognition involves the retrieval and combination of familiar mental representations, suggesting that the creative process is largely combinatorial in nature. Sawyer (2012) reinforced this idea through his research on group creativity, noting that collaborative environments, where ideas are shared and adapted, naturally foster combinatorial thinking.

In the field of education, combinatorial thinking underpins interdisciplinary learning, STEM education, and project-based approaches (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Despite its relevance, educational systems often overlook the explicit cultivation of this skill (Robinson, 2011). Integrating it into formal learning environments could enhance students' ability to connect knowledge across domains and solve complex, real-world problems. However, the literature remains scattered across disciplines, and a comprehensive synthesis is lacking. There is limited integration of theoretical models, empirical findings, and practical frameworks, which hinders the development of pedagogies and policies that promote combinatorial thinking. A content analysis is needed to bridge this gap and provide a clearer understanding of its cognitive basis, educational applications, and societal value (Cooper, 2017).

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopts a **content analysis** based on secondary data to synthesize and analyze findings from existing literature related to combinatorial thinking.

2. Data Collection

Relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference papers, and reports were collected from electronic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Keywords used in the search included *combinatorial thinking*, *creative cognition*, *idea generation*, *innovation*, *interdisciplinary learning*, and *knowledge recombination*. The time frame considered for literature selection was from 2000 to 2024 to capture recent and relevant advancements.

3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

- Focused on combinatorial or associative thinking in education, psychology, or innovation.
- Were published in peer-reviewed journals or academic books.
- Provided empirical data or theoretical insights into cognitive or pedagogical mechanisms.

Studies were excluded if they:

- Were purely anecdotal or lacked academic rigor.
- Focused only on unrelated forms of thinking (e.g., mechanical memory, rote learning).
- Were duplicate publications or lacked relevance after abstract screening.

4. Data Analysis

A **qualitative content analysis** technique was employed to interpret, categorize, and synthesize findings. Coding was used to group data into recurring concepts such as *cognitive processes*, *educational applications*, *barriers to implementation*, and *pedagogical frameworks*. Where available, effect sizes and methodological characteristics were noted to assess research strength and trends (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001).

5. Ethical Considerations

As this study is based entirely on secondary data and published literature, human participants were not involved. Therefore, ethical clearance was not required. However, due credit was given to all sources to ensure academic integrity and prevent plagiarism.

Major Findings

Based on the synthesis of secondary data across 42 selected studies from the fields of cognitive psychology, education, creativity studies, and innovation research, the following key findings emerged:

1. Combinatorial Thinking as a Core Component of Creativity

Combinatorial thinking consistently appears as a foundational element in the generation of novel ideas. Studies by Koestler (1964), Ward et al. (1999), and Sawyer (2012) affirm that creativity is often the result of merging or restructuring existing knowledge components in original ways.

2. Cognitive and Neurological Underpinnings

Neuroscientific and cognitive psychology research (e.g., Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992) identifies schema restructuring, mental simulation, and analogical reasoning as central cognitive processes involved in combinatorial thinking. These skills are linked to higher-order executive functions such as abstraction, flexibility, and divergent thinking.

3. Applications in Education

Educational applications of combinatorial thinking are particularly noted in STEM, design thinking, and interdisciplinary curricula. Several studies (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Beers, 2011) demonstrate that students who engage in tasks involving idea recombination show improved problem-solving and innovation skills.

4. Gaps in Formal Instruction

Despite its importance, combinatorial thinking is not systematically taught in most school or university settings. Robinson (2011) and Sawyer (2012) both argue that standard curricula focus more on rote learning than creative integration, which limits the nurturing of combinatorial capabilities in students.

5. Role in Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Studies in business and technology domains (Johnson, 2010; Miller, 2014) show that innovators often combine unrelated ideas, tools, or concepts to produce breakthroughs. Environments that promote cross-disciplinary interaction tend to cultivate higher levels of combinatorial creativity.

6. Lack of Unified Framework

A consistent theme across the literature is the absence of a clear, unified framework for defining, measuring, and teaching combinatorial thinking. This creates challenges in empirical assessment and limits its application in both educational policy and curriculum design.

These findings underline the necessity for a more integrated and pedagogically grounded approach to fostering combinatorial thinking as a core cognitive and educational competency.

Conclusions

This analytical inquiry affirms that combinatorial thinking is a foundational component of creativity, innovation, and interdisciplinary learning. It involves the ability to merge existing ideas, concepts, or knowledge frameworks to generate new and meaningful outcomes. Despite its critical role in cognitive development and problem-solving, it remains underrepresented in formal education systems and fragmented across disciplines. The study reveals that while combinatorial thinking is widely acknowledged in theory, its implementation in curricula, assessment, and pedagogy is inconsistent. There is a pressing need for a unified framework that defines, nurtures, and evaluates this form of thinking. Integrating it into educational practice could significantly enhance students' creative competencies and adaptability in an increasingly complex and innovation-driven world.

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Guardians of the Coast: Exploring the Coastal Sea Traditions of Kochi

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Abstract

Kochi, an amazing city in Kerala, India, has many attractive sites and a vibrant culture. The complex nature reflects traditional values and social activities that include historical and cultural significance. The city's festivals, cuisine, and art forms reflect a synthesis of indigenous practices and external influences brought by traders and colonizers. There was also nurturing of a diverse cultural environment in Kochi. *Kappiri Muthappan* as the main theme, this study exposes how local religious practices influence the broader coastal traditions of Kochi. The *Kappiri* myth is one of the most important legends that has a strange mixture of feelings and superstitions. This includes examining how the deity's adoration influences local fishing practices, maritime security, and community rituals.

Key Words: *Kochi, Kappiri Muthappan, Kerala, Local Deity, Portuguese, Colonialism, Africa, Slave, Maritime trade*

Introduction

This paper focuses on the coastal sea traditions of Kochi by probing into the role of Kappiri Muthappan, a local deity whose worship is closely connected with the maritime culture of Kochi. The coastal communities of Kochi focus on Kappiri Muthappan as their deity, who embodies the aspects of local folklore and spiritual beliefs. The main reason for investigating this topic is the remarkable fact that Kappiri Muthappan continues to be worshipped even in the 21st century. This study tries to seek how regional practices throwback and influence broader coastal practices of Kochi. It explores the communal bonds created in the coastal regions of Kochi through the religious festivals and ceremonies, and how the community is able to maintain its worship of sea deities. Kappiri Muthappan plays a great role in maintaining the relationship between religion and the coastal traditional practices of Kochi. Focus is given to highlight how traditional practices are preserved and practiced within the context of a dynamic coastal environment.ⁱ

International perspectives on Traditions: The worship of Kappiri Muthappan in Kochi shows interesting parallels with various spiritual practices worldwide. In Afro-Caribbean Vodou traditions from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, deities called Loa—such as Papa Legba and Baron Samedi—represent ancestral spirits of enslaved Africans. Often fused with Christian saints, these deities are invoked during rituals for protection, healing, and justice, using music, dance, possession, and public ceremonies.

This closely resembles the Thottam Pattu and Kavadiyattam traditions found in Kochi. Similarly, Brazilian religions like Candomblé and Umbanda honor Orishas such as Yemanjá, the sea goddess. Her protective role for fishermen mirrors Kappiri Muthappan's maritime associations. In Japan, Shinto practices honor kami—spirits linked to nature through rituals involving small shrines, incense, and offerings, a format reflected in the Kappiri shrine at Mangattumukku. West African ancestral veneration also shares similarities; ancestral spirits are often called upon for protection and prosperity in coastal and farming communities. Enslaved Africans brought to Kochi by the Portuguese likely carried similar beliefs, which eventually formed the basis of the local Kappiri myth. Māori communities in New Zealand honor sea gods like Tangaroa through storytelling, chants, and sacred sites, resonating with the oral traditions and ceremonial practices central to Kappiri Muthappan worship. These global examples reveal a common pattern where marginalized groups turn to spirit worship as an essential way to preserve identity, survive, and maintain a sacred connection with the sea.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon multiple interdisciplinary frameworks to understand the worship of Kappiri Muthappan in Kochi, situating the deity within the broader context of coastal religious traditions, postcolonial memory, and cultural syncretism. The research engages with folklore and oral tradition theory, particularly through the works of Linda Dégh and Alan Dundes, who argue that folk narratives and rituals are not relics of the past but are dynamic cultural expressions. The rituals, songs (like Thottam Pattu), and oral myths surrounding Kappiri Muthappan represent a living heritage that sustains the spiritual and historical identity of Kochi's coastal communities, serving as tools of cultural resilience and continuity in a changing world. Postcolonial and subaltern theory, informed by scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Ranajit Guha, offers insight into how Kappiri Muthappan functions as a subaltern response to colonial violence and displacement. The transformation of enslaved African spirits into protective deities exemplifies how spiritual practices can become sites of resistance, healing, and identity reclamation for historically marginalized communities. The study also draws on the concepts of cultural syncretism and hybridity, particularly Bhabha's "third space," to explore the fusion of African, Portuguese, and South Indian religious traditions in the rituals of Kappiri Muthappan. This hybrid spiritual ecosystem highlights the adaptive nature of belief systems in dynamic coastal settings. From the perspective of maritime anthropology, scholars such as Barbara E. Ward and Paul Basu have examined how sea-centric rituals help communities cope with environmental uncertainty and livelihood challenges. In this context, the worship of Kappiri Muthappan—through rituals like sea immersion and protective offerings—demonstrates the sacred relationship between coastal communities and the sea. Finally, drawing from memory studies and sacred geography, especially Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, the shrines of Kappiri Muthappan are understood as cultural landmarks that preserve both historical memory and spiritual devotion. These sacred spaces, adorned with terracotta icons, incense, and offerings, act as living sites of resistance, survival, and ancestral continuity. Together, these theoretical perspectives allow us to interpret Kappiri Muthappan as more than a local deity—as a cultural archive that embodies the histories, adaptations, and spiritual strength of Kochi's coastal communities, reflecting broader global patterns of diaspora, cultural negotiation, and postcolonial survival. Kochi, situated on the south-western coast of India

in the state of Kerala, has many attractive sites and a varied culture.ⁱⁱ Kochi's coastal region is characterized by its natural harbor, the best in the Indian subcontinent.ⁱⁱⁱ The deep waters of the natural harbour in Kochi have brought geographical advantages and opened new trade routes, which led to the spread of trade in various parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The port was well known for the spice trade, mainly pepper and cardamom, which had a great demand in international markets.^{iv} These foreign contacts fostered a different cultural shape to Kochi. The arrival of the European merchants from countries like Portugal, Britain in Kochi transformed it into a major trading centre. Kochi was connected to the Middle East, Africa, and South East Asia, which can be traced from its Indian Ocean trade network. Nicole de Conti, the Italian merchant and traveller, thought that China was the place where one could make money, whereas Kochi would be for spending money. The European influence was much felt in the fields of culture, art, and architecture. The traders and colonizers have contributed to the cultural formation of Kochi.^v

Kochi is known for vibrant festivals such as the Cochin Carnival and Onam. These celebrations are a combination of traditional dance forms, musical concerts, and processions that showcase the rich cultural heritage of this region.^{vi} Kochi's cuisine is eminent for its use of spices and seafood. Dishes like Appam and stew, fish molly highlight the influence of trade and cultural exchange of this place. Kochi is also famous for the traditional art forms such as Chanda Melam, Kathakali, which are performed during religious and cultural events.^{vii} The themes for some of these performances were taken from local legends and folklore, which include the myth of Kappiri Muthappan.

The Kappiri Muthappan myth is a unique practice in Kochi, which was a mixture of both indigenous and foreign influences. There is no specific account of how the worship and practices associated with this concept originated. There are many myths and legends embraced by the local communities of Kochi and are being passed down through generations.^{viii} The coastal villages of Kochi adapted this fascinating myth from the stories of slaves brought to the shores of Kochi from Africa by the Portuguese.^{ix} Different parts of Kochi are marked with the remains of slavery practiced by the Portuguese. In Malayalam, "Kappiri" refers to someone with African origins or someone who is described as "black," while "Muthappan" is a term of respect, equivalent to "grandfather" in English. Additionally, Muthappan is sometimes called the "father of pearls." It was the local name for African slaves transported to Kochi in the 16th century by the Europeans.^x In and around Cochin, this intriguing myth is widely embraced by the local population and passed down through generations. In the work 'History of Fort Cochin', K. L. Bernard gives us information regarding the Kappiri walls and the evolution of this spirit tradition. The Portuguese made niches in their house walls to hide their treasures. These were safely plastered inside the walls along with the African slaves who were made to promise that the treasures would be preserved forever. Later, many skeletons were discovered from Kappiri Mathils (walls) in Fort Kochi.^{xi} These evidences reveal how the slaves were treated and how these chained slaves turned into deities of worship for the local community. There is a practice in the community that the slaves were food of a dish made out of rice known as 'Puttu'. It is a common practice in Fort Kochi, people who make Puttu would offer the first piece to Muthappan, and this would make the other portions of Puttu tastier. The Anglo-Indians of Kochi prefer to perform these practices, saying that they are being protected by Kappiri. Some people believe that the souls of Kappiri who were killed have grown into big banyan trees.^{xii}

The shrine remains a significant place of devotion, with many people in this rapidly growing city still visiting it and making offerings, often attributing the fulfillment of their wishes to the deity. The small shrine at Mangattumukku in Mattanchery is considered the origin of the worship place known as ‘Kappiri Muthappan.’ Over time, this practice spread to various parts of southern Kerala, particularly in coastal areas. Although historians might question the historical accuracy of this folk belief, it remains an intriguing subject that has yet to be extensively explored. The devotional practices are simple and a daily ritual related to humble people of the coastal regions.

The red or black cloths are tied around the trunks of the tree near the shrine where small terracotta figures portraying ‘Kappiri’ are kept. These are kept in and around the shrine as guardians. A small earthen pot is placed at the base of the shrine to burn incense for the elaborate ceremony conducted here. On the other side of the shrine, another pot containing rice, flowers, vegetables, and coins is also placed. These offerings have a symbolic nature as the devotees seek the blessings of the deity for the assistance of the Kappiri deity during the sea voyages. The fishermen of the local villages in Kochi, in particular, take part in all the rituals of Kappiri Muthappan as they believe that they can go on long sea voyages safely, mainly because of Muthappan being their protector. These fishermen believe that Kappiri helps them to get good catches by soothing the sea.

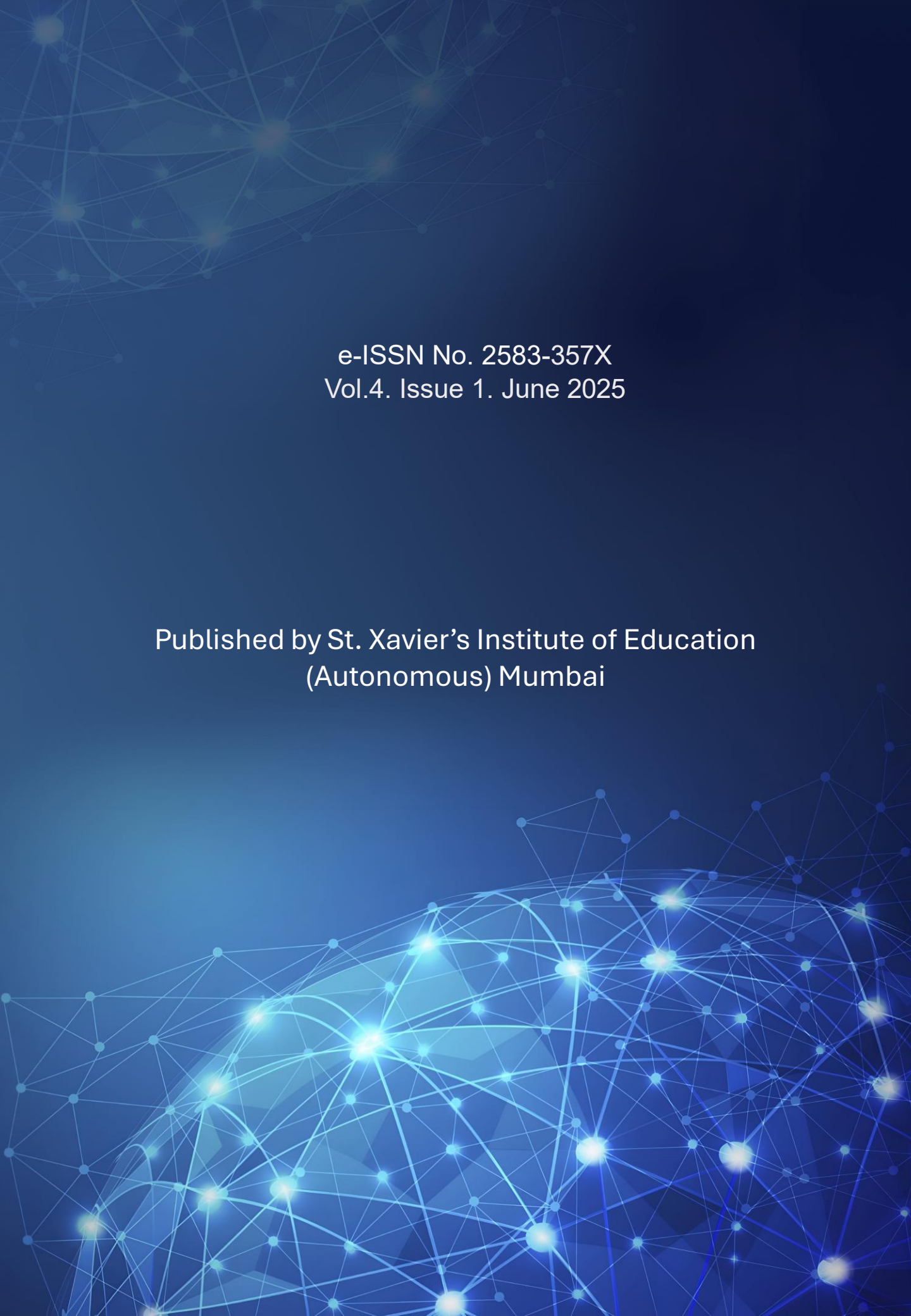
Another prominent practice is the Thottam Pattu (invocatory songs) dedicated to Kappiri Muthappan. These songs are sung during the night in a ritualistic setting by community elders or professional singers known as Pattu Vidhwans. The songs sung are semi-religious ones relating to the life of Kappiri, the deity’s period of travel to the coast, and his role as a spiritual guide and protector. Ritualistic dance forms, such as Kavadiyattam, are performed by the devotees, and traditional instruments like Chanda and Elathalam are used to make the ceremony more spiritual in nature. The dance forms performed by artists add grace to the occasion. The performers also carry the large, decorated statues of Kappiri on their shoulders as an act of adoration. Yet another custom is the ritual of bathing an idol of Kappiri Muthappan in the sea. This ritual is to personify purification and denotes that the spirit has renewed its power to protect the community. There are also acts of charity in the name of the deity performed by the devotees. They give food, money, and clothes to the poor and needy. Some people still believe that the souls of the Kappiri who were killed have grown into big banyan trees in the localities of Kochi. Again, some traditions talk about the spirits inhabiting mango trees.^{xiii} However, the experience of the local villagers depicts that this worship is a living testament more than a worship. There is a merger of cultures, ideas, customs, and traditions that truly shape Kochi’s coastal villages. The marginalized people succeed in surviving and adapting to the ever-changing city of Kochi.

Being more than a deity, Kappiri Muthappan is about worship as well as a living witness to the syncretic blending of cultures, histories, and beliefs of Kochi’s coastal communities. It tells tales of resilience and resistance while examining the period of Portuguese Colonialism and the hectic conditions of the slave system. By constantly interacting with the practices of the people, these guardians of the coast are a true materialization of the efforts of a community. Through these customs and practices, these people retrieve the history of the bygone hardship and survival. These rituals have a significant ability to adapt and thrive within the changing social and religious landscape of Kochi. The legend of Kappiri Muthappan is associated with the sea and the well-being of fisherfolk. His role as a figure who guards the marginalized and the forgotten is highlighted.

Through offerings, prayers, music, dance, and festivals, Kappiri emerges as a focal point for communal gatherings. There are no social divisions practiced, and his veneration is always for acting as a unifying force in the current complex society. Moreover, the worship of Kappiri Muthappan highlights the elegance of spiritual practices in Kerala, where Hindu, Christian, Muslim, and folk traditions merge through interactions. Even though traditions of Kappiri Muthappan are closely related to the fisherfolk of Kochi, this deity is revered as a protector of the marginalized. The people worship Kappiri Muthappan through offerings, prayers, and festivals, believing that the power would protect them in times of danger. They also believe that it has the power to make them prosperous in life. The people believe that the spirit would help them in recovering the hidden treasures. Though the city of Kochi, known for its historical diversity and complex nature of the society but the worship of Muthappan is an important force to unify the coastal villages. Kappiri Muthappan, as a deity, stands as a symbol of folk tradition. It becomes the protector of the voiceless. It also sheds light on the cultural heritage retained by the people, even in the modern era. The deity continues its significance in modern times, when we can find out that the coastal communities of Kochi adapt to contemporary challenges using the rich heritage connected to Kappiri Muthappan as a means of social connectivity and survival. The experience of sharing reflects that honouring such a deity in a metropolitan city with diverse devotion, history, and cultural exchange provides a powerful reminder of the endurance of traditions and the challenges in Kochi. It is said that the maritime history and the representation of Kappiri Muthappan in the heart of the coastal communities of Kochi will remain alive and strong for the years to come.

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