



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS : A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FINNISH AND INDIAN PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

Jyotika Bailung

Faculty Associate

Department of Education

Sibsagar University, Sivasagar, India

Abstract : Educationist David Kolbe created the proposition of existential literacy, which highlights the significance, process, and tactics of learning from gests that have been beautifully explained. Since literacy is regarded as an active and witching process, existential literacy emphasises how exposure to and compliances of real-world situations are among the most engaging and long- lasting literacy strategies. Concrete Experience, Reflective compliances, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation are the literacy phases in the cyclical process that's the existential literacy approach. The existential literacy approach has been successfully incorporated into the educational system of Finland, whose primary education system is regarded as the most stylish in the world. The thing of this existential literacy approach is to develop the three most sought- after capacities for any learner's creativity, problem- working, and critical and formative thinking. A nation like India, which has historically prioritized strict classes and orthodox test-acquainted systems, is preparing for new educational reforms under the ambitious National Education Policy(NEP) 2020, which places a strong emphasis on literacy by doing. This paper examines the idea of existential literacy and its current state in Finland and India. There are notable variations in how it's applied, and India can learn a number of assignments from Finland to produce a primary education system that's able.

Keywords : Experiential learning, Finland, India, NEP 2020.

INTRODUCTION

The famed realistic educator John Dewey was the one who first propagated the idea of literacy by doing. In 1896, he innovated an existential academy at the University of Chicago to put his distinctive practical education model into practice. puts the pupil and experience at the center of the educational diapason. Scholars who use an existential literacy approach do not just study data. Rather, he's laboriously prompted to use vicarious literacy to gain life gests . David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which has converted education encyclopedically in recent decades, is harmonious with John Dewey's proposition. Field studies, design- grounded social literacy, and play- grounded pedagogy have all been used to incorporate existential literacy into Finland's primary education system for numerous times. This approach has produced a generation of active, curious, and curious learners who are largely

responsive and reflective in their methodology. India, on the other hand, has traditionally placed further significance on text-grounded education and unrestricted-concluded examinations. For India, a paradigm shift toward existential and skill-grounded literacy approaches was suggested by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Objective of the Study

1. To investigate how Finnish primary schools use the experiential learning approach to make learning engaging and purposeful.
2. To investigate the application of the experiential learning approach in Indian primary schools in light of NEP 2020
3. To compare how experiential learning is used in the primary education systems of Finland and India.
4. To offer some recommendations regarding the application of the Finnish primary education system's best practices in the Indian primary education system

Review of Related Literature

According to analyses of Finland's experiential learning-based educational system by Mandavkar (2023), Sari et al. (2022), Hakala and Kujala (2021), and Sahlberg and Walker (2021), the country has become a unique model of quality in primary education because of the great autonomy of its teachers, its liberal educational scheme, its individualized instruction, and its student-centric policies. However, Mahanta and Garg (2022), Paltasingh and Bhue (2021), and Kalyani (2020) discovered that an inflexible curriculum, antiquated methods, and an antiquated assessment system had a negative impact on Indian primary education. It was noted that NEP 2020 will undoubtedly bring about some much-needed improvements to India's primary education system, which is currently dealing with problems like centralized implementation, financial constraints brought on by the country's enormous population, and gaps in teacher training.

Procedure of the Study

A variety of secondary sources, such as government reports, policy documents, curriculum designs, and school manuals, were systematically assessed using content analysis. Credible information was gathered and added to the study by combining all of the observations and insights gleaned from secondary sources.

Experiential Learning in Finland's Primary Education

The experiential learning model method works well in the Finnish primary education system to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world application. This makes the learning process much more interesting, engaging, practical, and fun. In Finnish schools, play-based learning is also an important part of early childhood and primary education. In Finnish classrooms, children are encouraged to move around, play, and interact with others, which helps all students' cognitive and social-emotional development. This is different from traditional systems where children are expected to sit still for long periods of time. The idea of using music, stories, and role-playing to integrate art into learning can turn boring lessons into rich, multi-sensory experiences that work for all kinds of learning styles and abilities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.). Furthermore, a significant innovation in Finland's primary education system is Phenomenon-Based Learning (PhBL). PhBl is a new pedagogical approach that substitutes interdisciplinary, inquiry-driven study of real-world themes for conventional subject-based instruction. Students study broad themes or phenomena rather than discrete and compartmentalized subjects, combining language studies, social sciences, mathematics, and science knowledge into a single project.

Additionally, kids in Finnish primary schools devote a lot of time to cooperative problem-solving exercises like creating a community garden or charting a hiking route. Mathematical lessons may include figuring out a playground's perimeter or measuring the rates at which trees grow. The value of experiential, hands-on learning outside of the classroom is reinforced by the fact that exposure to natural environments enhances concentration, lowers stress levels, and stimulates creativity. Literacy activities could involve storytelling sessions around a campfire or poetry writing inspired by nature. Finland employs formative and criterion-referenced assessment techniques to gauge student progress rather than depending solely on standardized testing, as is the case in many

other nations. It's fascinating and astounding to learn that primary school students are evaluated using a rubric, ongoing observation, self-reflection, and portfolio-based (process and product) evaluation rather than high-stakes tests.

Assessment in Finnish primary schools focuses on students' individual development, learning trajectory, creative outlook, and problem-solving skills rather than just assigning grades or ranking students based on predetermined academic criteria, as is the case with norm referenced criterion assessment, which is viewed as fundamentally flawed by many progressive educationists. The following are some of the most widely used assessment methods in Finnish elementary schools: Self-Reflection Journals: To promote mindfulness and metacognition, students keep journals in which they document their own thoughts, experiences, and discoveries. Students demonstrate their understanding of concepts and present their research findings through interpersonal communication and practical application. Teachers provide each student with individualized feedback on their areas of strength and growth rather than assigning grades. This easy, student-focused approach will help all students. Finland's primary education model is now a great example for future educational reforms worldwide thanks to this outstanding approach.

Experiential Learning in India's Primary Education

In the Indian primary education system, NEP 2020 has promoted a paradigm shift through experiential learning and life-related education. Because it has a significant impact on students' cognitive, social, and emotional development, the primary education system is an important stage. Many schools are encouraging students to actively participate in their education by applying their knowledge in real-world situations, in accordance with the directives and guidelines of NEP 2020. Students are now encouraged to: Engage in field-based learning, where students visit historical sites, small-scale industries, or natural settings to gain a contextual understanding of their subject; Conduct experiments to understand scientific phenomena, such as growing plants under various conditions to study photosynthesis. To make social studies and history lessons more engaging, engage in role-playing exercises like acting out historical events or plays, or participate in simulated debates and elocutions. Make learning more engaging and participatory by using the craft of storytelling to convey and express ideas. All of these teaching strategies are in complete harmony with David Kolb's well-known experiential learning theory, which holds that concepts are understood and retained through a cycle of firsthand experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application.

Challenges in Implementing Experiential Learning in India

In many government and rural schools, where traditional teaching methods still predominate, experiential learning is still underutilized despite progressive changes in some schools. The extensive use of experiential learning is hampered by a number of structural and systemic issues, such as packed classrooms, exam-focused curriculum, inadequate experiential pedagogy training for teachers, limited resources and infrastructure, etc. Large class sizes, which frequently exceed 50–60 students per classroom, are one of the main barriers to experiential learning in India. Because of this, it is very challenging to implement individualized instruction and learning by doing. Finland, on the other hand, which is a leader in experiential learning, keeps class sizes small (usually 12 students per class), which enables teachers to engage with students more effectively and support group-based inquiry. As previously mentioned, competitive entrance exams and high-stakes board exams have historically dominated India's educational system, emphasizing memorization over conceptual understanding. Exam preparation still takes precedence over experiential, student-centered learning in many schools. The majority of Indian educators are not familiar with experiential teaching methods. Instead of emphasizing interactive, hands-on learning, teacher training programs frequently emphasize textbook instruction. Many educators are overworked with administrative duties, which hinders their capacity to use creative teaching strategies. Most schools, especially those in rural areas, don't have the basic infrastructure they need for experiential learning. For example, they don't have well-equipped science labs for hands-on experiments, digital tools and internet access for technology-based learning, outdoor learning spaces for nature and environmental education, or project-based learning kits and maker spaces for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education. Despite these intimidating obstacles, a number of promising initiatives are leading the way in promoting experiential learning throughout India, including Atal Tinkering Labs (where students can work on hands-on STEM projects using 3D printers, robotics kits, and AI tools). Eklavya Model Residential Schools (established for tribal students, these schools place an emphasis on skill

development, activity-based learning, and contextualized education that is in line with students' cultural backgrounds); and Storytelling-Based Pedagogy (through numerous non-profit organizations, including Pratham and Teach for India).

In order to successfully infuse and integrate experiential learning into India's primary education system, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders must include experiential learning modules in teacher training programs, provide continuous professional development workshops to help teachers integrate activity-based learning into regular lessons, and support peer learning networks where educators can share best practices and learn from successful experiential education models. Additionally, rote-based exams must be replaced with competency-based assessments that measure creativity, problem-solving, and knowledge application. Encouraging project-based assessments, funding STEM labs, ensuring equitable distribution of digital tools and educational resources, and fostering public-private partnerships are some essential steps. With NEP 2020 opening the door for experiential learning in primary education, we can say that India is at a turning point in its educational transformation. If India wants to make its schools truly effective and forward-thinking, it must invest in better teacher training, infrastructure development, competency-based assessments, and experiential learning environments.

Comparing Experiential Learning in Finland and India

There are some significant differences in curriculum flexibility, assessment methods, and learning environments between Finland's well-established experiential learning model and India's developing educational system under NEP 2020. With a focus on inquiry-based, interdisciplinary, and experiential learning, Finland has led the world in student-centered education for many years. On the other hand, India is currently working to implement and accomplish a gradual shift towards competency-based education under NEP 2020, despite its historically exam-driven, rote-learning-based system. Small and manageable class sizes are one of Finland's most notable educational advantages since they readily permit individualized instruction, practical exercises, and improved teacher-student interaction. As previously mentioned, each child receives individualized attention thanks to Finland's exceptional student-teacher ratio (roughly 1:12 in primary education), which increases the effectiveness of experiential learning. In contrast, it is extremely difficult to implement student-centered, activity-based learning on a large scale in India due to the country's overcrowded classrooms, which are frequently 1:40 or more. Many Indian schools face resource shortages and logistical challenges in providing all students with experiential learning opportunities. The effectiveness and caliber of teacher training initiatives in India represent yet another significant concern. NEP 2020 acknowledged this problem and recommended a strong emphasis on primary teacher capacity building initiatives to boost their efficacy. In order to promote skills like critical thinking, reflective observation, and problem solving, NEP has also strongly advocated competency-based assessment. The elimination of the one-size-fits-all strategy has been proposed by NEP 2020 as a significant policy change. Additionally, NEP 2020 has suggested significant investments in digital education and infrastructure, but full implementation is yet to be realized nationwide.

Lessons India Can Learn from Finland

Application-driven assessment must replace memorization-based evaluation in order to promote in-depth learning and skill development. India should move away from high-stakes tests and toward portfolio-based evaluations, project assessments, and journals for self-reflection. Students should be encouraged to use case studies, experiments, presentations, and practical problem-solving exercises to illustrate their understanding. Critical thinking and group learning must be prioritized over assigning grades to students. To really improve learning, we also need to focus more on interactive and flexible learning environments, creating phenomenon-based learning curricula, interdisciplinary projects, and student-driven inquiry projects. In order to guarantee fair access to hands-on learning, India must also increase funding for STEM labs, digital education projects, and interactive learning resources. India must take steps to make true experiential learning a reality and a resounding success, including bridging the gap between urban and rural education by giving rural schools access to technology-enabled classrooms, encouraging public-private partnerships, organizing community-driven projects, real-world apprenticeships, and exposing students to real-world problem-solving through field visits, internships, and mentorship programs. Experiential learning has the potential to completely transform Indian education by turning classrooms into vibrant hubs for innumerable discoveries. Finland's best practices, including competency-based evaluations, multidisciplinary projects, and adaptable teaching approaches, can help India close the gap between traditional and modern education.

Conclusion

The quality of the teaching and learning process could be significantly altered by the use of the experiential learning model. The Finnish educational system has successfully implemented David Kolbe's model, yielding remarkable outcomes. There is a great deal of promise in elements like using an interdisciplinary approach to learning, relating education to real-world circumstances, and reflecting on tangible experiences with active participation. The Finnish model gives teachers a great deal of freedom to approach classroom interactions with an exploratory, activity-based, and experimental mindset. This explains why Finland's primary school environment is stress-free, happy, and jam-packed with educational opportunities. India is also attempting to implement the experiential learning model in its classrooms as part of NEP 2020. This strategy can assist the Indian system in eliminating many of its obvious flaws if it is implemented successfully. The provision of appropriate autonomy, infrastructure support, and digital resources to India's primary teachers is necessary for this to occur. The design of the curriculum must be more adaptable, focused on activities, and forward-thinking. Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary instruction must be promoted. The goal of having a truly high-quality education could be accomplished in this way.

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