

ARTICLE

Reimagining Education: The Philosophy, Evolution, and Policy Landscape of Child-Centered Learning

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the principles and theory of child-centered education through philosophical, social, and policy perspectives. Rooted in the constructivist model of education, the approach views learning as an active, contextual, interpretive and student-driven process. The paper highlights the contributions of key thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Maria Montessori, Swami Vivekananda, and Rabindranath Tagore, who advocated educational models that respect individuality, creativity, and holistic development. A chronological analysis of India's policy landscape—from the National Policy on Education (1986) to the National Education Policy (2020)—reveals a consistent and gradually more emphasizing commitment to child-centered pedagogy, albeit with lacunas in implementation. Challenges such as inadequate teacher training, redundant classroom practices, lack of quality educational materials in Indian languages, and infrastructural limitations continue to hinder the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches. The paper also discusses contemporary innovations such as responsive classrooms, play-based learning, and the whole-child framework. The paper also delves into what perspective do Indian Knowledge Traditions have to offer on the significance of learners. It concludes with practical policy recommendations, including experiential learning, multilingual education, continuous assessment, and culturally-sensitive curriculum development which are based on specific challenges and conditions in our country. In the concluding sections, it argues for a meaningful transformation in Indian education—one that truly centers the child in both pedagogy and implementation.

Keywords: Child Centered Education, Constructivism, Progressive Pedagogy, NEP-2020, Play-Based Learning, Responsive Classroom, Basic Education.

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