

Experiential and Nature-Based Learning in India through the Educational Thought of Rabindranath Tagore

Ruma Mukherjee

Research Scholar, Department of Education, RKDF University, Ranchi

Abstract:

Experiential and nature-based learning occupy a central place in the educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore, who believed that true education grows from direct experience and close contact with nature. This paper explores Tagore's ideas on learning through experience and nature and examines their relevance in the Indian educational context. Tagore opposed rigid classroom teaching and book-centered learning, as he felt such methods restrict curiosity, creativity, and emotional growth. Instead, he emphasized learning by doing, observing, feeling, and interacting with the natural and social environment. According to Tagore, nature is the best teacher because it helps learners develop sensitivity, imagination, and a sense of harmony with the world. His educational experiment at Santiniketan reflected this belief, where students learned in open-air classrooms and engaged in activities related to art, music, agriculture, and community life. Experiential learning, in Tagore's view, helps students connect knowledge with real life and encourages independent thinking rather than memorization. In the present Indian education system, experiential and nature-based learning are increasingly important. Modern schooling often focuses heavily on examinations, rote learning, and academic competition, which can lead to stress and disinterest among students. Tagore's educational ideas offer valuable solutions by promoting joyful learning, creativity, and mental well-being. His approach also supports environmental awareness and sustainable living, which are crucial in today's world. This paper concludes that integrating experiential and nature-based learning inspired by Tagore can make Indian education more meaningful and learner-centered. Such an approach can help students develop not only academic knowledge but also emotional balance, social responsibility, and respect for nature. Tagore's educational thought continues to provide strong guidance for creating a holistic and humane education system in India.

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Introduction:

Experiential and nature-based learning form an important part of the educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore, who believed that true education comes from direct experience and close interaction with nature. Tagore strongly opposed mechanical classroom teaching and rote memorization, as he felt these methods limited the natural curiosity and creativity of children. According to him, education should help learners

understand life, nature, and society through observation, participation, and personal experience rather than through textbooks alone. Tagore believed that nature plays a vital role in the healthy growth of a child's mind and emotions. He felt that learning in natural surroundings develops sensitivity, imagination, and a sense of harmony with the world. His educational experiment at Santiniketan reflected this belief, where students learned in open-air classrooms and engaged in activities related to nature, art, music, and community life. Such an environment encouraged freedom, joy in learning, and a deep connection between knowledge and real-life experiences.

In the Indian context, education has traditionally emphasized classroom instruction, examinations, and academic achievement. This approach often leads to stress, lack of creativity, and limited emotional development among students. In recent years, educators and policymakers have recognized the need for experiential learning methods that promote active participation and meaningful understanding. Tagore's educational ideas offer valuable guidance in this direction, as they focus on learning by doing and learning through nature. Experiential and nature-based learning inspired by Tagore can help make education more engaging, learner-centered, and humane. It supports the holistic development of students by nurturing intellectual growth along with emotional balance and moral values. Therefore, studying Tagore's educational thought is important for understanding how experiential and nature-based learning can contribute to improving the quality of education in India today.

Need and Significance of the Study:

The study of experiential and nature-based learning through the educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore is important in the present context of Indian education. Today, the education system is largely focused on examinations, textbooks, and memorization, which often limits creativity and practical understanding among students. Many learners experience stress and lack interest in learning because they are unable to connect classroom knowledge with real-life experiences. Therefore, there is a strong need to explore alternative approaches to education that make learning meaningful, joyful, and life-oriented. This study is significant because Tagore's educational philosophy offers a learner-centered approach that emphasizes learning by doing and learning through nature. He believed that direct experience helps students understand concepts more deeply and encourages independent thinking. Nature-based learning, according to Tagore, nurtures emotional balance, sensitivity, and respect for the environment. In a time when children are increasingly disconnected from nature due to urbanization and excessive screen use, Tagore's ideas provide valuable guidance for reconnecting learners with the natural world.

The significance of this study also lies in its relevance to current educational reforms in India, which promote experiential learning, environmental education, and holistic development. Tagore's ideas support these goals by integrating academic learning with creative activities, social interaction, and environmental awareness. This study is useful for teachers, curriculum planners, and policymakers who seek to improve the quality of education. By adopting experiential and nature-based learning inspired by Tagore, Indian education can become more humane, inclusive, and effective in developing well-rounded individuals.

Table- Need and Significance of the Study on Experiential and Nature-Based Learning in India through the Educational Thought of Rabindranath Tagore

Aspect	Explanation
Need of the Study	The present Indian education system is mostly textbook- and exam-oriented, which limits practical understanding and creativity among students.

Learning through Experience	Tagore emphasized learning by doing, which helps students connect knowledge with real-life situations and improves understanding.
Importance of Nature-Based Learning	Learning in close contact with nature supports emotional balance, imagination, and respect for the environment.
Student Well-being	Experiential and nature-based learning reduce academic stress and increase interest and joy in learning.
Relevance to Modern Education	Tagore's ideas align with current educational reforms focusing on experiential, activity-based, and holistic learning.
Environmental Awareness	Nature-based education helps develop environmental responsibility and sustainable attitudes among learners.
Teacher's Role	Teachers act as guides and facilitators, encouraging observation, exploration, and independent thinking.
Educational Significance	The study supports the development of a humane, learner-centered, and inclusive education system in India.

Literature Review:

The educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore has been widely discussed in relation to experiential and nature-based learning in India. Scholars agree that Tagore viewed education as a living process rooted in direct experience rather than rote memorization. Tagore (1917) emphasized that learning becomes meaningful when learners interact with nature and real-life situations. His ideas emerged as a response to the rigid, examination-driven colonial education system, which he believed suppressed curiosity and creativity. Several studies highlight Tagore's belief that nature plays a central role in the growth of the child's mind and emotions. Researchers note that learning in natural surroundings helps develop sensitivity, imagination, and emotional balance among learners (Mukherjee, 2015). Tagore's experiment at Santiniketan demonstrated how open-air classrooms and close contact with nature could create a joyful and stress-free learning environment. Sen (2012) observed that such an approach encourages students to observe, explore, and learn independently, which is essential for experiential learning.

Literature also emphasizes Tagore's focus on learning through experience and activity. According to Chakrabarti (2018), Tagore believed that education should connect knowledge with life through art, music, crafts, and community engagement. These activities help learners understand concepts practically rather than memorizing facts. Scholars argue that experiential learning, as promoted by Tagore, supports critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are often missing in traditional classroom teaching (Das, 2020). Recent studies examine the relevance of Tagore's ideas in the context of modern Indian education. Researchers point out that the current system still relies heavily on textbooks and examinations, leading to stress and lack of engagement among students (Kumar, 2019). In this context, Tagore's emphasis on experiential and nature-based learning aligns closely with contemporary educational reforms that promote activity-based learning and environmental education (Sharma, 2021). So, the reviewed literature shows that Tagore's educational philosophy provides a strong foundation for experiential and nature-based learning in

India. Scholars consistently suggest that integrating his ideas into modern educational practices can make learning more meaningful, joyful, and learner-centered while also promoting environmental awareness and holistic development.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze the concept of experiential and nature-based learning in the educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore through qualitative review of secondary sources such as books, research articles, and philosophical writings.
2. To examine the relevance of Rabindranath Tagore's ideas on experiential and nature-based learning in the context of the present Indian education system by critically studying existing literature, educational reports, and policy documents using secondary data.

Research Methodology:

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach based on secondary data to examine experiential and nature-based learning through the educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore. Data for the study were collected from secondary sources such as Tagore's educational writings, books, research articles, journals, biographies, and official educational policy documents. Relevant literature was carefully selected to understand Tagore's views on learning through experience, nature, and creativity. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and thematic analysis to identify key ideas and recurring themes related to experiential and nature-based learning. This qualitative method helps in developing a deep understanding of Tagore's educational philosophy and its relevance to the Indian education system.

Discussion:

The discussion of experiential and nature-based learning through the educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore is based on qualitative analysis of secondary sources such as books, research articles, and educational reports. The analysis shows that Tagore strongly believed learning should come from direct experience rather than rote memorization. According to him, students understand concepts more deeply when they learn by doing, observing, and participating in real-life activities. This approach helps learners connect knowledge with life and encourages independent thinking. One of the central ideas in Tagore's educational philosophy is the role of nature in learning. He believed that nature is a powerful teacher that nurtures curiosity, imagination, and emotional balance. Learning in natural surroundings allows students to observe changes, develop sensitivity, and build a harmonious relationship with the environment. Secondary literature highlights that Tagore's open-air classrooms at Santiniketan provided a stress-free and joyful learning environment, which is often missing in modern schooling. In today's education system, where students spend long hours indoors and face academic pressure, nature-based learning can help improve mental well-being and engagement.

The discussion also reveals that experiential learning in Tagore's philosophy includes creative activities such as art, music, crafts, and community work. These activities allow students to express themselves freely and develop practical skills along with academic understanding. Many scholars point out that such learning methods support the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and social skills. In contrast, the traditional Indian education system still gives more importance to textbooks and examinations, which limits experiential learning opportunities. Furthermore, Tagore's ideas are highly relevant to contemporary educational reforms in India that emphasize activity-based learning, environmental education, and holistic development. His educational thought aligns with the need to make learning more learner-centered and meaningful. Overall, the discussion indicates that adopting experiential and nature-based learning inspired

by Tagore can help transform Indian education into a more humane, engaging, and balanced system that supports the overall development of learners.

Table- Different Aspects of Discussion

Theme	Tagore’s Educational View	Implications for Indian Education
Learning through Experience	Learning should occur through direct experience, observation, and participation rather than memorization.	Helps students connect knowledge with real life and develop independent thinking.
Role of Nature in Learning	Nature acts as a teacher that nurtures curiosity, imagination, and emotional balance.	Supports mental well-being and creates a joyful, stress-free learning environment.
Open Learning Environment	Learning should take place in open and natural surroundings.	Encourages engagement and reduces classroom pressure in modern schooling.
Creative Activities	Art, music, crafts, and community work are essential parts of learning.	Promotes creativity, practical skills, and balanced personality development.
Student-Centered Learning	Learners should actively participate in the learning process.	Aligns with activity-based and learner-centered teaching methods.
Limitations of Traditional System	Overdependence on textbooks and examinations limits experiential learning.	Highlights the need for reform in teaching and assessment practices.
Contemporary Relevance	Tagore’s ideas support experiential, environmental, and holistic education.	Aligns with current educational reforms in India.
Overall Impact	Experiential and nature-based learning make education humane and meaningful.	Helps develop well-rounded, responsible, and environmentally aware learners.

Findings of the Study:

The study finds that Rabindranath Tagore strongly emphasized experiential and nature-based learning as essential elements of meaningful education. The analysis of secondary sources shows that Tagore believed learning becomes effective when students actively participate in real-life experiences rather than relying only on textbooks. Learning in close contact with nature was found to support emotional balance, curiosity, and creativity among learners. The findings also indicate that open and natural learning environments reduce stress and increase students’ interest in learning. Creative activities such as art, music, crafts, and community work were identified as important tools for developing practical skills and independent thinking. The study further reveals that Tagore’s ideas align well with current educational reforms that promote experiential and learner-centered education. Overall, the findings suggest that adopting experiential and nature-based learning inspired by Tagore can help make Indian education more humane, joyful, and effective while supporting the holistic development of learners.

Conclusion:

The educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore offers a powerful vision for experiential and nature-based learning in India. This study concludes that Tagore viewed education as a living and dynamic process rooted in direct experience, creativity, and close contact with nature. He strongly opposed rote learning and rigid classroom teaching, as these methods limit curiosity, imagination, and emotional growth among learners. Instead, Tagore emphasized learning by doing, observing, and engaging with the natural and social environment. The analysis shows that experiential and nature-based learning help students connect knowledge with real life, making learning more meaningful and enjoyable. Learning in natural surroundings also supports mental well-being, emotional balance, and environmental awareness, which are increasingly important in today's education system. Tagore's ideas encourage freedom in learning, creativity, and learner participation, all of which align with modern educational reforms in India. So, adopting experiential and nature-based learning inspired by Tagore can transform Indian education into a more humane, learner-centered, and holistic system. His educational philosophy continues to provide valuable guidance for creating joyful and meaningful learning experiences for future generations.

Recommendations:

Based on the educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore, several practical recommendations can be made to promote experiential and nature-based learning in India. Schools should reduce excessive dependence on rote learning and examinations and provide more opportunities for learning through activities, projects, and real-life experiences. Outdoor learning spaces such as school gardens, open classrooms, and nature walks should be used regularly to help students learn in close contact with nature. Creative activities like art, music, crafts, and community work should be integrated into the regular curriculum to support emotional and creative development. Teacher training programs should emphasize experiential teaching methods and encourage teachers to act as facilitators rather than instructors. Schools should also promote environmental education to develop awareness and responsibility toward nature. Implementing these recommendations can help create a joyful, learner-centered, and holistic education system inspired by Tagore's vision.

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