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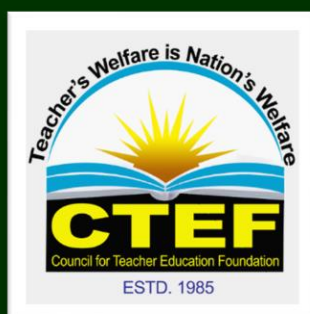
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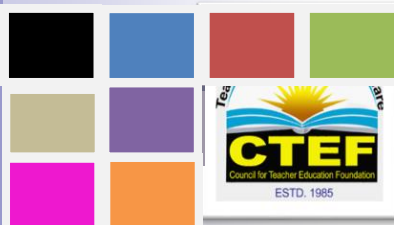
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Stories at All Levels of Learning: A NEP 2020 Perspective

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Introduction

Storytelling technique is one of the oldest and most effective methods in formal, informal, and non-formal education, as it is enjoyed by people of all ages. It is considered a natural and inherited way of teaching because everyone knows how to use it. Illiterate women in villages narrate stories of their lives, grandparents tell stories to their grandchildren, and elders sing folk songs of history and culture during festivals without formally learning the art of storytelling. It is used in society for many purposes teaching morals, traditions, life lessons, changing behaviour, and for entertainment because it engages both the head and the heart. India has rich tradition of storytelling. It was not confined to only spoken words or oral expression, but it was expressed in all kinds of art forms like drama, music, painting, sculptures etc. The following are the types of storytelling used in our Indian tradition.



Figure 1. Storytelling Traditions of India

As shown in figure 1, people used various forms of storytelling like music, drama, painting, sculpture, dance, and puppetry because storytelling was not just for entertainment but a powerful way to influence human beings. Oral stories were widely used so that even illiterate people could enjoy and learn. Art forms such as painting and sculpture conveyed stories

through visual symbols for those who could not hear or understand spoken words, while music helped people remember and retell stories easily. The use of parables was especially interesting, as they were used for everything—from teaching morals to children to explaining spirituality to elders. Thus, storytelling served as a means to teach values, culture, tradition, history, and all aspects of life.

We can understand the importance of storytelling in our education when Sudha Murty in her speech in the Rajya Sabha on July 2, 2024, emphasized the importance of storytelling in schools as a means to instill values and character in students. She urged the government to allocate funds for building storytelling halls in schools to facilitate value-based education. She also highlighted the need for teacher training in storytelling techniques to effectively impart moral lessons to children. She emphasized the crucial gap in our education system: “We can teach children AI, computer science, mathematics etc, but you are not making our children good citizens. A good character, value-based education, we are not able to do that.” She also highlighted that academic excellence alone is insufficient to nurture responsible citizens but we also must focus on a value system because highly educated people may not be good citizens. So, she emphasised to use of storytelling to inculcate values.

Learning through stories has a strong theoretical foundation in educational psychology. Bruner’s Narrative Theory explains that human beings understand the world through stories, and narratives help in constructing meaning, organizing experience, and remembering concepts more effectively. Similarly, Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory shows that learning happens through social interaction, cultural tools, and shared meaning-making. Storytelling naturally supports this process by creating a shared learning space where children co-construct knowledge with the teacher and peers.

A simple conceptual process of storytelling-based learning is: Stories activate emotions and imagination, which deepen learners’ attention. This engagement supports meaning-making and scaffolds language development, critical thinking, creativity, and values. Over time, these lead to behavioural, linguistic, and cognitive outcomes when learners apply the ideas in real-life situations.

NEP 2020 and Storytelling technique

NEP 2020 views storytelling as a transformative teaching technique one that develops imagination, inculcates values, teach life skills, leads a child towards culture and tradition. It sees it as the core teaching method in the classroom particularly during the foundational years. Across all subjects, teachers are encouraged to use stories as part of play-based,

activity-based, arts-integrated, and sports-integrated learning. Here's where and how storytelling is suggested to be used in NEP 2020

Table 1. Storytelling in NEP 2020

NEP 2020 Component	Storytelling Approach	Objective / Outcome	Examples / Notes
Standard Pedagogy	Adopt storytelling-based pedagogy across subjects	Enhance learning via experiential, hands-on, arts-integrated, and sports-integrated methods	Stories used in Maths, Science, Languages, and Social Studies
ECCE (Early Childhood Care & Education)	Include rich local traditions: stories, poetry, songs, games, art	Build cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural skills from ages 3–8	Panchatantra tales, folk songs, local games, art activities
Teacher Professional Development	CPD programs on storytelling, experiential learning, arts- and sports-integrated pedagogy	Equip teachers with latest pedagogical tools	Workshops, training modules, in-service teacher programs
Cultural & Ethical Learning	Teach classical Indian stories	Instill moral, ethical, and constitutional values; global cultural awareness	Panchatantra, Jataka, Hitopadesh, Indian fables and inspiring tales
Language Teaching	Weave storytelling with theatre, films, music, poetry	Improve language comprehension, vocabulary, and real-life communication	Story-based language activities, role plays, songs, narrative exercises
Preservation of Indian Languages & Culture	Digital platforms, videos, oral recordings, cultural performances	Document and preserve endangered and all Indian languages; promote cultural identity	Web-based portals, story recitals by elders, poetry readings, cultural documentation

NEP 2020 suggests to use storytelling at all levels for various purposes. For young children (ECCE), stories, poems, songs, and play help children grow in thinking, language, creativity, emotions, and social skills, and should be used in a joyful, play-way method. In school learning, storytelling is treated as an important method across subjects, and stories rooted in Indian traditions and local culture make lessons lively, relatable, and easy to understand. For teaching values, children read and listen to classics like the Panchatantra, Jataka Tales, and Hitopadesh to learn empathy, respect, justice, and other moral and constitutional values. For language and culture, storytelling combines drama, poetry, films, and music to make language learning enjoyable and culturally connected. In teacher training, storytelling is included in professional development to help teachers use it effectively and create more student-friendly, competency-based classrooms.

As discussed earlier, NEP 2020 directly mentions storytelling-based pedagogy as a recommended method for experiential and joyful learning across stages. It suggests to use at all level of learning; not just for kids or younger students but also should be used for developing language abilities, critical thinking, reasoning, values and creativity.

Use of stories for language development:

Storytelling can be used as a teaching method or a teaching technique at all stages of learning, especially for teaching languages. It helps develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In the foundational years (3 to 8 years), stories like *The Thirsty Crow*, *The Monkey and the Crocodile*, and *The Lion and the Mouse* can be told through narration, puppets, or picture sequencing to build vocabulary and comprehension. At the primary level, slightly longer tales such as *The Clever Rabbit and the Lion* can be used for predicting endings, retelling, writing short dialogues, or enacting the story to strengthen fluency and expression. In the middle stage, stories that promote debate, critical thinking, concise writing, and problem-solving—like the witty Akbar-Birbal tales—are useful. At the secondary level, philosophical stories such as *The Blind Men and the Elephant* can be explored through perspective writing, creative reimagining, or reflective discussions. Thus, storytelling across all levels naturally integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing in joyful and meaningful ways, making language learning culturally rooted and developmentally appropriate.

Creativity

Stories are the best tools to develop imagination and creativity among students, as they encourage learners to imagine beyond the logical world. At the foundational stage, stories like *The Tortoise and the Hare* can be retold through drawing or by asking children to invent a

new ending. At the preparatory stage, *The Foolish Lion and the Clever Rabbit* can inspire students to create alternative plots or design comic strips. In the middle stage, *Tenali Rama* stories support creative writing, where students script their own witty episodes or dramatize them. At the secondary level, philosophical parables like *The Blind Men and the Elephant* can be reimagined in modern contexts, such as multiple viewpoints about social media or technology. Stories can be used in various ways, like giving a beginning sentence and asking the class to add lines to complete it, asking children to write an imaginary adventure and send it as a message in a bottle, or giving magazine pictures from which students select a few and create a story.

Values

Stories are the main source of teaching values since ages. Our grandparents, family and teachers play a vital to inculcate values through stories. Different type of stories should be used at different levels to instill values. For the foundational stage, *The Lion and the Mouse* introduces kindness and reciprocity, reinforced through role-play and classroom acts of helping peers. At the preparatory level, Jataka Tales such as *The Monkey King* teach compassion and leadership, followed by group discussions on caring for others. Middle-stage learners can explore *Mahabharata* stories like Yudhishtira's commitment to truth, with debates on whether honesty is always the best choice. At the secondary level, tales like *The Gift of the Magi* or Gandhiji's childhood story about truthfulness can spark reflective essays or discussions on integrity, sacrifice, and moral choices in modern life.

Critical Thinking

Stories are the great source of developing critical thinking. In the foundational years, stories like *The Fox and the Grapes* encourage children to question why the fox reacted as it did, promoting curiosity. At the preparatory stage, *The Crocodile and the Monkey* from the *Panchatantra* can be paused mid-way, asking students to predict outcomes and justify their reasoning. In the middle stage, *Akbar-Birbal* tales provide dilemmas that allow learners to evaluate fairness and logic through classroom debates. At the secondary level, stories like *Ravana's dilemmas* in the *Ramayana* can be analyzed to explore multiple perspectives and ethical reasoning, strengthening analytical and evaluative skills.

Problem-Solving

Life skills like problem solving can be taught easily through storytelling. For exam, at the early stage, learners can use *The Thirsty Crow* story to discuss the crow's clever idea, then try simple "what else could the crow have done?" exercises. At the preparatory stage, *The Clever*

Deer can be followed by students working in groups to suggest different strategies the deer might have used to escape. Middle-stage learners can explore Vikram and Betal tales, where each story ends with a riddle-like moral question, prompting problem-solving and reasoning. At the secondary stage, real-life inspired stories such as A villager solving water scarcity creatively or Malala Yousafzai's fight for education can be discussed, leading to project-based activities where students propose solutions to current community issues.

Tradition and Culture

Our ancient scriptures are full of stories about our God, Goddess, Nature, Life etc. They can be used to teach traditions and culture. Like, in the foundational stage, folk stories like Why the Sun and Moon Live in the Sky can be shared with song and dance to connect children with cultural narratives. At the preparatory level, Regional folktales such as The Story of Ganesha's Wisdom can be dramatized to highlight cultural values. For the middle stage, performance traditions like Yakshagana or Kathakali enactments of episodes from the Ramayana can be studied to combine art and storytelling. At the secondary level, stories from India's freedom movement or classical texts like the Bhagavata Purana can be explored through debates, essays, or comparative analysis with global traditions, reinforcing pride in heritage and cultural continuity.

Challenges in Implementing Storytelling Pedagogy

- Teachers may lack proper training in storytelling and narrative facilitation.
- Textbooks often do not include enough culturally rich or local stories.
- Assessment systems do not adequately capture creativity, values, or narrative understanding.
- Time pressure to complete syllabus may reduce opportunities for storytelling activities.
- Overdependence on digital media sometimes weakens traditional oral storytelling practices.

Although storytelling is widely practiced in India's cultural and educational spaces, systematic integration of storytelling as a pedagogical approach—especially aligned with NEP 2020—is still limited. Most classrooms continue to rely on rote learning rather than narrative-based methods that build language, values, and critical thinking. Research studies have established that storytelling improves comprehension, creativity, and emotional development, yet its structured and stage-wise implementation from ECCE to secondary school remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need for more evidence-based approaches to narrative pedagogy in Indian schools.

Conclusion

Storytelling, as envisioned in the National Education Policy 2020, is not just a teaching method but a lifelong tool for nurturing imagination, empathy, and critical thinking. From play-based fables in the foundational years to analytical case studies in the secondary stage, stories naturally integrate language, values, creativity, and subject knowledge. They make learning joyful, holistic, and rooted in India's cultural traditions while preparing learners for global challenges. As storytelling evolves across levels—oral, visual, performative, digital, and reflective—it keeps education engaging, meaningful, and human-centered. Thus, NEP 2020 highlights that stories are not merely for entertainment but powerful instruments for inspiring minds, shaping character, and connecting generations through knowledge and values.

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