

**INTEGRATED RESEARCH JOURNAL
OF
MANAGEMENT, SCIENCE AND
INNOVATION**



ISSN 2582-5445

An Internationally Indexed Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

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Published by iSaRa Solutions

Integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Mathematics Education: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

The interdisciplinary incorporation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into mathematics education is examined in this paper. It highlights that IKS has its roots in India's ancient mathematical traditions and epistemologies. It provides methods of teaching mathematics that are engaging, comprehensive, and culturally relevant. Despite of these advantages, there are a number of theoretical and practical difficulties in its implementation. These difficulties include gaps in policy and practice, curriculum inflexibility, teacher preparedness, and lack of resources. In order to suggest some practical solutions to address all these challenges, the paper produces research findings from case studies, ethnomathematics literature, and policy studies. In order to implement IKS-infused mathematics instruction in modern schools, it ends by promoting research-based pedagogical frameworks and institutional strategies.

Keywords: IKS, Ethnomathematics, Indigenous Knowledge, Curriculum

1. Introduction

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is considered as vital to mathematics education in India. It connects ancient intellectual achievements with current learning needs and fits into larger educational reforms. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) cover a range of intellectual traditions which date back centuries in the areas of mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, philosophy and pedagogy. The extensive mathematical creativity arose in India much earlier than that of most of the Western developments. It can be seen through a number of Indian mathematical contributions like the concept of zero, use of decimal numeration and algorithmic procedures. These elements are part of India's academic legacy. These are also essential to the global field of mathematics. Bringing these historical and cultural views into classrooms helps students understand that mathematical ideas did not develop in a vacuum. These mathematical ideas were part of rich traditions of inquiry and problem-solving in Indian philosophy and science.

As the field of mathematics education has progressed with time, there is increasing awareness and acceptance of an aspect known as ethnomathematics. Ethnomathematics is the study of the relationship of mathematical practices to particular cultural contexts, as a mean of connecting learners' formal school mathematics with their lived experiences. IKS integration, thereby, is a

culturally specific form of ethnomathematics. It may increase student engagement, contextual understanding and cultural identity.

Similarly, at a global level, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India has clearly highlighted the need to include IKS in school and higher education curricula. This policy encourages integrating traditional knowledge into modern curricula to make learning more inclusive, relevant, and value-driven. It recognizes that embracing indigenous approaches, like Vedic mathematics, gives students alternative problem-solving methods that can improve logical reasoning and mental math skills. This complements traditional approaches. This integration not only satisfies historical interests but also boosts cognitive skills, supports deeper understanding, and fosters a sense of pride and identity among learners. The mathematics education discourse should, therefore, move away from Eurocentrism. It embraces an inclusive learning environment that appreciates indigenous mathematical knowledge and practices.

Additionally, focusing on IKS in mathematics, supports a well-rounded education. It connects quantitative thinking with broader cultural and philosophical contexts. It doesn't view mathematics as just a technical subject. Educators aim to create a learning environment that is culturally grounded and forward-looking. This can be done by highlighting India's mathematical contributions and incorporating them into teaching practices. This inspires students to see mathematics as a living tradition relevant to today's inquiries and global knowledge.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Indian Knowledge Systems as Epistemology

The IKS is not only a simple collection of historical facts that generally everyone thinks about. It is an epistemological framework which is based on conceptual learning, lived experience, beliefs, and context. Indian mathematical knowledge is deeply infused in rituals, astronomy, art, measurement, architecture, etc. The works of Aryabhata, Brahmagupta, Bhaskara II, etc. and the Sulba Sutras are examples of IKS mathematics. All these reflect indigenous ways of reasoning and mathematical inference, and applications to geometry, algebra, and number theory.

2.2 Ethnomathematics and Culturally Situated Pedagogy

The idea that mathematics is culturally neutral is challenged by Ethnomathematics. Indigenous and traditional mathematical practices, like spatial reasoning in craft traditions or problem solving embodied in local games, cannot be separated from genuine mathematical thinking. Thoroughly identifying and incorporating such practices has been shown to support students' understanding and cultural relevance.

3. Why Integrate IKS Into Mathematics Education?

3.1 Enhancing Cultural Relevance and Engagement

Incorporating IKS connects formal mathematics to the cultural and community contexts of students and helps to bridge the gap between these two. For an instance, local numeracy practices, norms of measurement in craft, weaving, and architecture, can be used to explain various mathematical concepts related to algebra and geometry in an easy way. This enhances student motivation and understanding of mathematics.

3.2 Supporting Holistic and Value-Based Learning

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into mathematics education improves learning by linking abstract concepts to cultural, historical, and value-based contexts. This creates a more complete educational experience. IKS traditions like Ganita, which refers to ancient Indian mathematics, place mathematical ideas within real-world problem-solving and contextual learning. This encourages students to explore patterns, geometry, and numerical reasoning through practical examples instead of just symbolic manipulation. Such an approach can enhance both understanding and creativity.

Moreover, this culturally focused method helps students build a sense of identity and pride in India's rich mathematical heritage. It also counters the dominance of Western frameworks and hence making mathematics more relevant and engaging. Additionally, IKS naturally includes ethical and value-based education in math learning. It highlights principles like harmony, balance, and the connections among various fields, linking mathematics to essential life skills and moral decision-making.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 supports this multifaceted integration by emphasizing the importance of holistic, multidisciplinary learning that connects traditional and modern knowledge systems. Inserting mathematical learning into cultural stories and hands-on experiences, is unique feature of IKS. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) not only strengthens cognitive skills but also aids in students' emotional, social, and ethical growth. This prepares learners to tackle complex real-world issues with both analytical depth and cultural awareness. Therefore, IKS emphasizes a holistic education where a learner's mathematical reasoning is linked to ethical and ecological awareness, as well as philosophical insights. These elements align with the NEP 2020 vision of balanced development, which includes cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning.

3.3 Fostering Sustainable and Inclusive Knowledge

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into mathematics education can play an important role. It can foster both sustainability and inclusivity in learning environments. Traditional Indian mathematical traditions, such as Vedic mathematics and various indigenous practices, are based on holistic worldviews. This holistic worldview emphasizes on interconnectedness, community relevance, and real-world problem-solving. This aligns well with current goals of sustainable education. By drawing from IKS's rich history, educators can help students see mathematics as more than abstract symbols. It can become a culturally relevant tool for understanding patterns in nature, managing resources, and building social systems. This approach also reinforces ecological awareness alongside numerical skills.

Additionally, integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with mathematics education supports inclusive education by validating different ways of knowing and learning. Many students, especially those from indigenous or regional linguistic communities, often feel a cultural disconnect when taught solely through Western mathematical models. Including examples and methods from IKS can bridge this gap. It acknowledges local knowledge, respects linguistic diversity, and creates connections that resonate with students lived experiences. This approach

not only deepens mathematical understanding but also fosters a sense of belonging, identity, and pride. It contributes to fair learning outcomes across diverse student populations.

In short, inserting Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in mathematics classrooms can contribute to inclusive and sustainable knowledge, especially for learners whose cultural backgrounds differ from the dominant Western mathematics paradigms. It also contributes to sustainable education by giving a due value to indigenous knowledge as part of the global intellectual heritage and local problem-solving capacity

4. Challenges in IKS Integration

4.1 Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into formal education presents significant challenges, especially regarding teacher preparedness and professional development. Many educators today are trained mainly in conventional, standardized curricula. They often lack a deep understanding of traditional knowledge systems and the teaching skills needed to convey them effectively. This gap affects teachers' confidence and ability to create meaningful IKS-based lessons. Much of the IKS content is context-specific, oral, and holistic, which contrasts with formal education's structured methods. The lack of specialized training programs and clear curriculum frameworks makes this issue worse. Teachers must often navigate to unfamiliar content without proper support or resources. Professional development opportunities that focus on culturally respectful integration of IKS are also limited. This can lead to superficial or token inclusion, rather than real transformation. To tackle these challenges, we need to invest systematically in targeted teacher training, offer ongoing support, and provide culturally responsive professional development. This lead to enable authentic and effective IKS integration. Thus, Lack of teacher knowledge and pedagogical preparation to incorporate IKS concepts is one of the prominent and persistent challenges highlighted in the research. It cannot be denied that many teachers have a positive attitude towards IKS. Although they lack confidence, training and resources to incorporate culturally relevant teaching strategies in the classroom.

4.2 Curriculum and Resource Constraints

Most of the formal mathematics curricula and textbooks do not include IKS content. Teachers find it a challenging task to incorporate indigenous examples into lessons. This is because they do not have any curriculum-aligned teaching frameworks, resource materials and assessment or evaluation strategies.

4.3 Policy Implementation Gaps

While NEP 2020 suggests that IKS should be incorporated but there are gaps in its implementation. These gaps include a lack of proper institutional capacity, funding, and coordination among sectors. Many policies do not have clear mechanisms, dedicated budgets, or trained staff to put IKS priorities into action. This leads to non-uniform implementation of policies advocating IKS across states and institutions. Policymakers find it difficult to reconcile the dynamic and oral nature of traditional knowledge with rigid regulatory frameworks. This results in approaches that do not account for the richness of IKS's context. Additionally, a bias

toward modern scientific methods and a lack of protection for community voices weaken implementation. Dominant players often overshadow indigenous knowledge holders. These systemic issues mean that the expected benefits of IKS—like culturally relevant curricula, sustainable practices, and local empowerment—often fail to materialize. This shows the need for more inclusive, flexible, and well-supported policy execution strategies. Consequently, schools tend to stick to traditional teaching methods with minimal real integration of IKS.

4.4 Cultural and Epistemological Resistance

The key features of traditional indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are holistic, contextual, and experiential. The prominent feature of these are that all these are based on practices and oral traditions that have existed for centuries. These systems differ significantly from modern Western scientific methods, which focus on empirical proof, measurement, and universal application. This basic difference in understanding can make many scholars and institutions uneasy. Some may dismiss IKS considering as unscientific or irrelevant to today's academic standards. This, in turn, leads to disbelief and resistance to integrating IKS in meaningful ways.

Cultural bias also adds to this resistance. Many educational systems often favor Western ideas over indigenous ones, pushing aside the diverse knowledge traditions found in IKS. This reinforces a hierarchy in knowledge. Furthermore, whenever attempts are made to include IKS, there can be pushback from within the cultures themselves. This happens especially when stories are oversimplified or made political. This leads to debated views on authenticity and representation. These knowledge and cultural conflicts make it tough to develop curricula that honor traditional knowledge while meeting modern standards for rigor. Now question arises what we need to overcome these challenges. Answer to this question is quite acceptable for all that we need open conversations between cultures, respect for different ways of knowing, and collaborative approaches that let traditional and modern systems inform each other equally.

Thus, resistance to integration of IKS is often based on deep-rooted assumptions about the superiority of Western mathematics paradigms. These paradigms simply lead to tokenistic inclusion of elements of IKS rather than genuine integration of it. Teachers and administrators often underestimate the value of indigenous knowledge and practice. The reason for this is misunderstandings about the precision or relevance of such knowledge.

5. Strategic Solutions

5.1 Targeted Teacher Education and Professional Development

There is a need to create continuous professional development (CPD) programs focused on the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). These programs should address the theoretical foundations of ethnomathematics as well as strategies to identify local mathematical practices. These should also address the theoretical foundations of practical teaching methods for combining local and formal knowledge.

It is evident from past researches that pre-service teacher preparation programs need specialized IKS-centered curricula. Future teachers must learn about traditional ways of knowing, teaching methods, and cultural contexts alongside modern educational theory. This will help them to create classrooms that are culturally responsive and inclusive. Professional development should

also include in-service training workshops, refresher courses, and ongoing learning opportunities. Teachers can teach using experiential learning techniques, and applying community-based teaching methods. These will improve teachers' skills in teaching IKS content. For example, ongoing capacity-building initiatives like national workshops can help educators communicate traditional knowledge effectively within modern curricula.

Additionally, incorporating local languages and community engagement into training programs allows teachers to share IKS more authentically. This approach strengthens students' connections to their heritage. Collaborating with tribal elders, Indigenous knowledge practitioners, and scholars can enrich professional development. They can act as co-educators, ensuring that the sharing of IKS is respectful, accurate, and rooted in real-life experiences. Institutional support is also essential. Formal policies should mandate and fund IKS training, include relevant modules in teacher education programs, and promote reflective practices that appreciate diverse ways of knowing. Together, these specific teacher education reforms and professional development strategies prepare educators to integrate IKS meaningfully. They also contribute to a sustainable and culturally relevant pedagogy that connects traditional wisdom with modern educational goals.

5.2 Curriculum Redesign and Resource Creation

An effective way to integrate Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into mainstream education is possible through curriculum redesign and focused resource creation. This connects traditional wisdom with modern learning outcomes. First, we need to restructure curricula to include IKS content systematically. It should not be included just as extras, but as essential parts of subjects like mathematics, science, arts, philosophy, and social studies. This requires teamwork among curriculum designers, IKS scholars, traditional knowledge holders, and education policymakers. They should work collectively to develop modules that are academically strong, culturally authentic, and relevant to teaching. Interdisciplinary curriculum frameworks can include local, regional, and classical knowledge systems in core learning sequences. This will enhance students' understanding of both indigenous and contemporary perspectives.

At the same time, creating resources is crucial. We need high-quality textbooks, multimedia materials, digital repositories, and tailored teaching aids to support both teachers and learners. The IKS Textbook and Course Materials Scheme under the Ministry of Education, for instance, funds the development of diverse IKS content across sciences, arts, design, and cultural heritage, providing a solid foundation for curricular resources. Additionally, digitized archives, interactive platforms, and open educational resources can make IKS content accessible in various languages and regions. It closes gaps in documentation and availability. The effort becomes meaningful and sustainable by integrating IKS effectively within curriculum design and ensuring a strong set of educational resources. It can help foster a deeper cultural understanding alongside modern skills.

5.3 Policy Frameworks and Institutional Support

NEP-2020 clearly encourages including IKS in all curricula. policymakers need to provide clear guidelines, funding, and accountability measures to put the vision of NEP-2020 into practice.

These measures should motivate education bodies, from national councils to individual schools and universities, to incorporate IKS into teaching, learning, research, and assessment. At the same time, support from IKS centers, research departments, and Centres of Excellence offers essential resources for scholarship, resource development, and community outreach. Recent university initiatives to create IKS departments and research hubs show how institutional commitment can boost these integration efforts. Financial support, grants, and monitored action plans help institutions to innovate, document, and share IKS knowledge. These policies and institutional supports collectively build a supportive environment that recognizes IKS. It encourages scholarly research, and promotes sustainable, culturally relevant education across India's diverse educational landscape.

5.4 Community Engagement and Co-Design

Curriculum design and its local contextualization enhance significantly as collaboration with local communities, traditional knowledge holders and researchers increases. For instance, the contextualization of mathematical concepts within the dominion of indigenous games or community craft traditions provides students.

6. Case Evidence and Applied Examples

6.1 Teacher Awareness in STEM Contexts

According to a survey of pre-service and in-service teachers on integrating IKS into STEM education, although teachers have generally positive attitudes toward IKS yet actual classroom application is still limited and not up to the mark. All this is primarily due to a lack of resources and instructional strategies.

6.2 Ethnomathematics Methods in Zambia

According to research from Zambia's Southern Province, students' interest and comprehension of mathematics were greatly increased by the use of examples from everyday life and traditional games. It was also found that problem situations that were culturally appropriate had positive effect also on student's interest. These studies demonstrate how culturally grounded math instruction can be helpful in a variety of settings.

6.3 Systemic Integration Models

Methods that are based on integration of traditional mathematical reasoning with present-day curriculum goals have the potential to advance inclusive pedagogy. These methods stimulate deeper conceptual thinking in a variety of learners.

7. Conclusion

A right pathway to learning that is engaging, relevant, and culturally sensitive is provided by incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems into mathematics instruction. Although there are obstacles, particularly in the areas of curriculum constraints, teacher preparedness, and policy implementation, yet the solutions offered here offer a path forward based on both research and experience. Curriculum designers, educators, legislators, and community knowledge bearers must work together consistently for integration to be successful. Math education can become more dynamic, inclusive, and representative of India's rich intellectual legacy by adopting IKS.

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