



Revisiting Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy: Relevance to contemporary child-centred education

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66856/ijhssr.2026.12.3.12335>

Abstract

Gijubhai Badheka (1885-1939) was an important Indian educationist who gave special attention to children and their natural development. His educational ideas focused on freedom, play, stories, activities, experience, creativity and a supportive teacher-child relationship. This paper examines Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy and explores its relevance to contemporary child-centred education. The study follows a qualitative, descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary sources, including books, research articles, educational documents and policy papers. The discussion focuses on his life and educational contributions, major aspects of his educational philosophy, its relationship with child-centred education, its relevance in contemporary education, and its connection with NEP 2020. The study finds that several of Gijubhai's ideas remain relevant in the present educational context. His emphasis on play-based learning, active participation, experiential learning, creativity and holistic development has meaningful connections with contemporary child-centred approaches. The study also identifies similarities between his educational vision and several pedagogical ideas highlighted in NEP 2020. The paper concludes that revisiting Gijubhai's philosophy can provide useful insights for developing joyful, supportive and child-sensitive learning environments.

Keywords: Child-centred education, early childhood education, educational philosophy, experiential learning, Gijubhai Badheka, NEP 2020

Introduction

Education plays an important role in the overall development of a child. It is not limited to gaining information or achieving good results in examinations. Education also helps children develop their thinking, creativity, social skills, values and confidence. For this reason, modern educational approaches increasingly give importance to the needs, interests, abilities and experiences of learners. Child-centred education is one such approach in which the child is considered an active participant in the learning process rather than a passive receiver of knowledge.

Child-centred education gives importance to active participation, learning through experience, freedom, creativity and respect for individual differences. In such an approach, the teacher is not only a provider of information but also acts as a guide and facilitator. Learning activities are planned according to the developmental needs and interests of children. Play, stories, discussion, exploration and practical activities can therefore become important parts of the learning process. Such an approach can create a learning environment in which children feel comfortable and are encouraged to express their ideas.

The idea of child-centred education is not completely new in the Indian context. Several Indian educationists contributed to the development of educational ideas that gave importance to the child's needs and natural development. Among them, Gijubhai Badheka (1885-1939) occupies an important place. He was particularly concerned with early childhood education and tried to move away from rigid and teacher-dominated forms of schooling. His educational experiments and writings reflected his belief that children should be treated with care, respect and understanding.

Gijubhai's educational philosophy was based on a number of ideas that were different from the traditional methods of his time. He gave importance to freedom, play, stories, activities and learning through direct experiences. He believed that children could learn better when they were given opportunities to participate actively and when learning was connected with their everyday lives. He also emphasised the importance of the mother tongue, the child's social environment and a positive relationship between the teacher and the child. The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage recognises Gijubhai as an important pioneer of child-centred early childhood education in India and refers to several aspects of his work, including storytelling and active learning. (NCERT, 2022) Gijubhai's well-known educational work Divaswapna also reflects his concern for creating a more meaningful and child-friendly educational environment. His ideas were developed in a particular historical and social context, but several of them remain relevant to present educational concerns. His emphasis on play, activity, experience and the overall development of children has important connections with contemporary approaches to early childhood education. Recent studies have also examined the relevance of his educational thinking in relation to modern educational practices and the foundational stage. (Modi, 2022; Rajyaguru & Varsat, 2026) ^[6, 11]

The relevance of Gijubhai's educational philosophy becomes more noticeable when it is considered in the context of recent educational developments in India. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 gives importance to play-based, activity-based and experiential learning, particularly during the Foundational Stage. It also emphasises holistic development, creativity, active learning

and the use of the child's home or familiar language in the early years. These ideas show meaningful similarities with several principles that Gijubhai had emphasised much earlier. (Ministry of Education, 2020; NCERT, 2022) ^[5]

However, Gijubhai's philosophy should not be viewed only as a historical contribution. It can also be examined as a source of ideas for understanding present-day child-centred education. His emphasis on joyful learning, freedom, active participation and sensitivity towards children raises important questions about how classrooms can become more supportive and responsive to learners. At the same time, it is important to examine his ideas critically rather than assuming that all of his educational practices can be directly applied to present-day classrooms.

In this context, the present paper examines Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy and explores its relevance to contemporary child-centred education. The paper focuses on his life and educational contributions, the major aspects of his educational philosophy, its relationship with child-centred education, its relevance in contemporary education, and its connection with the educational direction of NEP 2020. Through this discussion, the study attempts to revisit an important strand of Indian educational thought and understand how Gijubhai Badheka's vision can contribute to creating more joyful, active and child-sensitive learning environments in contemporary education.

Review of Related Literature

The review of previous studies is essential for understanding the educational philosophy of Gijubhai Badheka and its relevance to contemporary child-centred education. Gijubhai Badheka was one of the early Indian educationists who gave special importance to the child, the child's interests and the child's natural development. His ideas about freedom, play, stories, activities, experience and a joyful learning environment have been discussed in different Indian studies.

Modi (2022) ^[6], in the study *A Study of Educational Thinking of Gijubhai Badheka and Its Relevance in the Modern Era*, examined Gijubhai Badheka's educational ideas and their relevance to modern education. The study discussed his views on teaching methods, curriculum, discipline, examination, value education, school environment and the use of the mother tongue. It highlighted that Gijubhai gave importance to children's interests and supported learning through activities. The study also suggested that many of his educational ideas continue to have value in the present educational context.

Another study on Gijubhai Badheka's life and educational philosophy examined his contribution to child-centred education and its relevance to primary education. The study highlighted his emphasis on freedom, creativity, experiential learning and the natural development of children. It also pointed out his opposition to rote learning and rigid methods of discipline. These findings show that Gijubhai's approach was closely related to the basic ideas of child-centred education.

Sharma (2023), in *Early Childhood Development and Holistic Education in India: From Perspective of Gijubhai Badheka's Literature*, examined Gijubhai's contribution to early childhood development and holistic education. The study discussed his use of stories, poetry and drama for children. It showed that his writings were not only meant for entertainment but also had an educational purpose. His

approach helped children learn in an enjoyable way and supported their social, emotional and creative development. Kumar and Ram (2025), in *Beyond Books: Gijubhai Badheka's Philosophy of Holistic Education*, discussed Gijubhai's educational ideas from the perspective of holistic education. The study gave importance to play, mother-tongue education, dialogue and activity-based learning. It also connected some of Gijubhai's ideas with the present educational context and the principles of NEP 2020. The study suggests that his educational philosophy can still provide useful ideas for improving the learning experience of children.

Rajyaguru and Varsat (2026) ^[11], in *Playing to Learn: Revisiting Gijubhai Badheka's Vision of Toy-Based Pedagogy for the Foundational Stage*, examined Gijubhai's ideas in relation to toy-based and play-based learning. The study discussed the use of stories, dramatic play, clay, sand and other learning materials in children's education. It suggested that these ideas are closely related to present approaches to play-based and experiential learning, particularly at the foundational stage.

Indian educational literature also recognises Gijubhai's contribution to child-centred education. The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage identifies Gijubhai Badheka as one of the early pioneers of child-centred early childhood education in modern India. It gives importance to his ideas related to the mother tongue, the child's social and cultural environment, storytelling and active participation in learning. His educational approach is also discussed in NCERT teacher education materials, where importance is given to freedom, love, stories, music and play in children's education.

The reviewed Indian studies show that Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy has several important features. He gave the child a central place in education and supported learning through play, activities, stories and direct experiences. He also gave importance to freedom, creativity, individual differences and the overall development of children. These ideas have a clear connection with many principles of contemporary child-centred education. The recent interest in his ideas also shows that his educational thought continues to be relevant to present educational discussions.

Research Gap

The review of the available Indian studies shows that different researchers have discussed different aspects of Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy. Some studies have focused on his general educational thinking, while others have examined his contribution to early childhood education, holistic development, play-based learning, storytelling, mother-tongue education and foundational-stage pedagogy. Some recent studies have also tried to connect his ideas with NEP 2020 and present educational practices.

However, most of the existing studies have focused on particular aspects of Gijubhai's philosophy. There is still a need to examine his major educational ideas together and understand their relevance to contemporary child-centred education in a more systematic way. In particular, the relationship between his ideas of freedom, play, activity, learning through experience, creativity, respect for the child and the supportive role of the teacher needs further attention.

Another gap is that much of the available literature presents Gijubhai's contribution from a historical or descriptive perspective. Comparatively less attention has been given to examining how his complete educational philosophy can be related to the major principles and needs of contemporary child-centred education.

Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap by examining Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy and exploring its relevance to contemporary child-centred education. The study seeks to connect his educational ideas with present-day classroom needs and to understand how his philosophy may contribute to creating a more joyful, active, supportive and child-friendly learning environment.

Rationale of the Study

The purpose of education has gradually shifted from teacher-dominated instruction towards approaches that recognise the child as an active participant in the learning process. Contemporary child-centred education emphasises the child's individuality, freedom, curiosity, creativity, active participation, and holistic development. In this context, the educational philosophy of Gijubhai Badheka, an influential Indian educationist and pioneer of child-centred education, deserves renewed attention. (NCERT, 2022)

Gijubhai Badheka developed his educational ideas in response to the rigid, authoritarian and examination-oriented practices prevalent in traditional schooling. He advocated an educational environment where children could learn through freedom, play, stories, activities, exploration and meaningful experiences. His emphasis on respecting children's individuality, understanding their psychological needs, creating a joyful learning environment, and reducing fear and punishment reflects several principles that are central to contemporary child-centred pedagogy. (Deb's, 2022; Tschurenrv, 2021)

The relevance of Gijubhai's philosophy becomes particularly significant in the present educational context, where NEP 2020 and contemporary pedagogical approaches emphasise experiential learning, competency development, creativity, critical thinking, learner autonomy and holistic development. (Ministry of Education, 2020) ^[5]. Although these ideas are often discussed as modern educational innovations, many of their underlying principles can be traced to the progressive educational thinking of Indian educationists such as Gijubhai Badheka.

Therefore, there is a need to critically examine Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy and explore its relevance to contemporary child-centred education. Such an examination can help establish connections between his educational ideas and present-day pedagogical practices. It may also provide useful insights for teachers, teacher educators, curriculum planners and researchers seeking culturally relevant approaches to child-centred learning. The study is thus undertaken to revisit Gijubhai Badheka's educational vision and assess its potential contribution to creating more joyful, democratic, inclusive and child-sensitive educational environments in contemporary India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the life and educational contributions of Gijubhai Badheka.
2. To analyse the major facets of Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy and their relationship with child-centred education.

3. To explore the relevance of Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy in contemporary educational practices.
4. To examine the relevance of Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Methodology

The present study follows a qualitative, descriptive and analytical approach. It is based mainly on secondary sources of information. Relevant books, research articles, academic papers, educational reports and policy documents related to Gijubhai Badheka and child-centred education were reviewed. Relevant ideas from the selected sources were identified and organised into major themes such as child-centred learning, freedom, play, experiential learning, creativity, the role of the teacher and holistic development. These themes were then examined in relation to the principles of contemporary child-centred education. The study also considers relevant aspects of NEP 2020 to understand the present educational context.

Analysis and Discussion

1. Gijubhai Badheka's Life and Contribution

Gijubhai Badheka (1885–1939) was an important Indian educationist who made a significant contribution to early childhood education. He was deeply concerned about the way children were treated in traditional schools. At a time when education was often associated with strict discipline, memorisation and teacher control, Gijubhai tried to create a learning environment that was more suitable for children. His educational work gradually developed around the idea that children should be understood, respected and given opportunities to learn in natural ways.

Gijubhai's contribution was particularly important in the field of early childhood education. He believed that the early years of a child's life needed special care and attention. Instead of depending mainly on textbooks and formal teaching, he encouraged the use of stories, songs, games, activities and experiences. He also gave importance to the mother tongue and to the social and cultural surroundings of the child. The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage recognises Gijubhai as one of the pioneers of child-centred early childhood education in modern India and refers to his work with storytelling, active participation and learning in the child's familiar environment. (NCERT, 2022)

Gijubhai also made an important contribution through his writings and educational experiments. His well-known work *Divaswapna* presents many of his ideas about teaching, children, classroom practices and the role of the teacher. His educational writings and experiments show that he was not satisfied with simply changing teaching methods; he wanted to change the way teachers understood children and the purpose of education itself.

An important feature of his contribution was its connection with the Indian context. He tried to develop educational practices that were meaningful for Indian children and their surroundings. His emphasis on the mother tongue, local environment, stories and familiar experiences reflects this concern. Therefore, his contribution can be understood not only as a historical contribution to early childhood education but also as an early Indian attempt to develop a child-sensitive approach to education.

2. Major Facets of Gijubhai Badheka's Educational Philosophy

The educational philosophy of Gijubhai Badheka was centred on the child and the child's natural development. He believed that education should not be forced upon children through fear or excessive control. Children should get opportunities to learn according to their interests, abilities and experiences. His philosophy therefore gives importance to freedom, activity, play, experience, creativity and a positive relationship between the teacher and the child.

Freedom was an important part of his educational thinking. Gijubhai wanted children to have sufficient freedom to express themselves and take part in learning. However, freedom in his approach should not be understood as complete absence of discipline. Rather, it meant creating conditions in which children could learn without unnecessary fear and pressure. His educational thinking therefore suggests a form of discipline based more on understanding and guidance than on punishment. (Modi, 2022)^[6]

Another important feature was his emphasis on play and activities. Gijubhai considered play to be a natural part of childhood and an effective way of learning. Children can develop language, social skills, imagination and problem-solving abilities through play and meaningful activities. His use of toys, stories, dramatic activities, clay, sand and other simple materials shows his practical approach to children's learning. Recent discussion of his toy-based pedagogy also shows a close connection between his ideas and present-day play-based and experiential approaches at the foundational stage. (Rajyaguru & Varsat, 2026)^[11]

Gijubhai also believed in learning through experience. Children should have opportunities to observe, explore, ask questions and learn by doing. Learning becomes more meaningful when children can connect new knowledge with their own experiences. This idea is particularly important in early childhood education, where children learn naturally through interaction with people, objects and their surroundings.

The role of the teacher was another important aspect of his philosophy. Gijubhai did not see the teacher only as an authority who gives instructions. The teacher should understand children, observe their needs and provide suitable opportunities for learning. Such a role requires patience, affection and sensitivity towards children. The teacher therefore becomes a guide and supporter rather than simply a controller of classroom behaviour.

Finally, Gijubhai gave importance to the holistic development of children. Education should not be limited to academic knowledge. Children also need opportunities to develop emotionally, socially, morally and creatively. His educational ideas therefore present education as a process of developing the whole child rather than simply preparing children for examinations.

3. Gijubhai Badheka and Child-Centred Education

There is a strong relationship between Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy and the basic principles of child-centred education. Child-centred education gives importance to children's needs, interests, abilities, experiences and participation. Gijubhai's educational thinking reflects many of these ideas, although his work developed in a different historical and social context.

A major point of connection lies in the central position given to the child in the learning process. In a traditional teacher-dominated classroom, children are often expected to listen, memorise and follow instructions. Gijubhai questioned this approach and gave greater importance to children's interests and natural development. In his approach, the child is not simply a receiver of information but an active participant in the learning process. This is one of the central features of child-centred education.

Active participation provides another important link between Gijubhai's philosophy and child-centred education. Gijubhai encouraged children to learn through play, stories, activities and direct experiences. Such methods allow children to participate in learning instead of remaining passive listeners. This approach can also make learning more meaningful because children are able to connect what they learn with their own experiences.

His ideas are also connected with individual differences. Children have different interests, abilities, learning speeds and ways of responding to their surroundings. A child-centred classroom therefore needs to recognise these differences rather than expecting every child to learn in exactly the same way. Gijubhai's emphasis on understanding individual children therefore supports the need for a more responsive approach to learning. (Modi, 2022)^[6]

The idea of positive discipline also creates an important connection. Gijubhai was critical of fear-based approaches to education. A child-friendly classroom does not mean a classroom without rules; rather, discipline can be developed through understanding, guidance and positive relationships. This approach can help children feel safe enough to participate, ask questions and make mistakes.

Taken together, these ideas show that Gijubhai was advocating several principles that are now closely associated with child-centred education. His ideas provide an Indian perspective on the importance of respecting children and creating learning environments that respond to their developmental needs.

4. Relevance in Contemporary Education

The educational needs of children have changed in many ways, but several basic concerns raised by Gijubhai remain relevant. Contemporary education increasingly gives importance to active participation, experiential learning, creativity and the overall development of learners. Against this contemporary background, Gijubhai's ideas offer a useful basis for reflecting on how children's learning can be made more active, meaningful and supportive.

Gijubhai's emphasis on play and activity-based learning remains particularly relevant because it places children's active involvement at the centre of the learning process. Children often understand ideas better when they are given opportunities to do things rather than only listen to explanations. Games, stories, simple projects, classroom activities and real-life experiences can make learning more interesting and meaningful. Gijubhai's approach therefore fits well with the growing importance of activity-based learning.

His emphasis on joyful learning is equally important. Children may find learning difficult when the classroom is dominated by fear, pressure and excessive examination demands. A supportive environment can encourage curiosity and confidence. Gijubhai's educational vision reminds

teachers that enjoyment and learning do not have to be separate; learning can take place in an environment where children feel comfortable and interested.

Creativity represents another important area of relevance in Gijubhai's educational thinking. When children are allowed to tell stories, play, draw, construct, explore and express their own ideas, they get opportunities to develop imagination and creative thinking. Such experiences can also encourage children to think independently instead of simply reproducing information.

Gijubhai's view of the teacher's role also remains meaningful. The teacher can create opportunities, provide guidance and observe the learning needs of individual children. This does not make the teacher less important. Rather, it changes the nature of the teacher's responsibility from controlling every activity to supporting children's learning.

His emphasis on the child's language and social environment is also relevant. Children can learn more naturally when teaching is connected with familiar language, culture and everyday experiences. The NCF for the Foundational Stage similarly gives importance to the child's home language, social environment and active participation in learning. (NCERT, 2022)

These aspects indicate that Gijubhai's educational philosophy continues to offer meaningful perspectives for contemporary educational practice. It encourages educators to think about learning from the child's point of view and to create classrooms that are more active, supportive and meaningful.

5. Relevance in the Context of NEP 2020

The relevance of Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy becomes particularly clear when it is considered alongside the present educational direction of India. NEP 2020 gives importance to holistic development, learner participation, experiential learning and more flexible approaches to teaching and learning. Several of these priorities closely correspond with the principles underlying Gijubhai's educational thinking. (Ministry of Education, 2020)^[5]

The Foundational Stage is especially important in this context. NEP 2020 recommends play-based, activity-based and experiential learning for young children. It encourages learning through discovery and activities rather than relying mainly on formal and rote methods. These ideas are closely related to Gijubhai's emphasis on play, activity, stories and learning through experience. (Ministry of Education, 2020; NCERT, 2022)^[5]

A further connection becomes evident in the emphasis placed on holistic development. NEP 2020 aims at the development of well-rounded individuals and gives importance to cognitive, social, emotional, creative and other aspects of development. Gijubhai also viewed education as a process that should support the overall development of the child. Thus, both approaches move beyond a narrow focus on academic achievement.

Another important area is experiential and activity-based learning. NEP 2020 encourages hands-on learning, storytelling, art-integrated and sports-integrated activities and other forms of experiential learning. Gijubhai's educational practices similarly emphasised learning through doing, stories, play and direct experiences. The similarity

suggests that some of his educational concerns remain meaningful in the present context. (Ministry of Education, 2020)^[5]

The importance given to mother tongue and familiar language also creates a meaningful connection. NEP 2020 recommends the use of the home language, mother tongue, local or regional language as the medium of instruction, particularly in the early years, wherever possible. The NCF for the Foundational Stage also recognises Gijubhai's emphasis on mother-tongue education and the child's social and cultural environment. (Ministry of Education, 2020; NCERT, 2022)^[5]

However, the similarity between Gijubhai's philosophy and NEP 2020 should be understood carefully. NEP 2020 is a contemporary national policy developed in response to present educational needs, while Gijubhai developed his ideas in a very different historical period. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to claim that NEP 2020 directly adopted Gijubhai's philosophy. Rather, several principles in the two approaches show meaningful similarities.

Overall, the discussion indicates that Gijubhai Badheka's educational philosophy still has relevance in present-day education. His emphasis on the child, freedom, play, experience, creativity, supportive teachers and holistic development connects with many concerns of contemporary child-centred education. His ideas also provide a valuable Indian perspective while thinking about the pedagogical direction highlighted in NEP 2020. Revisiting his work can therefore help teachers and teacher educators reflect on ways of making education more joyful, active and responsive to children's needs.

Significance of the Study

The present study is significant because it brings attention to the educational ideas of Gijubhai Badheka and their relevance to present-day child-centred education. His ideas were developed in the Indian context and continue to provide useful perspectives on how children can be understood and supported in the learning process.

The study may be useful for teachers by helping them understand the importance of freedom, play, activities, experience and a supportive classroom environment. It may encourage teachers to give greater attention to children's interests, abilities and individual differences. For teacher educators, the study may provide useful ideas for discussing child-centred and child-friendly approaches in teacher education programmes.

The study may also be useful for curriculum planners and educational practitioners. Gijubhai's emphasis on activity-based, experiential and holistic learning can provide relevant ideas while thinking about learning experiences for young children. The study also highlights the connection between his educational philosophy and several concerns of NEP 2020, particularly play-based learning, experiential learning and holistic development.

Finally, the study may be useful for researchers and scholars interested in Indian educational thought, early childhood education and child-centred pedagogy. By revisiting Gijubhai Badheka's ideas in the context of contemporary education, the study may encourage further research on Indian educational thinkers and their possible contribution to present educational practices.

Conclusion

Gijubhai Badheka's educational ideas were developed at a time when children had very little freedom in the classroom. His approach challenged this situation by placing greater emphasis on the child and on how children learn. He believed that children should not learn only through books and memorisation. Play, stories, activities and everyday experiences could also become important parts of education. He also believed that children need care, understanding and respect from their teachers.

The analysis presented in this study indicates that these ideas continue to hold relevance in contemporary education. Many classrooms now give greater importance to children's participation, learning by doing, creativity and overall development. These are areas where Gijubhai's ideas can offer useful guidance. His approach also reminds teachers that children do not all learn in the same way and that the classroom should provide enough space for their interests and abilities.

Gijubhai's educational thinking also shares several important connections with the priorities highlighted in NEP 2020. Play-based learning, experiential learning, creativity, holistic development and learning in a familiar language are important areas in the present educational framework. Gijubhai had given attention to several of these ideas much earlier. This does not mean that NEP 2020 directly follows his philosophy, but it does show that some of his educational concerns remain relevant today.

Overall, Gijubhai Badheka's contribution should not be seen only as a part of the history of Indian education. His ideas can still make us think about how children learn and how teachers can create better learning situations for them. Revisiting his philosophy may therefore help in developing classrooms where children feel comfortable, take part actively and learn with greater interest and confidence.

Acknowledgements

The author sincerely acknowledges the scholarly works, books, research articles and educational documents that supported the completion of this study. The author is grateful to the researchers and institutions whose published materials provided valuable academic resources for the present work.

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