



CHILD-CENTRED EDUCATION IN INDIAN AND WESTERN THOUGHT: A REVIEW OF TAGORE, GANDHI, DEWEY AND ROUSSEAU

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Child education is a child-centred process that supports the child's natural growth, freedom, interests, creativity, and abilities through learning, experience, nature, society, and real-life activities. The main purpose of this paper is to explore the educational philosophies of Tagore, Gandhi, Dewey, and Rousseau regarding a child's development. Adopting a literature research methodology, this paper analyzes their respective concepts. Their ideas continue to influence modern child-centred education systems worldwide. Ultimately, the study concludes that their educational ideals still inspire teachers, students, and policymakers to build a better and more meaningful system of education for the child and society. Although their approaches differed, all of them emphasized the importance of understanding the child's nature, interests, abilities, and needs.

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Introduction

Child education is the foundation of a progressive society. Child education is a child-centred process that supports the child's growth, interests and abilities through learning, experience, nature, society and real-life activities. Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey made contributions, to educational thought. Rabindranath Tagore was a poet, philosopher and educationist. He believed in freedom, creativity and learning that worked well with nature. He created a system that supported artistic expression, cultural understanding and the full growth of the child. Tagore's educational philosophy emphasized the importance of co-curricular activities as integral to a child's holistic development Marshal (2025). In India, Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, suggested a new educational system called Basic Education or Nai Talim. It emphasized self-reliance, moral values, manual work and practical learning. His educational plan allows close integration between school and community so that children become more social and cooperative Verma and Tripathi (2023).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a French philosopher who changed the philosophy of education. He thought that education should be natural and inspire creativity and critical thinking (Sharma, 2025). He was a specialist in naturalistic education. He believed that children are born good and should be allowed to develop according to their interests, their abilities and their development. John Dewey was a philosopher and someone who worked to change education. He supported the idea of pragmatism and learning by doing. For Dewey education is a never-ending process of experience. Dewey's educational philosophy emphasized individualized and socialized development for learners, importance of children's education, and encouragement of diverse and creative educational measures Ye and Shih (2021). John Dewey was a progressive philosopher and educator in the 20th century who developed a child-centered approach to education, emphasizing the value of experience as the basis for the learning process Sulistiawati (2024).

Review of Related Literatures

Review of Related Literatures about Rabindranath Tagore

Goswami and Malviya (2016) The result of the study was Rabindranath Tagore emphasized freedom of the child which is essential for learning and acquisition of skills and knowledge. it is concluded that the teaching and methodologies of Tagore are still have relevance and great applicability in the present era of education system being practiced in our country and even around the globe. A child should be fearless in expression. Debbarma (2017) Result showed that Tagore mainly focus on mother tongue, full freedom to live in natural environment, ideals and values of national culture to develop in child education. he also emphasized

that education of child should be according to his needs, interest and capacity. However, the ability of the child should be utilised in proper place. Ahmad Shah (2018) Researcher found that according to Rabindranath, Early childhood experiences of school life made him believe that the educational system of that time was not concerned with the growth of children, it was rather preparing children for a society of clerks. Since that time Tagore had been aware of this discrepancy and tried to build an institution where children would have more freedom to explore and learn by themselves in the open learning environment of nature. By this Tagore means development of imagination, creative free thinking, constraint curiosity and alertness of mind, a Child should feel free to learn this will lead to all round development.

Indrani (2019) Conducted a research Rabindranath Tagore on education. Tagore placed great importance on children learning in a natural environment, and said that nature herself was our greatest teacher. He worked hard for the improvement of education system in India. From children's education and rural development, he increasingly shifted his attention to university education and developing the surrounding villages as one of the university's functions. He was one of the first in India to argue for a humane educational system that was in touch with the environment and aimed at overall development of the personality. Ahmed (2019) Children should be provided with a free environment and they should be treated with utmost love, sympathy and consideration. Tagore emphasised that education should be imparted to the child through his mother tongue so that students will be able to grasp and understand ever the most difficult subject easily. According to him, Educations should be given according to the interest and nature of the child. He also asserted that a child should be free to learn by his /her own efforts and experience. Rani (2021) The result showed that Tagore said that a child should be permitted to read books. Our education system is lifeless as small children are burdened with piles of books. His educational philosophy also aims at the physical development of the child. His ideas continue to be relevant and continue to inspire educators to create more inclusive, holistic, and meaningful learning experiences for students. Sarkar (2021) Tagore also greatly emphasized the intellectual development of the child. By intellectual development he means development of imagination, creative free thinking, constant curiosity and alertness of the mind. Tagore's educational philosophy also aims at the physical development of the child. He gave much importance to sound and healthy physique. He emphasized the cultivation of intellect in order to counter balance emotional immaturity and instability where it exists.

Das (2021) Rabindranath believed that the educational system should foster the development of students' creative abilities. The National Education Policy 2020 shares striking similarities with Tagore's educational concept. Both emphasise the importance of holistic and multidisciplinary education, flexibility and choice, community and social responsibility, inclusivity and equity, teacher empowerment and professional development, cultural and linguistic diversity, etc. Biswas (2022) The result of the study was that Rabindranath Tagore did not want to take detached from nature. Because he thought that nature is the best teacher for a child. Rabindranath Tagore said to teach in the lap of nature according to the child's own needs. Through this the child becomes self-educated. He was in fact in favour of child-centered education system and he understood the student psychology very well in this connection he wrote – "I knew that I had very profound sympathy for children, and about my knowledge of their psychology I was very Certain". Das (2022) The study showed that Tagore's educational system promotes a child's physical development. Tagore believed a child's language is the best medium for self-expression. Mother tongues allow children unfettered expression. Tagore advocated using the "activity method" of education because he believed it to be crucial for developing the body and intellect of a child. Atole et al. (2022) Result of the study Tagore believed that true education should foster creativity and free thinking, encourage inquiry, and promote the development of a student's individuality. Tagore emphasized the importance of learning through direct interaction with nature, where students could learn not only academic subjects but also values such as simplicity, harmony, and respect for the environment.

Datta et al. (2023) The study showed that according to Rabindranath Tagore there should be free space for learners in any educational system. So, students or learners can learn freely and can achieve their goal in life. For all round development of the students or learners moral and spiritual development is also necessary that help the learners to walk in right direction and becoming a good human being. According to him only book-oriented study will not fulfil the criteria as our society needs good number of human beings also, so there is a need of well-educated human being. Majeed and Hussain Mir (2024) The study revealed that Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy, rooted in the ideals of holistic development, creativity, and ethical values, remains profoundly relevant in the contemporary educational landscape. His emphasis on nurturing the whole person – intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually-provides a framework that aligns with modern educational approaches advocating for student-centered learning and personalized education. By integrating arts and culture into the curriculum, fostering collaborative learning, and promoting engagement with nature, Tagore's principles resonate with current movements that prioritize experiential and interdisciplinary learning. Priyanka (2025) Natural education refers to a learning approach that emphasizes the innate development of a child in harmony with nature, free from rigid structures and forced discipline. Rousseau's child-centric approach finds echoes in Tagore's insistence on respecting a child's individuality and creative instincts. Tagore believed that education should cater to the all-round development of a child – physical, intellectual, and spiritual. The spiritual foundation of his vision was central. For Tagore, education was not a tool for economic or social mobility alone—it was a sacred journey toward self-realization. He believed that the divine resided in the heart of every child, and education should help uncover that inner light. Tagore's philosophy aligns with growing global interest in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which recognizes that education must address not just the mind but also the heart.

Bhagat (2025) The study showed that Tagore's approach prioritizes the needs and interests of the child, encouraging exploration, discovery, and self-expression through various art forms and nature-based learning experiences. Adopting a child-centric

approach and emphasizing nature-based learning, arts, and project-based learning, educators can help students develop into well-rounded, innovative, and compassionate individuals who are equipped to make a positive impact in the world. Marshal (2025) Tagore advised that it is essential to be educated children in the freedom of nature by defeating their intention and teachers must be upgraded with different knowledge, news, educational changes, guidance, research, new formulas in different situations. All round development of the children is not possible without co-curricular activities. Every child comes into the world end owed with certain powers and potentialities. Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy emphasized the importance of co-curricular activities as integral to a child's holistic development.

Review of Related Literatures about Mahatma Gandhi

Rao (2018) Education is the back bone of society and is largely responsible for its upliftment. Education must be imparted in the child's mother tongue and originally connected with the child's social and cultural environment. – education for self-sufficiency, of eight years duration for children in the age group 7-15, with the same subjects and curricula contents for both boys and girls, irrespective of their caste or class. Every individual child should have full opportunity for the balanced and harmonious development of all his/her faculties and should acquire capacity for self-reliance in every aspect of a clean, healthy and cultured life, together with an understanding of the social, political and moral implications of such a life.

Kumari (2018) It related with the basic needs and interest of a child. This also pointing to the moral development of the child in a natural way. Child- centred – Education should develop harmony of the child's personality, body, heart, brain and soul, in short child-oriented education must be given for the betterment of the child. The child is in centre of education. At elementary level child are too young to understand the prospects of language. Though Nai Talim supports mother tongue so it became easier to educate them. Shrivastava and Kumar (2021). According to Mahatma Gandhi, the child should know the Why and The How of every process. The hand of the child should be trained to draw geometrical figures before he learns to write. Children should not be bound to learn anything and he should be interested in learning. The process of teaching should be conducted in a playful manner. All the education should be imparted through mother tongue of the children. Nair and Hardikar (2021) Mahatma Gandhi recommended craft education not only as a mechanism to teach a skill to the children to be self-reliant, but as a way to develop the critical and creative thinking abilities of the children to search for more knowledge and to be inquisitive. For Mahatma Gandhi holistic development of the person, character building and citizenship development are the purpose of education for which craft-oriented education and experiential learning are vehicles to reach that objective. In modern era, life skills education is considered as the vehicle to achieve potentiality development or holistic development of the children.

Sahu and Behera (2022) The result of the study was that Gandhi prescribed an education scheme known as "Nayi Talim" (Basic Education) in which every child should be educated and trained for the realization of his ethical goal in life and also the goal of a just social order. It is relevance is realized by everybody to build a holistic education system for child and man. His education scheme provides for close integration between school and community to make the child more social and cooperative. He wished that some local handicraft be made as a means of education for children so that they develop their mind, body and soul harmoniously and also meet the needs of their future life. Shukla (2023) Researcher show that Gandhiji was a great advocate of educating children per their needs, interest and capabilities. He was against bookish knowledge and always emphasized keeping the student-centred approach that aided in realizing the true meaning of education, that is, physical, intellectual and spiritual development to its best potential. Gandhi's objective for this was that the children would learn social responsibilities, citizenship, and regular studies. Jena (2023) The process of education throughout this period should have some manual and productive work and ability should be developed to engage them with handicraft work according to the environment of the child. Gandhiji's idea of basic education is valid and fruitful which may also be used as guiding principles in the present scenario. The modern education system needs to be reformed at elementary stage keeping in view of the moral value and employability features of the Gandhiji's basic education.

Verma and Tripathi (2023) Gandhi prescribed an educational program known as "Nayi Talim" (basic education) where every child should be educated and trained to achieve an ethical goal in his life as well as a just social order. Gandhiji always emphasized cooperative learning. Crafting helps the child learn cooperative skills and understand the value of honest work. The main purpose of basic education was to achieve comprehensive development of children through crafts and to create a sense of patriotism. Gandhiji wanted the primary education system to be self-supporting and every child to learn a trade or skill to earn a living. Mahatma Gandhi was one of the biggest proponents of "mother tongue" as compulsory teaching in primary education. Children learn better and faster in a language they understand. Sahoo and Sahoo (2024) This paper indicates some highlight point about child centric education, to develop the child's personality. The result showed that Education should make a child self-reliant. Character building is the utmost aim of education. Education should develop human values in the child. "Earning while learning" was the motto of this education. This will increase the creativity in a student. Gandhi ji focuses on child-centred education which is specially focused by NEP 2020. He believed that the child brings his own experience to school and they have to be reconstructed. There is plenty of room for the child to display her creative abilities and develop originality. He wanted children to cultivate purity in thought, word, and deed along with the pursuit of knowledge. Kundnani and Gupta (2025) Gandhi advocated for the simultaneous and harmonious development of the child's intellect (head), emotions/morals (heart), and practical skills (hand). While emphasizing discipline, Gandhi also advocated for an environment of freedom where children could explore and learn from their mistakes.

Review of Related Literatures about Jean Jacques Rousseau

Jamwal (2016) Conducted a study on Rousseau and his educational philosophy. Rousseau believed that children should be educated in nature and according to nature far from the madding crowd. He advocated that innate tendencies are more reliable base for action than the experience gained from society. He believed that the child should be brought up in natural environment and he will automatically become a natural being. He has stressed on Child interest. He wanted the child centered education. Rousseau has emphasized on the free and natural discipline. He has raised the slogan “leave the child free” and “there should be absence of restraint from Emile”. He also advocated that discipline by natural consequence. Yawei (2019) This paper analyzed the educational purpose, process, principles and methods of Rousseau’s nature education. Finally, it comes to the conclusion that Rousseau’s view of natural education is based on the criticism of feudal education and has the limitations of the times and revolutionary radicalization to a certain extent. The second stage is the childhood period of 2 – 12 years old: in this period, the children are mainly given sensory and sensory education. Pouwels (2023) The result showed that, First Rousseau promoted the idea of the natural development of children. This idea, according to Rousseau, should guide all pedagogical interventions by educators– nature is the norm. Second, is the importance of observing the child; that is, not to look ahead to what the child could become, but to focus on how they are. It is to acknowledge the child as a child instead of as not an adult. Third, is the importance of negative education; that is, to wait, to sit on your hands and do as little as possible to allow the natural development to unfold itself.

Sarkar and Ray (2024) The researcher has found that Rousseau’s naturalistic educational philosophy, rooted in human nature and self-discovery, has influenced modern educational theories like constructivism and student-centered learning approaches. Rousseau believed in contrasting native and foreign cultures, giving self-esteem to childhood, avoiding negative education, learning by experience, and promoting a balance between teachers and students. He thought that education should be tailored to the specific requirements and interests of each student. He advocated for hands-on, experiential learning experiences that allow students to explore and acquire knowledge on their own. Shi (2024) Rousseau’s natural education believed that attention should be paid to the natural changes in students’ physiology and psychology. The essence of education is to lead all students to achieve all-round development, so that they have a healthy body and mind. Rousseau was fully aware that students are different and children have different developmental characteristics at different ages. Long-term learning pressure, students will appear a variety of complex psychological problems, is not conducive to growth. Therefore, education should teach students according to their aptitude and respect their individuality.

Iskandarova (2024) Rousseau’s ideas continue to resonate with contemporary educational debates, including discussions on child-centered learning, student agency, and holistic development. He emphasized the natural state of the child, promoting the idea of the “noble savage” and the innate goodness of individuals. Rousseau advocated for education as a process of liberation, aiming to foster freedom, self-expression, and individuality. His emphasis on child centered education, individuality, and freedom of expression laid the foundation for progressive educational movements. Sel and Aveke (2025) The result showed that Central to Rousseau’s approach is the belief that a child’s education must align with nature meaning it should adapt to the child’s needs, capacities, abilities, interests, and perspective at each stage of growth. Sharma (2025) carried out a study on Jean-Jacques Rousseau: learning through Emile. Rousseau’s view in *Émile* insists that children should not be taught through verbal lessons, instead they should learn through experience. He also advises against punishing them, as they lack maturity at a young age. In addition, asking a child to apologize or say “Forgive me” is meaningless in Rousseau’s view that a child is incapable of doing something morally incorrect. Furthermore, he highlights the importance of viewing children as individuals with different development stages. His ideas help to shape a student-centered learning and the idea that children learn best when they are content, curious, and free. His work makes us think deeply about what education should really be.

Review of Related Literatures about John Dewey

Leshkovska and Spaseva (2016) Conducted a study on John Dewey’s educational theory and educational implications of Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory. The aim of the research presented in this paper is to identify and compare compatible elements of educational ideas of John Dewey and Howard Gardner. They also agree on student-centred teaching where implementation of variety of active methods of learning will give opportunity to students to express their specific identity. They represent instruments that every child learns how to use them, in his own pace in accordance with the individual motivation. Thorburn (2018) The objectives of the study to progressive education writings by John Dewey in relation to two questions: firstly, how was physical education organised and taught in the Gary Schools, a programme Dewey widely praised in Schools of Tomorrow and secondly, how might the educational aspirations of Dewey benefit current subject purposes in physical education. The paper concludes by arguing for a Deweyan and Merleau-Pontian informed account of physical education which is primed by embodied learning and social and moral development. Ye and Shih (2021) This study concludes that a democratic education allows children to participate in the problem-solving process, that continuous use of real social issues enhances democratic literacy for children, and that the quality of children’s education depends on teachers’ commitment to social responsibility.

Dar (2021) The study showed that the harmonious development of a child provides the main source of development of a nation. Thus, the teacher develops proper attitudes by selecting and organizing the subject matter with the children’s mental makeup. True education according to him is that which draws out and stimulates the intellectual and physical facilities of children. He advocated that literacy should never be the end of education or even the beginning. Sulistiawati (2021) The result revealed that John Dewey, a 20th century progressive philosopher and educator, developed a child-centered approach to education,

emphasizing the importance of experience as the basis of the learning process. Dewey believed that learning should be active, interactive, and based on children's interests and needs. Das et al. (2023) Dewey's call for education to be deeply connected to students' real-life experiences and democratic ideals has inspired the development of student-centered learning environments, including project-based and inquiry-based learning approaches. His emphasis on experiential learning and the integration of education with real-life experiences has inspired innovative pedagogical strategies that prioritize student engagement and active participation.

Wada et al. (2023) Dewey maintains that every child is unique and that uniqueness must be respected and accorded to every child. The education should follow the path that leads from the child's individual experience towards the cumulative experience of human kind. In this way, the child and the school curriculum build together the unity of the educational process. Hassen (2023) Dewey thought that the child was at the center of all academia, and his educational philosophy and reforms were primarily focused on the child. education should be concerned with the child's experiences both within and outside of the classroom. Dewey's teaching techniques were founded on the idea of learning via performing tasks that were relevant to a child's life. Project-based or problem-based learning techniques are used in such teaching and learning approaches. Das and Banerjee (2023) Dewey's educational philosophy is deeply rooted in his broader philosophical outlook, which integrates elements of pragmatism and functionalism. His emphasis on experiential learning and the integration of education with real-life experiences has inspired innovative pedagogical strategies that prioritize student engagement and active participation. Luo (2024) This paper explores Dewey's theory of experiential learning, its historical influence on modern teaching methods, and its potential for future educational research. The paper is structured into three parts: an introduction to Dewey's pragmatic philosophy in education, a discussion on the application of experiential learning in current educational practices, and suggestions for future research on integrating teaching and learning.

Several studies have been conducted on great educators; these are as follows Maji and Saha (2013); Reich et al. (2016); Paroi and Saha (2013); Atkinson (1984); Adhikari and Saha (2021a, 2021b, 2021c); Raghuramaraju (2015); Adhikari and Saha (2022); Baniwal (2026); Adhikari and Saha (2023a, 2023b); Mathur (1984); Hoskins and Smedley (2019); Adhikari et al. (2023); Gorain (2023); Roy and Saha (2021); Frost (2012); Roy (2023); Roy et al. (2023); Saha and Adhikari (2023a, 2023b); Das (2025); Escudero (2022); Ghosh and Saha (2024); Jeynes (2006); Mondal (2025a, 2025b); Chatterjee (2023); Mondal and Ghosh (2025); Patra (2026); Bauri (2026), all those studies have discussed the context of modern education.

Critical note

Rabindranath Tagore viewed the child as a naturally developing, curious, and creative individual. He believed that education should grant the child freedom to explore and express themselves. He was a sharp critic of rote learning, excessive discipline, and rigid education confined within classroom walls. Mahatma Gandhi conceived the idea of Basic Education or *Nai Talim*. He believed education should integrate the development of the head, the heart, and the hand, ensuring it is not divorced from productive work and daily life. Thus, he united craft, manual labor, social responsibility, moral values, and intellectual growth in his educational practice. Similarly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey emphasized the natural development of the child, valuing experience, freedom, and active participation. None of the four thinkers was in favour of a rigid, authoritarian, and purely book-centred education, even though their approaches developed within distinct historical and cultural milieus.

Conclusion

The educational ideas of Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey have greatly enriched the field of child education. Though their approaches differed, all of them emphasized the importance of understanding the child's nature, interests, abilities, and needs. The society at the time had become engulfed in cultural rigidity, which could only be overcome through the spread of education Ansary et al. (2023). It envisions a future where education is not merely about imparting knowledge but about fostering well-rounded individuals capable of contributing to a rapidly changing world Sen and Saha (2026). They believed that education should not merely provide bookish knowledge but should prepare children for a meaningful, creative, moral, and socially responsible life. Rabindranath Tagore emphasized freedom, creativity, and harmony with nature. Tagore's idea of education was largely about 'power of acceptance', 'capacity to hold' and 'calm brooding over it'. These are the essential criteria which should be developed and adapted mostly from childhood Saha and Majhi (2012). Gandhi stressed moral values, self-reliance, and productive work. Gandhiji's idea of basic education is valid and fruitful which may also be used as guiding principles in the present scenario Jena (2023). Rousseau advocated natural growth and child-centered learning. Rousseau's concept of natural education is based on the criticism of feudal education Yawei (2019). The formation of Rousseau's natural education thought is closely related to his growth experience and living environment Shi (2024). Dewey promoted experiential learning and democratic education. Dewey's main principles, namely experience-based learning (learning by doing) and social involvement, can be integrated with technology to enrich children's learning experiences without ignoring the importance of direct interaction with the physical world Sulistiawati (2024). Their ideas challenged traditional rigid systems of teaching and introduced methods that respected the interests, abilities, and individuality of children.

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