How Higher Education Students in West Bengal Perceive Creative Thinking in Their Learning Process: A Theoretical Exploration

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ABSTRACT

Creative thinking is crucial in higher education, fostering problem-solving, innovation, and adaptability. This study explored how students in West Bengal perceived creative thinking in their learning, drawing from theories and existing research. While global studies emphasized creativity's importance, students in West Bengal struggled to integrate it due to rigid curricula, exam-driven learning, and institutional barriers. The research analyzed how socio-cultural factors, teaching methods, and policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 influenced students' creative engagement. Findings revealed that although students valued creative thinking, traditional academic structures often restricted its practical application. Institutional support, faculty training, and curriculum flexibility were essential for fostering creativity. The study underscored the importance of interdisciplinary learning, alternative assessments, and digital tools in promoting creative engagement. Bridging the gap between urban and rural institutions was also necessary to ensure equal access to creativity-driven education. By assessing theoretical perspectives and existing challenges, this study provided insights into how higher education in West Bengal could evolve to nurture creativity. Future research should investigate the impact of innovative teaching strategies and policy changes on students' creative development. Integrating creativity into academic structures would better prepare students for dynamic careers and equip them with skills for an ever-changing global landscape.

Keywords: Creative Thinking, Higher Education, Innovation, Pedagogy, Curriculum Reform, NEP 2020.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, creative thinking has become a vital skill for academic achievement and career advancement. Researchers suggest that fostering creativity in education enhances students' cognitive skills, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability to complex situations (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). However, despite widespread initiatives to incorporate creative thinking into higher education curricula, perceptions and implementation strategies differ across various cultural and educational settings. In India, particularly in West Bengal, the conventional education system has been frequently criticized for its exam-oriented approach, which may limit students' capacity to engage in creative and critical thinking (Nair, 2021). This research aims to investigate how higher education students in West Bengal perceive creative thinking in their academic journey, considering cultural, institutional, and pedagogical influences. Creativity in education is commonly examined through different psychological and pedagogical theories. Guilford's (1950) divergent thinking theory underscores the importance of generating multiple solutions to a problem, which is a key aspect of creativity. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural background in shaping cognitive development, implying that students' creative thinking is largely shaped by their learning environment. Amabile's (1983) componential theory of creativity posits that creativity stems from intrinsic motivation, domain-specific skills, and a supportive social setting. Using these theoretical perspectives, this study assesses whether higher education institutions in West Bengal create an environment conducive to creative thinking or restrict it through rigid curricula and structured assessment methods. Across the globe, higher education institutions increasingly recognize the importance of nurturing creativity among students. Studies suggest that creativity is fundamental to knowledge development, innovation, and lifelong learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Research conducted in Western settings indicates that interdisciplinary education, open-ended problem-solving tasks, and student-centered teaching approaches foster creativity (Robinson, 2011). However, in India, studies reveal that students often

struggle with creative expression due to an emphasis on rote learning and exam-driven evaluations (Mukherjee, 2020). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to address this challenge by promoting a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education, yet its influence on students' perceptions of creativity remains an area that warrants further investigation (MHRD, 2020). Students' perspectives on creative thinking are shaped by various factors, including instructional methods, institutional priorities, and cultural expectations. Research suggests that students who engage in inquiry-based learning and problem-solving activities develop a more favorable view of creativity in their academic experiences (Sawyer, 2012). Conversely, students who primarily experience traditional, lecture-based, and exam-focused teaching approaches may perceive creativity as insignificant or secondary to academic success (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). In West Bengal, where conventional teaching strategies still dominate many higher education institutions, it is crucial to explore whether students feel encouraged or constrained in their creative endeavors. Exploring how higher education students in West Bengal perceive creative thinking in their learning experience has important implications for educational reform. A positive perception of creative thinking and increased opportunities for creative engagement may suggest a shift towards a more progressive academic landscape. On the other hand, if students perceive creativity as undervalued or irrelevant, it highlights the necessity for curriculum revisions, faculty development, and policy changes. This research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining how cultural and educational factors shape students' attitudes toward creativity and by offering recommendations to enhance creative thinking in higher education institutions across West Bengal. Creative thinking is a fundamental skill for both academic success and professional growth, yet its perception varies across educational settings. While global research underscores the advantages of creativity in higher education, students in West Bengal may encounter cultural and institutional barriers that hinder their creative engagement. By analyzing students' perspectives, this study aims to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with fostering creativity within the higher education system of West Bengal.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creative thinking is increasingly acknowledged as a vital cognitive skill in higher education, playing a crucial role in problem-solving, innovation, and adaptability (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Scholars define creativity as the ability to develop novel and valuable ideas, distinguishing between various forms, such as "big-C" (groundbreaking innovation) and "little-c" (everyday creative expression) (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Within an educational framework, creative thinking enables students to engage in deeper learning, establish interdisciplinary connections, and cultivate flexible problem-solving abilities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Higher education research indicates that creativity is nurtured through interdisciplinary approaches, experiential learning, and open-ended problem-solving tasks (Robinson, 2011). However, conventional teaching practices, particularly in Asian academic settings, often emphasize rote memorization and standardized assessments, potentially restricting students' creative engagement (Mukherjee, 2020). This issue is particularly significant in West Bengal, where the strong focus on competitive examinations and rigid curricula may shape students' attitudes toward creative thinking. Research suggests that cultural influences significantly impact students' views on creativity (Niu & Sternberg, 2006). In many Asian education systems, including India's, academic structures have historically prioritized knowledge acquisition over knowledge creation, fostering a passive learning environment (Ng, 2001). Studies indicate that students in these settings often struggle to perceive creativity as a core academic skill, instead associating it with artistic or extracurricular pursuits rather than essential disciplinary competencies (Mishra & Mehta, 2017). Institutional frameworks further shape creative thinking in education. Research on Indian higher education highlights that rigid curricula, lecture-based teaching, and high-stakes examinations reduce opportunities for creative exploration (Gupta, 2019). Faculty perspectives are equally critical—if educators do not value or fully understand creativity, they may be less likely to incorporate creative teaching strategies into their instructional methods (Beghetto, 2016). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 acknowledges these challenges and advocates for interdisciplinary learning, flexible curricula, and skill-based education (MHRD, 2020). However, its practical implementation in higher education institutions in West Bengal remains an area requiring further study. Research emphasizes that student-centered learning approaches, including inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning, are effective in fostering creativity (Sawyer, 2012). These teaching methods encourage students to consider multiple perspectives, generate original solutions, and engage in reflective thinking. For instance, studies on problem-based learning (PBL) demonstrate that it enhances students' ability to think critically and creatively by challenging them with

real-world problems that require innovative solutions (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Assessment methods also play a key role in fostering creative thinking. Conventional assessments, such as standardized tests and memory-based examinations, often fail to evaluate or promote creativity (Torrance, 1966). Alternative assessment techniques, including portfolio evaluations, open-ended projects, and reflective journals, have been shown to enhance students' creative engagement (Cropley, 2006). However, research indicates that Indian higher education largely relies on knowledge-recall assessments, which can restrict students' opportunities for creative expression (Singh & Aggarwal, 2021). Students' perceptions of creativity are shaped by their educational experiences, institutional environments, and societal expectations. Research indicates that students who are given autonomy in their learning, encouraged to take intellectual risks, and provided with opportunities for self-expression tend to develop more positive attitudes toward creativity (Amabile, 1996). Conversely, students in rigid academic environments often regard creativity as secondary to academic performance (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). Study revealed that A year-long creativity training program in higher education enhanced students' ability to generate ideas and adapt their thinking, though it did not boost originality. However, it did lead to better results in a convergent creativity task (Ritter et al., 2020). Another study has found that First-year business and economics undergraduates develop better creative thinking skills through authentic assessment tasks, highlighting the importance of providing opportunities to foster creativity in higher education (Karunarathne & Calma, 2023). On the other hand, research suggested that Higher education students engage in two types of creative cognitive processes—deliberate and intuitive—both of which are positively linked to deep learning approaches. However, their use varies depending on gender, enrollment type, and the nature of the institution (Miller & Dumford, 2016). Research showed that Cultivating creativity as a habit among higher education students can foster new connections, generate meaningful ideas, and enhance their ability to achieve specific goals effectively (Toshtemirovich, 2022). Studies on Indian higher education students suggest that while many recognize the value of creativity, they feel constrained by the traditional educational framework (Chakraborty & Basu, 2020). A study conducted by Banerjee (2018) on undergraduate students in West Bengal found that although students appreciated creative learning experiences, they often felt unprepared for them due to a lack of exposure in earlier schooling. These findings underscore the disparity between the theoretical significance of creativity and its practical implementation in higher education. To address the gap between theoretical and applied creativity, scholars stress the importance of comprehensive educational reforms. Runco (2014) argues that fostering a creative mindset requires cultivating an academic culture that encourages curiosity, experimentation, and intellectual freedom. Institutions must invest in faculty training programs that emphasize creative pedagogies and restructure curricula to include interdisciplinary and experiential learning opportunities (Robinson, 2011).

Additionally, policy initiatives such as NEP 2020 offer a foundation for fostering creativity in Indian higher education (MHRD, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these reforms depends on their implementation at the institutional level, especially in regions like West Bengal, where conventional teaching practices remain deeply embedded. Further research should investigate how creative learning policies are applied and assess how students' perspectives on creativity evolve in response to these educational shifts.

The literature highlights that creative thinking is essential for higher education students, yet its perception and integration vary across educational and cultural contexts. While research supports the benefits of creativity in academic settings, students in West Bengal may face challenges due to institutional constraints, rigid assessment structures, and societal influences. Overcoming these obstacles requires a combination of policy reforms, innovative teaching approaches, and institutional support. Future studies should examine how these factors shape students' perceptions and experiences of creativity, offering insights to improve educational practices in West Bengal.

Theories Incorporating Creative Thinking

Creativity has been widely explored across psychology, education, and cognitive sciences. Over time, numerous theories have been proposed to explain how individuals develop innovative ideas and solve problems creatively. These theories focus on various aspects of creativity, such as cognitive mechanisms, environmental factors, and personality characteristics. A foundational theory in creative thinking was introduced by J.P. Guilford through his Structure of Intellect (SI) Model (1956). Guilford challenged the conventional idea that intelligence is a singular, fixed trait and instead suggested that it comprises multiple abilities, including divergent thinking—an essential component of creativity. Divergent thinking enables individuals to generate multiple potential solutions

to a problem rather than following a singular, linear approach. Guilford identified four key elements of creativity: fluency (the capacity to generate numerous ideas), flexibility (the ability to shift perspectives and create diverse ideas), originality (the capacity to produce unique and novel concepts), and elaboration (the ability to refine and develop ideas with complexity). His research paved the way for later studies, positioning creativity as a measurable and teachable skill. Building upon Guilford's ideas, E. Paul Torrance (1966) developed his Theory of Creativity, offering a structured framework for assessing and enhancing creative potential. He designed the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT), which became a widely used tool to evaluate creativity in students and professionals. Torrance argued that creativity is not purely an inborn trait but can be fostered through education, encouragement, and motivation. His research highlighted problem-solving abilities, curiosity, risk-taking, and intrinsic motivation as crucial elements of creative thought. He also emphasized that creative individuals tend to embrace ambiguity, explore unconventional approaches, and challenge existing norms. This perspective has significantly influenced educational practices, where creativity is now regarded as a vital skill in modern learning. Another notable approach is Sternberg and Lubart's Investment Theory of Creativity (1995), which draws an analogy between creative thinking and investment strategies. This theory suggests that creative individuals "buy low and sell high" in the realm of ideas, meaning they generate novel or initially unpopular concepts, refine them with persistence, and eventually gain recognition when their value is acknowledged. Sternberg and Lubart identified six essential factors that contribute to creativity: intellectual abilities (the capacity for analytical and creative thinking), knowledge (a deep understanding of a particular domain), motivation (an inner drive to innovate), environment (a setting that nurtures creativity), personality traits (such as openness to new experiences and a willingness to take risks), and thinking style (a preference for originality and independent thought). This perspective suggests that creativity is not just a cognitive ability but also a result of interactions between personal traits and external influences. A more interdisciplinary framework is Amabile's Componential Model of Creativity (1983, 1996), which explains creativity as the interaction of three primary components: domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic motivation. Domain-relevant skills refer to an individual's expertise and knowledge in a specific field, while creativity-relevant processes include cognitive styles that encourage risk-taking, flexible thinking, and strategic problem-solving. Intrinsic motivation, or an individual's internal drive to engage in creative tasks, plays a crucial role in sustaining long-term creative efforts. Amabile's work has been particularly influential in organizational psychology, as it highlights how workplace environments, leadership styles, and task structures can either enhance or inhibit creativity. In addition to psychological models, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Creativity (1978) offers a perspective centered on social interaction. Lev Vygotsky argued that creativity is not solely an individual cognitive process but is profoundly shaped by social and cultural influences. He believed that creative thinking emerges through social learning, collaboration, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. According to his theory, individuals develop creativity by internalizing cultural tools, such as language and symbols, and then using them in novel ways. His perspective underscores the significance of teachers, mentors, and collaborative environments in nurturing creative potential. Another sociocultural approach is Csikszentmihalyi's Systems Model of Creativity (1996), which conceptualizes creativity as an interaction between three core elements: the individual, the domain, and the field. The domain represents a specific area of knowledge (such as science, music, or literature), the field comprises experts and gatekeepers who evaluate creative contributions, and the individual is the person generating new ideas. According to this model, creativity is not solely a personal attribute but also involves gaining validation and recognition from society. Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow" a state of deep immersion and enjoyment in creative work—has been widely applied in education, business, and the arts to understand how individuals achieve peak creative performance. These diverse theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of creative thinking, addressing cognitive mechanisms, personality traits, environmental influences, and social contexts. While Guilford and Torrance focused on cognitive abilities and problem-solving strategies, Sternberg and Lubart emphasized persistence and external recognition. Amabile highlighted the role of expertise and motivation, whereas Vygotsky and Csikszentmihalyi underscored the impact of social and cultural interactions. Together, these theories present a multidimensional view of how creativity emerges, evolves, and flourishes in various settings.

Creative Thinking in the Learning Process in Higher Education: Worldwide Perspective

Creativity has become an indispensable skill in higher education, equipping students with the ability to develop innovative solutions, think critically, and adjust to the evolving demands of a fast-changing world. As global

economies increasingly shift towards knowledge-driven industries, universities across the world are placing greater emphasis on nurturing creative thinking within their academic programs. This shift aligns with the belief that education should extend beyond memorization and instead encourage students to experiment, explore, and generate original ideas. Creative thinking within higher education involves the capacity to produce new and meaningful ideas, solve complex problems, and approach learning with flexibility and openness (Runco, 2014). Unlike conventional teaching approaches that emphasize passive knowledge intake, creative learning encourages active participation, collaboration, and problem-solving. Many universities are now adopting interdisciplinary strategies, project-based learning, and experiential education as ways to foster creativity among students (Jackson, 2014). In the United States and Western Europe, universities integrate creativity into higher education through innovation centers, design thinking methodologies, and collaborative learning spaces (Robinson, 2011). Institutions like Stanford and MIT actively promote creative problem-solving through initiatives such as Design Thinking and Project-Based Learning, which allow students to address real-world challenges by working across disciplines. Historically, Asian education systems have emphasized structured and rigorous learning. However, in recent years, universities in China, Japan, and South Korea have acknowledged the need to incorporate creativity into their curricula (Cheng, 2019). China's Ministry of Education, for instance, has introduced policies that encourage innovation-driven education, urging universities to include entrepreneurship and creative problem-solving in their academic frameworks. African and Middle Eastern universities have also been increasingly integrating creative thinking into higher education. Institutions in countries such as South Africa, Egypt, and the UAE are investing in learning strategies focused on innovation, recognizing that creativity plays a crucial role in economic and technological progress (Ngugi & Goos, 2018). Many universities are implementing collaborative learning environments and research-based teaching techniques to support student creativity. In Latin America, particularly in countries like Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, higher education institutions are adopting creative learning approaches by leveraging digital technologies, entrepreneurship initiatives, and experiential learning (Zabalza, 2012). The traditional lecture-based model is gradually being replaced by interactive and student-centered teaching methods, acknowledging the importance of creativity in addressing both regional and global challenges. Despite the widespread focus on fostering creativity, several obstacles remain. Many educational systems still rely on traditional assessment models that prioritize standardized testing over creative problem-solving. Additionally, faculty members may lack the necessary training in creative pedagogy, making it difficult to effectively implement innovative teaching techniques (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2009). Furthermore, cultural perspectives on creativity differ across regions, influencing the extent to which creativity is encouraged in academic settings. To enhance the integration of creative thinking into higher education, universities should focus on developing flexible curricula, fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration, and utilizing digital tools that support creativity. Moreover, teacher training programs should prioritize creative pedagogy, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to inspire innovation among students. Policymakers should also advocate for educational reforms that emphasize creativity, solidifying its role as a fundamental aspect of higher education worldwide (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Creative thinking is essential in higher education, empowering students to navigate the complexities of today's world. While different regions approach creativity in diverse ways, a global shift towards fostering innovation and critical thinking is evident. By addressing existing challenges and embracing new educational models, universities can better prepare students for a future that requires adaptability and creative problem-solving.

The Role of Creative Thinking in Higher Education in West Bengal

Creative thinking is a vital component of the learning process in higher education, shaping students' ability to innovate, critically analyze, and adapt to evolving academic and professional environments. In West Bengal, the incorporation of creative thinking into higher education has been shaped by both historical traditions and modern educational ideologies. The region's strong intellectual legacy, influenced by figures such as Rabindranath Tagore, has long championed holistic and creativity-driven learning. Institutions like Visva-Bharati University have fostered a model of education that emphasizes imagination, interdisciplinary exploration, and artistic expression, laying the foundation for creativity-centered education in the state. In contemporary higher education institutions across West Bengal, efforts to embed creative thinking within academic programs have been influenced by changes in pedagogy, educational policies, and technological advancements. Universities such as Jadavpur University, Presidency University, and the University of Calcutta have introduced progressive teaching strategies that integrate research-based learning, experiential education, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The

adoption of project-based learning, hands-on workshops, and digital education tools has further expanded students' creative capabilities, enabling them to engage in critical problem-solving and innovative thought. However, despite these positive developments, challenges persist, particularly in striking a balance between structured academic frameworks and flexible, creativity-focused learning models. A key driver of creative thinking in West Bengal's higher education system has been the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which prioritizes skill-based and interdisciplinary learning. The policy encourages institutions to move away from rote memorization and conventional assessment methods, instead promoting critical thinking, innovation, and research-driven education. Many universities in West Bengal have gradually adopted these principles, incorporating creativity-enhancing activities such as collaborative student projects, interdisciplinary research, and opportunities for exploration beyond rigid disciplinary boundaries. Faculty training and evolving pedagogical strategies have also played a significant role in nurturing creativity within the learning process. Many educators in West Bengal are incorporating constructivist teaching methodologies, drawing from the theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1950), which highlight active student engagement and knowledge construction. These approaches enable students to develop creative problem-solving skills through inquiry-based learning, case studies, and interactive discussions rather than passive knowledge consumption. Additionally, there is a growing emphasis on digital literacy and the integration of technology to support creative thinking, utilizing online platforms, virtual laboratories, and artificial intelligence-powered learning tools. Despite these advancements, several systemic barriers continue to hinder the widespread integration of creative thinking in higher education. The continued emphasis on standardized examinations, limited resource availability in rural institutions, and rigid academic structures often restrict students' ability to explore unconventional ideas. Furthermore, societal expectations and traditional career norms can discourage students from taking creative risks. Nevertheless, universities are increasingly recognizing the importance of fostering an environment that encourages experimentation, innovation, and the practical application of knowledge.

To further promote creative thinking in higher education, a collaborative approach involving policymakers, educators, and institutions is essential. Strengthening interdisciplinary research opportunities, investing in faculty development for creative pedagogy, and expanding access to diverse learning resources will be critical in cultivating a more innovation-driven education system. By fostering a culture that values intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and innovation, West Bengal can enhance its higher education landscape and better equip students to navigate an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

Bridging the Gap between Creative Thinking and Academic Practice

The integration of creative thinking within higher education has been widely acknowledged as essential for fostering innovation, problem-solving abilities, and adaptive learning among students. However, in the context of higher education in West Bengal, a significant gap persists between the theoretical recognition of creativity and its practical application within academic environments. This gap reflects a broader tension between traditional educational structures and contemporary pedagogical expectations that emphasize higher-order thinking skills. From a theoretical standpoint, creativity is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct involving divergent thinking, originality, flexibility, and elaboration (Guilford, 1956; Torrance, 1966). It is further understood as a dynamic process shaped by cognitive abilities, intrinsic motivation, and environmental influences (Amabile, 1983; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Educational theorists have consistently emphasized that creativity plays a crucial role in meaningful learning and intellectual development, enabling students to generate novel ideas and engage with complex academic challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Despite this strong theoretical foundation, the translation of creative thinking into everyday academic practices remains limited in many higher education institutions. One of the primary reasons for this disconnect is the dominance of exam-oriented and content-heavy curricula, which prioritize memorization and standardized performance over critical inquiry and innovation. In such environments, students often perceive creativity as secondary to academic achievement, focusing instead on reproducing knowledge to meet assessment criteria (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2009; Mukherjee, 2020). This phenomenon is particularly evident in the Indian educational context, where high-stakes examinations and rigid syllabi shape students' learning behaviors and attitudes toward knowledge construction. Furthermore, institutional and pedagogical constraints significantly influence the extent to which creative thinking is encouraged in higher education. Traditional lecture-based teaching methods, limited opportunities for experiential learning, and insufficient emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches restrict

students' ability to engage in creative exploration (Sawyer, 2012). Although some universities in West Bengal have begun incorporating innovative teaching strategies, the overall system continues to reflect a structured and teacher-centered model of instruction, which may inhibit students' creative potential. In addition to institutional factors, socio-cultural influences also play a critical role in shaping students' perceptions of creativity. Cultural expectations that prioritize stability, conformity, and academic success often discourage risk-taking and independent thinking among students (Niu & Sternberg, 2006). As a result, students may hesitate to experiment with new ideas or challenge established norms, fearing negative academic or social consequences. This reinforces the perception of creativity as an optional or non-essential aspect of education rather than a core academic competency. Policy initiatives such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have sought to address these challenges by advocating for interdisciplinary learning, skill-based education, and the integration of critical and creative thinking into the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2020). While these reforms represent a progressive shift toward holistic education, their implementation remains uneven across institutions, particularly in regions where traditional practices are deeply embedded. Consequently, the intended transformation of higher education into a creativity-driven system is still in a transitional phase. Therefore, the gap between creative thinking and academic practice can be understood as a result of the complex interplay between theoretical ideals, institutional structures, pedagogical practices, and socio-cultural expectations. Recognizing this gap is essential for interpreting students' perceptions of creative thinking in higher education. It provides a critical analytical foundation for examining how various systemic factors influence students' ability to engage in creative and innovative learning processes. Addressing this gap requires a comprehensive approach that includes curriculum reform, faculty development, flexible assessment strategies, and the creation of supportive learning environments that encourage intellectual risk-taking and originality.

DISCUSSION

Creative thinking is essential in higher education as it enables students to cultivate problem-solving abilities, foster innovation, and adapt to an increasingly complex world. In West Bengal, students' perceptions of creative thinking are influenced by a range of socio-cultural, institutional, and pedagogical factors. Existing research on creativity in education underscores the need to create an academic environment that nurtures independent thinking, interdisciplinary engagement, and collaborative learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Amabile, 1983). However, the extent to which students in West Bengal acknowledge and incorporate creative thinking into their academic experiences remains a topic of theoretical discussion. The significance of creativity in learning has been extensively analyzed in educational psychology, with scholars emphasizing its role in student growth (Guilford, 1956; Sternberg & Lubart, 1995). According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, creativity develops through social interactions and guided learning, indicating that students' understanding of creative thinking is shaped by their academic setting and institutional support. Similarly, Torrance (1966) defines creative thinking as involving fluency, originality, flexibility, and elaboration, all of which can be cultivated through well-structured educational practices. Within the higher education framework in West Bengal, creativity is often perceived through the lens of conventional learning models that prioritize knowledge acquisition and academic rigor. While students acknowledge the value of creative thinking, they frequently struggle to integrate it within an exam-focused academic system. Runco (2014) suggests that students' engagement with creative thinking is influenced by institutional policies, teaching methods, and faculty encouragement toward open-ended exploration. Research on India's higher education sector indicates that students often regard creative thinking as supplementary rather than an essential component of academic success (Cheng, 2019). In West Bengal, institutions such as Jadavpur University, Presidency University, and the University of Calcutta have introduced innovative teaching strategies to foster creativity. However, integrating these methods into standardized curricula remains challenging. Studies indicate that students in these universities primarily associate creativity with disciplines like literature, fine arts, and media studies, whereas fields such as engineering, medical sciences, and commerce tend to focus more on structured academic outcomes (Robinson, 2011). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to address this divide by promoting interdisciplinary education and critical thinking as core educational priorities (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, traditional academic expectations continue to influence student perceptions of creative thinking, with rote learning and exam performance often taking precedence over innovation and originality (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2009). West Bengal's academic environment is shaped by deep-rooted historical and cultural factors that influence students' attitudes toward creativity. The educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, which advocates holistic and experiential learning, continues to

inspire institutions such as Visva-Bharati University (Tagore, 1917). However, the broader higher education system in the state still faces challenges due to rigid syllabi and assessment structures, which may restrict students' opportunities to explore creative approaches.

Faculty perspectives significantly impact how students engage with creative thinking. Jackson (2014) asserts that teachers who integrate interactive and inquiry-based learning techniques help enhance students' creative engagement. In West Bengal, educators who embrace constructivist teaching methods, promoting critical discussions and problem-solving activities, contribute to fostering a more favorable perception of creative thinking. However, widespread adoption of such methods is often hindered by institutional barriers, including large class sizes and resource constraints (Ngugi & Goos, 2018). Although there is increasing recognition of creativity in education, students in West Bengal still face obstacles in fully embracing creative thinking due to systemic limitations. Standardized assessments, societal expectations regarding stable career paths, and restricted access to interdisciplinary learning opportunities shape students' perceptions of creativity as secondary to academic achievement (Zabalza, 2012). Overcoming these challenges requires policy reforms, enhanced faculty training, and stronger institutional support to create an academic environment where students feel encouraged to think creatively without the fear of negative academic consequences.

Future research should investigate the role of digital learning tools, experiential education, and policy interventions in improving students' perceptions of creative thinking. By integrating global best practices while maintaining regional educational values, a balanced approach can be developed to promote creativity within West Bengal's higher education landscape.

Educational Implications

Integrating creative thinking into higher education has far-reaching effects on pedagogy, curriculum design, and institutional policies, particularly in the context of West Bengal. Gaining insights into students' perceptions of creativity within their academic journey can assist educators and policymakers in formulating strategies that enhance innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities.

Pedagogical Implications

To effectively nurture creativity while maintaining academic rigor, educators in West Bengal must implement teaching strategies that encourage innovative thinking. Constructivist methods, including inquiry-based learning, collaborative projects, and problem-solving tasks, provide students with opportunities to think independently and critically (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1950). Faculty should incorporate interdisciplinary learning, enabling students to establish connections between various fields, thereby fostering holistic and innovative thought processes. Techniques such as open-ended questioning, reflective discussions, and case study analyses can help students move beyond rote learning and actively engage in creative problem-solving. Faculty development initiatives should prioritize equipping educators with the necessary skills to integrate creativity into their teaching. Conducting workshops on creative pedagogies, active learning methodologies, and digital tool utilization can enhance faculty members' capacity to foster creative thinking among students. Studies indicate that teachers who encourage autonomy, risk-taking, and divergent thinking significantly influence students' creative engagement (Jackson, 2014).

Curriculum Design and Assessment

Higher education institutions in West Bengal must redesign curricula to incorporate creativity-driven learning experiences. Introducing project-based learning, research-oriented assignments, and experiential education can foster students' ability to think creatively. While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 underscores the importance of skill-based and interdisciplinary education (Ministry of Education, 2020), universities must take proactive steps to implement these guidelines by offering flexible course structures that enable students to explore creative disciplines beyond their core subjects. Assessment practices must also evolve to better accommodate creative thinking. Conventional examinations that primarily assess memorization and theoretical understanding should be complemented with alternative assessment methods, such as portfolios, reflective

essays, and presentations. Grading criteria should include rubrics that evaluate originality, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, thereby motivating students to engage in innovative academic work.

Institutional Policies and Support

To create a conducive environment for creative learning, universities and colleges in West Bengal must establish institutional policies that support innovation. This includes setting up makerspaces, interdisciplinary research centers, and innovation hubs where students can collaborate on real-world challenges. Additionally, forming partnerships with industries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and global institutions can expose students to practical applications of creative problem-solving. Institutional policies should also address bureaucratic barriers that hinder creative learning. Rigid credit structures and inflexible course requirements often limit students' ability to explore creative disciplines. Introducing a greater number of elective courses, interdisciplinary degree programs, and experiential learning opportunities can allow students to customize their education based on their interests and strengths.

Technology and Digital Learning

With the growing role of technology in education, digital platforms, virtual labs, and artificial intelligence-based learning tools can be leveraged to promote creative thinking. Online educational resources such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), simulation-based learning, and gamified education offer students interactive and immersive learning experiences that enhance creativity (Runco, 2014). Blended learning models, which integrate traditional classroom instruction with digital tools, can be particularly effective in fostering creativity. Encouraging students to engage in activities such as digital storytelling, coding projects, and multimedia presentations can help them develop creative skills that are essential in today’s workforce.

Addressing the Urban-Rural Divide

One of the key challenges in West Bengal is the disparity in educational resources between urban and rural institutions. While universities in cities like Kolkata benefit from advanced learning tools and infrastructure, many rural colleges continue to rely on outdated curricula and limited technological access. Government policies and institutional initiatives should aim to bridge this divide by improving funding, enhancing faculty training, and expanding access to digital resources for rural institutions. Strategies such as mobile learning units, community-driven projects, and virtual workshops on creativity can support students in underprivileged areas in developing innovative thinking skills.

Shaping a Cultural Shift

For creativity to be fully embraced in education, a broader cultural shift is necessary in how students, parents, and educators perceive learning. In West Bengal, traditional academic success is often measured by high examination scores, leading students to prioritize rote memorization over creative exploration. To change this mindset, universities and policymakers should promote awareness campaigns, organize student-led innovation fairs, and establish recognition programs for creative achievements. Cultivating student autonomy, reducing the fear of failure, and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset can help students prepare for careers that demand adaptability and innovation.

Future Directions

To ensure creative thinking becomes a central element of higher education in West Bengal, universities and policymakers must implement long-term strategies that promote innovation in learning. Future research should investigate how different teaching methodologies impact students’ creative growth and how institutional reforms can foster a more supportive environment for creativity. Collaboration between academia, industry, and government agencies can further strengthen creative education initiatives. Establishing mentorship programs, startup incubators, and interdisciplinary research projects can provide students with opportunities to apply their creative thinking in practical contexts. By embedding creativity within pedagogical approaches, curriculum structures, institutional policies, and technological advancements, higher education in West Bengal can nurture

a generation of students who are not only academically proficient but also innovative, adaptable, and equipped to tackle complex global challenges.

CONCLUSION

Creative thinking plays a crucial role in higher education, helping students cultivate problem-solving skills, adaptability, and innovation. In West Bengal, students' perspectives on creativity are shaped by conventional academic frameworks, institutional guidelines, and socio-cultural expectations. While awareness of creativity's significance is growing, several barriers—such as rigid syllabi, examination-centric education, and unequal resource distribution—still obstruct its full integration into higher education. Scholars like Vygotsky (1978), Guilford (1956), and Sternberg & Lubart (1995) highlight that creativity thrives in environments that promote independent thought, collaboration, and interdisciplinary engagement. However, many students in West Bengal continue to perceive creativity as secondary to academic achievements, primarily due to traditional evaluation systems and the societal focus on standardized success. The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents an opportunity to redefine educational structures, incorporating creative learning methods that align with global educational trends. To nurture creative thinking, universities in West Bengal should emphasize innovative teaching approaches, flexible curricula, and alternative evaluation techniques. Institutional policies must facilitate faculty development, establish innovation centers, and incorporate digital learning tools. Furthermore, addressing the urban-rural educational gap and reshaping societal attitudes toward creativity are essential to ensuring that students from all backgrounds can participate in creative learning.

Future research should examine the effectiveness of diverse creative pedagogical strategies within West Bengal's higher education system and assess how institutional reforms influence students' engagement with creativity. By embedding creativity as a core element of learning, higher education institutions in West Bengal can better equip students to navigate an increasingly dynamic global landscape, preparing them for both academic and professional success.

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