

Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim as Indigenous Pedagogical Space and Its Relevance in the Context of NEP 2020: A Synthesis

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Abstract: This review examines the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim as an indigenous pedagogical space that can inform contemporary educational practices and contribute to educational transformation within the NEP 2020 framework. Longshim, a dormitory of the Hau Tangkhul Naga, served as an important traditional educational institution for youths before Christianity by promoting the transmission of knowledge, social and ethical values, social responsibilities, and skills through oral traditions, role modelling, and experiential learning. Indigenous pedagogical principles such as collective community participation, apprenticeship, role modelling, intergenerational engagement, and a holistic approach were central features of the educational process in the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim. The synthesis of various literature reveals significant similarities between the indigenous pedagogical strategies of the Longshim and those of NEP 2020. The philosophy of holistic education, experiential learning, joyful learning, cultural rootedness, vocational integration, and indigenous knowledge systems are core components of both Longshim and the NEP 2020. The indigenous knowledge systems and pedagogy of the then Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim have transformative potential to inform best practice in educational settings, aligning with the NEP 2020 framework.

Keywords: National Education Policy (NEP), 2020; Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim; Indigenous Pedagogy; Community-based Learning, Experiential Learning

Introduction

Indigenous communities, grounded in ecology, collective memory, oral traditions, social participation, and experiential learning, have transmitted knowledge, values, skills, customary laws, and a sense of social responsibility since time immemorial. Indigenous institutions play a pivotal role in the transmission of indigenous knowledge. Before formal education emerged, indigenous institutions functioned as platforms for education. The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim was one such indigenous institution. The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim is commonly known as Morung among the Nagas in Northeast India. Boys and girls at the age of puberty joined and lived in the Longshim with many other inmates. The inmates of the Longshim were known as Longnao (Luikham, 2009). The Hau Naga Tangkhul Naga Longshim played a pivotal role in mentoring,

educating, and shaping the Longnao (inmates) and the community members. Goswami (2022) described the significance of Longshim and wrote: “it made men and women”. Longshim had crucial educational significance among the Nagas. In Longleng District, Nagaland, a community-based organisation called “Lemsachenlok” under the AlijoCademia started reviving the Longshim/Morung indigenous educational pedagogical system (Phom, n.d.). Hon’ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi also praised the educational significance of the traditional Morung learning system of Nagaland in the 132nd Edition of ‘Mann Ki Baat’ broadcast on 29th March, 2026 (English II 132nd Edition of “Mann Ki Baat,” 2026).

Although the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim has considerable educational significance, previous research on Longshim was mostly anthropological and ethnographic. Previous research overlooked the pedagogical dimensions of Longshim, which have significant implications within the context of NEP 2020. The National Education Policy, 2020, provides a framework for incorporating indigenous knowledge and experiential learning into education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). This provides a context for re-evaluating the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim as a pedagogical space and synthesising its pedagogical principles in relation to NEP 2020.

Research Questions

This synthesis aims to answer the following questions.

1. How did the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim function as an indigenous model of community-based education?
2. In what ways did the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim pedagogical principle reverberate with the objectives of NEP 2020?

Objectives of the Review

To explore the above questions, the review aims to,

1. analyse the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim pedagogical principles.
2. critically evaluate the relevance of the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim pedagogical principles within the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 framework.

Review of Related Literature

Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) and the Pedagogical Methods

“Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) refer to the cumulative body of knowledge, practices, and beliefs developed by Indigenous peoples through their interactions with the environment” (Leveridge, 2024). IKS is

rooted in the intimate relationship between indigenous people and their natural environment. IKS is experience-based and values-based (Battiste, 2002). These knowledge systems include ecological, cultural, spiritual, and societal dimensions, offering insights into sustainable practices, environmental stewardship, and community-based management (Leveridge, 2024). IKS contains a distinctive philosophy of knowledge (Battiste, 2002), unlike Western scientific knowledge that compartmentalises knowledge into disciplines.

The indigenous pedagogical method of teaching IKS is based on the indigenous ways of knowing (Indigenous Pedagogies, n.d.). Indigenous knowledge is passed down through stories, ceremonies, and oral teaching. Indigenous pedagogy is relational, intergenerational, experiential (Bone, 2022), learning through enjoyment (Battiste, 2002), and participatory in nature. Teaching IKS cultivates holistic development, including spiritual, ethical, ecological, social, cultural, political, and survival skills.

The Role of Indigenous Institutions in Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge in Northeast India

Northeast India is rich in indigenous knowledge, culture, and heritage. Most tribal communities in the Northeast had a dormitory system, an indigenous institution that played a crucial role in teaching and passing down indigenous knowledge. This dormitory system is known as Morung among the Nagas. Other tribal communities of Northeast India called it by different names (Horam, n.d.). It acts as a living academy, social club, and vocational institution (Goswami, 2022; Lolia, 2018). It facilitated the transmission, practice, and teaching of indigenous knowledge from generation to generation.

IKS and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, India

The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 in India reformed the Eurocentric educational system and signifies a significant change in the Indian education system by giving special emphasis on holistic development of students, inclusive, integrated, enjoyable, engaging, experiential learning, multilingualism, and integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), along with vocational training to equip students for employability (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). IKS are profoundly integrated into the NEP 2020 policy to anchor modern learning in India's rich heritage, tribal ethos, and traditional sciences (University Grants Commission, 2023). NEP 2020 paved the way for incorporating indigenous epistemologies into modern pedagogy (Mehta, 2025; Prabhakar, 2023). But there are also concerns about structural inequalities, lack of documentation, teacher preparedness, and epistemological hierarchies that continue to hinder the implementation of a culturally responsive educational model, despite policy recognition (Roy & Ahmed, 2026).

Methodology of the Study

The researcher incorporated a qualitative descriptive research design to conceptualise the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim as an indigenous pedagogical space in light of NEP 2020. The researcher used secondary sources to thematically synthesise the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim's pedagogical significance in light of NEP 2020.

Findings of the Synthesis

Meaning and Functions of the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim

Longshim is a compound word made up of "Long" and "Shim." The word "Long" mean "association, union, organisation", and "Shim" means "house." Luikham (2009) called it as the "Common House of unmarried boys and girls." A. S. W. Shimray (2001) translated it as the 'Sleeping Chamber' of boys and girls. Horam (n.d.) described Longshim as a 'training school in the arts of life and war as well as a club for entertainment and fun.' As a result, Haksar (2011) and Chasie (2000) refer to Longshim as a space or institution for educating youths. Manorama Year Book (2026) referred to it as an 'indigenous model of community-based education' (PM Modi Lauds Nagaland's Morung Learning System, 2026).

In the early 20th century, anthropologists started to refer to it as 'Dormitory,' which fell far short of the essence of what it – Longshim - is (Goswami, 2022).

Types of Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim

Hau Tangkhul Naga had separate sleeping halls for boys and girls and known by different names. They are:

1. Mayar (boys) Longshim, and
2. Ngala (maiden) Longshim (Maheishang, 2016; Shangjam, 2026).

Places Where It Was Installed and the Qualifications of the Person Who Installed Longshim

In Hau Tangkhul Naga Tradition, Longshim was installed in the village chief's house. If the village chief's house cannot accommodate it, Longshim can also be installed in the clan head's house (Simon, 2025). The one who installed the Longshim should have a commanding authority and could be in a position to accommodate the youths and maids of the village (Simon, 2025).

Who Made the Rules of the Longshim?

The Awunga (hereditary village chief) and the Hangva (members of the village council) exercised continuous sovereign authority over the Longshim. According to the traditional and customary laws of the Hau Tangkhul Naga, the Hangva (village council) managed and framed rules and regulations for the functioning of the Longshim (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001).

Who Looked After the Longshim?

The Longshim had no permanent office-bearers. According to A. S. W. Shimray (2001), the internal administration was entrusted to the elders of the Longshim. The elders, who managed the internal affairs of the Longshim, were the most skilled, most capable, and most respected persons in the whole society (Simon, 2025).

How Was Membership in Longshim Granted?

Generally, both boys and girls were admitted to the Longshim as early as they reached puberty.

Membership in Mayar Longshim (Boys Dormitory)

As soon as boys entered Longshim, they had to go through a probationary period. They were to undergo severe trials and ordeals for three to five years (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001). Every evening, young boys in their probationary period had to bring firewood in bundles (thingchui) to a group fireplace (meilongpam), in front of the Longshim. Upon puberty, they were admitted to the Longshim as permanent bona fide members, provided that the boys performed their duties consistently, diligently, and to an acceptable standard. A festival called “Longra Phanit” was celebrated to commemorate the admission of the graduated boys as bona fide members of the Longshim (Simon, 2025).

After the probationary period, boys were promoted to full membership as intermediates (second stage). Intermediate members were entrusted with and involved in important village responsibilities. The intermediate members were responsible for helping the weak and distressed villagers and assisting the seniors in the administration of Longshim (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001).

The third stage of membership was the senior group. They were expected to be active members and leaders in all village affairs and business. They were responsible for running the Longshim (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001).

Membership in Ngala Longshim (Girls or Maiden Dormitory)

In Hau Tangkhul Naga tradition, there were no formal procedures to earn membership in the Ngala Longshim (Simon, 2025). Both boys and girls can leave the Longshim after they marry. If a man cannot set up a house

for himself even after marriage, he can stay in the Longshim. For girls, once they cross marriageable age, they should keep long hair to signify maidenhood. At 40 to 45 years, she can leave the Longshim.

Moral Values, Ethics, and Conduct in the Longshim

Longshim provided a platform for boys and girls to learn from elders about moral character, social etiquette, manners, obedience, respect, responsibility, and community service (Shangjam, 2026). The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim maintained high moral standards and decorum. All inmates and whoever enters should respect the sanctity, social norms, and customs of the Longshim (Simon, 2025). Anyone who violated the norms of the Longshim was punished (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001).

Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim as an Indigenous Model of Community-Based Education

Longshim came to life only in the evening, as during the daytime the members engaged in various agricultural and domestic work. Various activities held in Longshim played an important role in educating and shaping Hau Tangkhul Naga youths into men and women. The various activities held in Longshim are discussed below.

An Institution of Oral Instruction

Though there was no writing or reading, oral instruction was the medium through which young Hau Tangkhul Naga were educated in Longshim (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001). Oral tradition and instruction are pivotal for preserving the cultural heritage of Indigenous communities and for sharing knowledge in a way that reflects the community's values and worldview. Elders of the indigenous community play a crucial role as knowledge keepers, sharing their experiences and wisdom through stories, songs, and ceremonies (Leveridge, 2024). According to Luikham (2009), Longshim had played an important role in oral schooling, in disciplining and instructing impressionable young people about various aspects of life. It was through this medium that the art of life, agrarian knowledge, warfare, customs and traditions, etc., were taught and preserved from generation to generation.

An Institution of Storytelling

Storytelling is one of the most important modes of communication in many Indigenous cultures. Storytelling is used not only to entertain but to educate, transmit cultural values, and convey important ecological knowledge. Storytelling allows for the transmission of knowledge in a way that is dynamic, engaging, and accessible to all members of the community, from elders to children. Indigenous stories often incorporate ecological observations and lessons about living in harmony with the land (Leveridge, 2024). Storytelling plays an important role in the development of skills and abilities of Longshim inmates (Luikham, 2009). Village elders, who were well-versed in history, narrated stories about their history and put it into folklore,

songs, and poetry (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001). The inmates would also listen to folklore and folk tales, which provide knowledge on the positive and negative aspects of community and individual life (Luikham, 2009).

An Institution of Experiential Learning

Hau Tangkhul Naga youths learnt numerous lessons from Longshim, taught by the elders. According to Luikham (2009), elderly men and women were occasionally invited to teach and instruct the inmates through songs and stories, and to share facts and realities of life. Besides, village elders brought their unfinished work to Longshim and worked there. In the process, the inmate youths learnt wood carving, mat weaving, basket making, etc. (Maheishang, 2016). In fact, the teaching and learning process in Longshim was mostly experiential.

An Institution of Values and Discipline

The teaching and learning processes in Longshim mainly focused on building values, discipline and character that shaped the youths. According to Simon (2025), the young people were trained, disciplined and given proper instruction in every sphere of life. They were taught the philosophy of life and values such as respect for the elders, the duty to protect the village and commitment to the community (Haksar, 2011). They were also taught the hard realities of life; in the process, the inmates would learn manners and behaviours. The older girls would also teach the younger one's primitive etiquette, instruct and guide them on how to talk and behave in private and public life (Luikham, 2009). According to Maheishang (2016), various lessons the youths learnt in the dormitory from their elders were mainly about building moral character towards their elders, parents, and friends.

An Institution for Training and Skill Development

Longshim was a training centre for young Hau Tangkhul Naga youths. In Longshim, the Hau Tangkhul Naga youths were taught useful lessons and training for individual, family, and community living (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001). According to Haksar (2011), it was here that the young men were trained in the Naga way of life - in the tenets of Naga religion, the rituals, the dances, songs, wood carving, basket making, and the art and technique of war. A. S. W. Shimray (2001), supplements that all sorts of war tactics, like the use of dao, spear, bow, arrow, holding shield, offensive as well as defensive trainings were given to the member of the Longshim.

The young Hau Tangkhul Naga youths were also taught about the agrarian economy, cultivation, hunting, rearing cattle, and numerous other allied activities (Maheishang, 2016). The girls were taught how to handle various weaving implements, such as tackling cotton, spinning yarn and weaving clothes with or without

patterns (Luikham, 2009). Additionally, Longshim was a training ground for sports activities such as singing, dancing, wrestling, spear throwing, etc. (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001).

An Institution of Role Modelling

Teaching and learning pedagogy in Longshim was mainly through role modelling. Hau Tangkhul Naga ideals for leadership emphasised compassion, politeness, justice, and care for others. Therefore, the leaders in Longshim must be honest, humble, fair, self-controlled, and trustworthy. Leaders and elders were the experts in village history, customs, folklore, songs, dance, warfare, and social responsibilities. This made them living examples of the Hau Tangkhul Naga culture (RS, 2023).

Hau Tangkhul Nagas lived as a head-hunting community. Human heads were war trophies. Collecting human heads during the inter-village feuds was the highest glory for the Hau Tangkhul Nagas (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001). Longshim was the custodian of war trophies. The man who beheaded and collected the most heads in war was regarded as the bravest and accorded the highest status in the community. He received special titles, ornaments, tattoos, and sometimes even leadership roles. As a result, the person who hunted the most heads became someone others looked up to and emulated.

Exposure and Competition

According to A. S. W. Shimray (2001), in Longshim, there was a spirit of keen competition and ambition among the inmates. Customarily, Hau Tangkhul Naga male youths would visit the maiden's dormitory at night (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001). These times were opportunities for the youths to showcase their abilities and excel. These attitudes helped them learn faster and more quickly. Maheishang (2016), describing the spirit of competition, stated that when the young boys visited the girls' dormitory, the boys would try to outdo others in their speech, behaviour, and songs in order to attract the opposite gender.

An Institution for Local Innovation and Production

The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim was a hub of innovation and production. The inmates of the Longshim learned how to design and make various kinds of products. Elders brought their unfinished work to the Longshim and worked there, where the inmates learned from them. Items such as agricultural tools and war equipment were made and produced in Longshim (Luikham, 2009; Maheishang, 2016).

An Institution for Community Engagement

Indigenous communities often engage in collective that fosters a deep sense of inclusion and shared responsibility for decisions that affect the community and the environment (Leveridge, 2024). This

participatory approach to decision-making is rooted in values of respect, reciprocity, and relational accountability. Apart from serving as a dormitory, the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim also served as a platform for community engagement. The boys and girls discussed all matters of life under the sun which educated them (Luikham, 2009). Realising the importance of indigenous institutions, M.C. Goswami remarked that, in an isolated tribal community the bachelor's dormitory organisation renders yeoman's service to the society of which its inmates are proud members and who deem it to be their sacred duty to serve their society by faithfully living traditional tribal life. They also take extreme pleasure and pain in transmitting the same to their progeny (Simon, 2025).

An Institution of Intergenerational Transfer of Knowledge and Culture

Oral traditions ensure that knowledge is passed down through generations, maintaining a living connection to the past. Elders play a crucial role as knowledge keepers, sharing their experiences and wisdom through stories, songs, and ceremonies (Leveridge, 2024). Longshim served as a learning space and a place for the transmission of oral traditions, stories, songs, customs, folklore, etc. (Luikham, 2009; Maheishang, 2016; Simon, 2025). Longshim was the identity of the Hau Tangkhul Naga, in the sense that it reproduced, preserved, and transmitted indigenous knowledge and culture through generations.

An Institution of Joyful Learning

Although Longshim was bound by strict adherence to the rules of the dormitory, customs and norms, it was also a centre of entertainment. Learning processes and activities were not full of fatigue and labour; all activities were blended with mirth and merriment (A. S. W. Shimray, 2001). They exchanged stories, had fun, and cracked jokes. Luikham (2009) stated that there were no other forms of enjoyment than singing and listening to stories.

There were times when boys would visit the maiden dormitory. That moment was one of the happiest social gatherings for the unmarried people and the best resort for the sad and distressed. All the inmates present had the liberty to share in the merrymaking through singing, chatting, joking, etc. (Simon, 2025). To express the essence of joyful learning in Longshim, A. S. W. Shimray (2001) stated that "Without entertainment of mirth and merry-making, the meaning of Longshim is incomplete".

An Institution of Equality

The inmates in Longshim were treated equally. According to R. R. Shimray (1986), family pride and personal arrogance had no place in Longshim. Whether rich or poor, the members were treated equally. The primary aim of Longshim was to form a classless society having unity, equality and brotherhood (Zimik, 1988).

An Institution with Holistic Outcome

According to Haksar (2011), after the youths' training in Longshim, they emerged as brave, formidable warriors, skilled craftsmen and farmers. Both men and women learnt to live with courage, dignity, and to value freedom and wisdom above all material goods. Goswami (2022) summed up the outcome of training in Morung/Longshim, stating that "But there was such a place, and it made men and women."

Discussion

The above findings establish Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim as an integrated indigenous pedagogical and learning ecosystem, where oral instruction, storytelling, experiential learning, values and discipline, training and skill development, role modelling, exposure and competition, innovation and production, joyful learning, and equality together yield holistic results which resonate strongly with the vision and provision of NEP 2020.

Longshim system is a complex indigenous educational framework. The multiple components of the Longshim pedagogical system, such as oral instruction, storytelling, experiential learning, values and discipline, training and skill development, role modelling, exposure and competition, innovation and production, joyful learning, and equality, are not isolated practices but are deeply interconnected and produce holistic education of individuals. A foundational strength of the Longshim ecosystem is its immersive and multi-modal pedagogical approach. Oral instruction and storytelling are not merely methods of information transfer. They are the primary vehicles for transmitting cultural values, historical knowledge, and communal identity. When combined with experiential learning, where knowledge is gained through direct participation in daily life, agriculture, and craft, the learning process becomes deeply contextualised and meaningful. This echoes the mandates of NEP, 2020. NEP 2020 also focuses on experiential learning and critical thinking. The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim indigenous pedagogical model shows that this approach is not a novel framework. But to one that has been tested over time. In addition, role modelling provides living examples of the skills and virtues being taught. It creates a seamless link between abstract principles and practical application.

The Longshim ecosystems focused on values, discipline, training, and skill development. It served a dual purpose of preserving cultural heritage and equipping individuals with the practical competencies required for livelihoods. The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim serving as innovation and production hub reveals a dynamic process where traditional skills are applied and adapted to create new values. It fostered entrepreneurial and productive mindset from young age. The vocational and skill-oriented focus finds strong resonance in NEP 2020. NEP 2020 call for integrating vocational education, promoting local crafts, and fostering a spirit of innovation and self-reliance.

Exposure and competition in the Longshim were not for individualistic ranking but for motivating learners, building resilience, and encouraging excellence for the collective good. This is balanced by a pervasive ethos of joyful learning and equality. The absence of rigid hierarchies between teacher and student, or between different types of knowledge (academic vs. practical), creates a psychologically safe space for exploration and growth. This holistic, non-threatening, and inclusive atmosphere is a core strength of the Longshim system and is a central pillar of NEP 2020, which envisions an education system that is “enjoyable, stress-free, and fulfilling.” The most significant implication of these findings is the striking convergence between the integrated, holistic outcomes of the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim and the foundational principles of NEP 2020. NEP 2020 envision a flexible, multidisciplinary, culturally rooted, and holistic education. The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim embodied experiential learning, community participation, cultural rootedness, and holistic learning long before these concepts were even envisioned in modern educational policy discourse. The Longshim system inherently promotes what the NEP terms “21st-century skills”—collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication while grounding them firmly in cultural values and community well-being.

Conclusion

The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim stands as a symbol of a cutting-edge indigenous educational institution that blends socio-cultural learning, cultural transmission, experiential learning with mirth and merriment, and character formation, which leads to the holistic development of an individual. The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim was not merely a dormitory for youths; it emerged as an inclusive educational model. The findings reveal strong alignment between the pedagogical philosophy of the Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim and the educational objectives articulated in NEP 2020. The Hau Tangkhul Naga Longshim embodied experiential learning, community participation, cultural rootedness, and holistic learning long before these concepts were even envisioned in modern educational policy discourse. Longshim, which is translated as dormitories - prevalent in many of the then indigenous communities of India should not be considered as a relic of the past; rather, it should be understood as a repository of pedagogical wisdom capable of informing educational transformation in the 21st century. For policy and practice, this implies that the implementation of NEP 2020, particularly in tribal and rural areas, should adopt a framework of integration rather than replacement. Instead of imposing external structures, educational planners and practitioners should seek to understand, validate, and collaborate with existing indigenous ecosystems. By leveraging the strengths of the Longshim model—its integration, contextual relevance, and community-based approach—the formal education system can be enriched, making it more meaningful, effective, and truly holistic for all learners. This study thus contributes to the broader discourse on decolonizing education and underscores the invaluable role of indigenous knowledge systems in shaping the future of learning.

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