



# Ancient Indian Education: Its Relevance and Importance in the Today's Education System

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## Abstract:

India's rich educational heritage, rooted in ancient wisdom, thrived during the Golden Age of Indian Culture, marked by achievements in mathematics, astronomy, and Sanskrit epics. The Vedic period employed verbal/oral and thinking-based teaching methods, echoing today's multidisciplinary approach outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This study, relying on secondary research, explores the relevance of ancient education in modern multidisciplinary settings. It highlights the incorporation of yogic practices, such as meditation and mantra chanting, in contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Memory development techniques, originating from ancient teachings, persist in current educational practices. Using the ABCD methodology, the research delves into the advantages, benefits, constraints, and disadvantages of the modern education system, revealing the enduring impact of ancient Indian education on today's educational landscape.

**Keywords:** Ancient Education, Vedic Knowledge, Multidisciplinary, ABCD Analysis framework, Modern Education

## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional education, focused on passing knowledge to future generations within classroom confines, had distinct features in ancient India, where learners resided in gurukuls. This system, both formal and informal, operated in homes, temples, pathshalas, and gurukuls, emphasizing traditions, customs, and spirituality (Ghonge M, et al. (2020) ). Evolution led to the modern interdisciplinary, application-oriented education system. India's globally renowned education system, stemming from ancient practices, is fueled by its youthful demographic dividend, technological progress, and a robust university structure rooted in ancient and medieval education (Aithal P.S & Aithal S (2020) ). This paper explores the adaptation of ancient principles to fortify the modern education system, aligning with the National Education Policy 2020. The policy, emphasizing inclusive quality education, echoes early childhood education goals, drawing parallels with ancient principles. Higher Education Institutions prioritize cross-disciplinary approaches, in sync with ancient educational values (Khusnam P. N. (2022) ). The paper reviews the evolution from ancient to medieval education, the period from 1986 to 2020, and the current NEP 2020, aiming to enhance the present system with insights from the past.

## 2.OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER :

- To explore the historical evolution of education in ancient India.
- To analyze the philosophical underpinnings of ancient Indian education.
- To assess the relevance and importance of ancient Indian education in the modern context.
- To analyse the role of the ancient education system in the modern education system using ABCD analysis framework
- To suggest strategies for effective outcome-based education in the modern system

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Ghonge et al. (2020)** discuss the holistic nature of education during the Vedic period, focusing on mental control and practical-divine alignment.

**Mishra et al. (2023)** further explore the practical teachings and teacher-student relationships of this era, noting parallels with modern teaching practices.

**Swami (2007)** critiques the rigid educational compartments enforced by the caste system, limiting access based on social hierarchy.

**Gupta (2022)** highlights the 1986 policy's departure from centralization, granting states autonomy in curriculum design. It prioritized technical education and holistic development, aiming to address disparities among social groups. Challenges included lack of uniformity and implementation obstacles.

**Mishra (2020)** stresses the importance of aligning education with the demands of Industry 4.0 to bridge the employability gap. The policy aims to integrate vocational education and employability skills, focusing on 21st-century skills like creativity and critical thinking. Reports by OECD and FICCI-EY commend the policy's potential to address future challenges and enhance equitability, inclusivity, and accessibility in education.

#### 4. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATION :

##### Education during the Vedic period (1500 BCE-600 BCE):

Holistic education, centered around Chitti-Vritti-Nirodha (control of mental activities), aimed to align individuals with both practical and divine aspects of life. The close teacher-student relationship emphasized transparency, with teachers serving as societal role models. Rigvedic education, rooted in the four Vedas, provided vocational training and secular religious teachings, catering to both the priestly class and the masses Ghonge et al. (2020).

Practical teachings shaped character, personality, and vocational skills during the Vedic period. Rooted in oral and thoughtful methods, reminiscent of modern teaching practices, educators guided students to research, apply, evaluate, and create. Vedic education, particularly through Yajurveda and Atharvaveda, emphasized practicality, contributing to the evolution of Aryan Culture. Instruction revolved around hearing, thinking, and meditation, later incorporating the question-answer system. Teachers held a prominent role, acting as significant guides, and education included rules of conduct. The Vedic education spanned twelve years, disseminated through Gurukuls, Parishads, and Sammelans (Mishra N. et.al (2023).

Teacher-student bonds and openness held significance. Vedic education, spanning 1500 BCE to 600 BCE, shares parallels with the modern system. Vaishyas, engaged in business, focused on arithmetic, geography, economics, agriculture, and trade. However, the caste system led to educational limitations, with no higher education provision for the Shudras. They specialized in dancing, vocal and orchestral music, and dyeing, passing down skills across generations (Indian Education System). The system's major flaw lay in rigid educational compartments tied to the caste system (Swami, H. 2007).

##### Education in the Sutras: 600 BCE – 200 BCE:

Specialization in diverse branches of knowledge emerged during the transition from Vedic literature to sutra literature. The Sutras education that followed the Vedic period leaned more towards practical methods. Notably, this era marked a distinctive feature with the introduction of specialized branches of learning, including Geometry, Algebra, Physiology, Astronomy, Astrology, and Vedas, reaching the zenith of scholarly pursuits. Panini, Katyayana, and Patanjali referenced this literature in their works.

During this period, the emphasis on philosophy, character formation, and personality development persisted. The overarching goal of education was the cultivation of character and personality, accomplished through practices like Yoga (mind-body integration), Nyaya (justice), Karma (deeds), and Vedanta (Vedas' conclusion).

##### Education in the Epics:

Military education gained prominence during this era, with glimpses found in epics like Ramayana and Mahabharat. The terms Kulapati (Chancellor) and Upkulapati (Vice-Chancellor) in today's university structure trace their origins to these epics, where Kulapati referred to the Guru (head) overseeing 10,000 disciples. Dhanurveda was the term commonly used for military science during this period, underlining its importance.

Prominent educational institutions like Taxila, Ujjain, Nalanda, Banaras, and Madura were established. Renowned figures such as Jibaka, a medical expert from the 6th Century, Panini, the grammarian from the 7th Century, and Kautilya, a 4th Century authority on Arthashastra, were all students of Taxila. In summary, education in the epics primarily focused on vocational training, emphasizing practical and application-oriented learning.

##### National Policy on Education 1968:

The National Policy on Education of 1968, enacted as part of India's post-independence educational reform efforts, aimed to address the country's educational needs by instituting free and compulsory education up to the age of 14. This initiative, aligned with Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy, sought to improve educational quality, particularly in science and technology, while emphasizing moral and social values. Academic freedom for teachers was promoted to encourage independent research and publication, alongside efforts to enhance teacher remuneration and service conditions. The policy also prioritized language development, education for marginalized groups, and a standardized educational structure across regions. However, despite its merits such as compulsory education and the three-language formula, criticisms included the policy's overwhelming objectives, centralized approach lacking state involvement, and resource scarcity hampering effective implementation (Agarwal, 2006).

In the field of science, education received a notable boost, with a special focus on research in agriculture and industry. The educational structure aimed for broad uniformity across all regions of the country, promoting consistent standards and opportunities nationwide.

##### National Policy on Education -1986:

The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 marked a significant departure by embracing a 10+2+3 structure and granting states autonomy in designing their curricula, as highlighted by Gupta (2022). Prioritizing technical education, the policy aimed to equip India for the challenges of the 21st century. Emphasizing pre-primary education, it focused on holistic development

encompassing health, nutrition, and play-based learning, aiming to improve enrollment rates and address disparities among social groups. Core elements included fostering cultural awareness, promoting democracy and secularism, environmental protection, and dismantling social barriers. Additionally, the policy stressed the expansion of technical and management education to meet evolving workforce needs, and the introduction of Open and Distance Education broadened higher education access. While merits included recognition of technical education and the expansion of higher education opportunities, challenges encompassed lack of uniformity, enrollment issues, and implementation obstacles, notably in mobilizing teachers and local communities (Gupta, 2022).

### **National Education Policy – 2020:**

In a forward-thinking approach, the 2019 proposal aimed to integrate vocational education and employability skills into mainstream education, acknowledging the necessity of aligning skills with educational pursuits. This initiative was underscored by the 2019 skill report. According to the 2019 skill report, only 45.6% of graduating youth are employable, showcasing a significant gap. A mere 4.69% of the Indian workforce possesses necessary skills, contrasting starkly with other countries like China (24%), the US (52%), the UK (68%), Japan (80%), and South Korea (96%). This disparity in India stems from a misalignment between skill training and employability, as highlighted in the National Education Policy 2020. Which revealed a significant employability gap among graduating youth in India compared to other countries. Mishra (2020) stresses the importance of adapting education to meet the demands of Industry 4.0, advocating for a proactive approach to incorporating problem-solving skills and industry-related activities into educational programs.

The Organization for Economic Development (OECD) emphasizes the need for a framework that prioritizes 21st-century skills such as creativity and critical thinking ("Future of Education and Skill Project (2030)"). The FICCI-EY report in 2021 [Higher Education in India: Vision 2040] commends the bold reformation steps proposed by the National Education Policy 2020, highlighting its potential to address future challenges and demands by focusing on equitability, inclusivity, accessibility, and employability skills.

### **Modern Education System Based on Ancient Education System:**

In response to the escalating academic demands in modern education, there's a growing recognition of the need to enhance learning methodologies. Drawing inspiration from ancient learning systems rooted in the Vedas, there's a push to incorporate yogic practices into modern education. Asanas, mantra chanting, and meditation, integral components of ancient practices, are believed to contribute to a serene mind and improved learning outcomes. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), guided by regulatory bodies like UGC and AICTE, are advocating for the revival of ancient learning strategies. Practices such as logical learning, spaced learning, and rational memory, inherent in the ancient way of teaching, are being reintroduced with renewed significance. These strategies align with the Universal Human Value (UHV) framework, aiming at holistic personality development through an integrated approach to Yoga. As part of this initiative, a compulsory 10-day UHV program during the orientation period ensures widespread implementation of these ancient-inspired practices in modern education.

## **5. RELEVANCE OF ANCIENT EDUCATION IN MODERN EDUCATION SYSTEM:**

The relevance of ancient education in the modern education system is a topic that has been widely discussed and debated. While there are differences in the methods, tools, and societal contexts between ancient and modern education, there are also valuable principles and insights from ancient educational systems that can be considered relevant today. Here are some aspects to consider:

### **Holistic Education:**

Ancient education often focused on a holistic approach to learning, encompassing physical, moral, and intellectual development. Modern education systems are increasingly recognizing the importance of a well-rounded education that goes beyond academic achievements. Integrating aspects of character development, ethics, and physical well-being can enhance the overall educational experience.

### **Critical Thinking and Philosophy:**

Ancient educational systems, especially in Greece and India, placed a strong emphasis on philosophy and critical thinking. These skills are still highly relevant in the modern world, where the ability to analyze, question, and think independently is crucial. Integrating philosophical concepts into modern curricula can foster a deeper understanding of various subjects.

### **Individualized Learning:**

In some ancient educational systems, personalized and individualized learning was more common. Modern education is moving towards recognizing and accommodating diverse learning styles and preferences. Incorporating elements of individualized learning plans and adaptive teaching methods can enhance the effectiveness of education today.

### **Ethics and Morality:**

Many ancient educational systems included teachings on ethics, morality, and values. In the modern era, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of character education. Integrating ethical considerations into the curriculum can help students develop a strong moral compass and a sense of social responsibility.

### **Practical Skills and Apprenticeship:**

Ancient education often included practical skills training and apprenticeships, providing students with hands-on experience. Modern education can benefit from incorporating more practical, real-world applications to academic knowledge. Internships, practical projects, and experiential learning opportunities can bridge the gap between theory and practice.

**Cultural and Historical Awareness:**

Ancient education often emphasized the study of cultural and historical texts. Incorporating a strong focus on cultural literacy and historical awareness in the modern curriculum can help students better understand the roots of contemporary issues and foster a global perspective.

**Extracting Wisdom from Ancient Practices:** Modern education stands to gain valuable insights from ancient pedagogies, particularly through the incorporation of multidisciplinary and holistic approaches.

**Fostering Holistic Development through Universal Human Values (UHV):** The integration of Universal Human Values (UHV) emerges as a crucial facet of contemporary education, contributing significantly to the holistic development of individuals.

**6. ANALYSIS OF ANCIENT EDUCATION COMPARED TO MODERN EDUCATION:**

In an analytical exploration of ancient education versus modern education, various frameworks have been employed. Aithal and Kumar (2020) introduced the SWOC analysis for internal analysis, while Ho (2014) proposed the PESTEL analysis for external analysis. About Aithal ABCD analysis framework, which allows qualitative and quantitative assessment depending on the requirements. The qualitative framework includes ABCD listing from stakeholders' viewpoints and factor analysis, while the quantitative framework involves ranking and statistical analysis of ABCD constructs (Nayak & Kayarkatte, 2022).

Table 1: Differences Between the Ancient education with modern education model

Issue	Ancient education	Modern education
Teaching	Instruction based	Discussion based
Learning	Passive learning Attitude	Active learning attitude
Role of Teacher	Instructor	Mentor
Learning Activities	Text-books and Tests- based	Project-based learning
Learning Location	Traditional Classrooms or Gurukuls	Online large learning space and platform
Teaching training	Degrees, credentials and certificates	Continuous training and upskilling
Industry's Views of Graduates	Assembly line workers	Co-creators and entrepreneurs
Employability	Qualified and major focussed	Prepared for multiple careers
Result	Limited career Prospects & not suitable for today's Fast-Changing world	Equipped with a variety of skills and multiple career paths

Source :<https://www.dreamformula.education/edu4> and (Nandita Mishra et al., 2023).

**Learners' Perspective:**

From the learners' perspective, modern education presents several advantages, including high engagement through project-based learning and emphasis on technology-driven infrastructure. However, constraints such as the cost of education and shortage of skilled teachers hinder its effectiveness. Mishra (2020) emphasizes the need for education to adapt to Industry 4.0 by incorporating problem-solving skills and industry-related activities.

**Teacher perspective:**

Teachers view modern education favorably due to opportunities for research, innovation, and career advancement outlined in the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). However, challenges arise from implementing a multidisciplinary curriculum and adapting to new teaching methodologies. The shift towards research and innovation alongside teaching responsibilities poses productivity challenges for faculty members, especially without adequate support structures.

**Benefits:**

The benefits and constraints outlined indicate the complexities involved in transitioning from traditional to modern education systems. While modern education offers advantages like merit-based appointments and faculty autonomy, challenges such as maintaining teaching quality and ensuring uniformity across states persist. Achieving the goals set forth in NEP 2020 requires addressing these challenges while leveraging the opportunities for innovation and skill development in both learners and educators.

**7. SUGGESTIONS :**

- (1) Modern-day education should aim at developing good, well-rounded creative, and ethical individuals, contributing productively to society.
- (2) Revamping the curriculum, pedagogy, assessments, teaching, and learning methods to develop student-centric education.
- (3) Education should be more multidisciplinary and choice-based.

(4) Focus should be made on faculty/teachers' training and upskilling to enable them to implement outcome-based education. This will allow autonomy and flexibility in teaching and research.

(5) Effective regulatory system with good governance to assess the quality of education standards. Light but tight is what NEP 2020 mentions.

## 8. CONCLUSION:

A holistic and multidisciplinary education will help develop well-rounded individuals who possess critical 21st-century capacities in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; an ethic of social engagement; soft skills, such as communication, discussion, and debate; and rigorous specialization in a chosen field or fields. The influence of ancient education in the modern education system is tremendous. The emphasis on Indian Knowledge System, Value education, Yoga, and Skill-based education is to develop psychological well-being through grit. The perceived grit in a person is highly influenced by psychological well-being, hence the focus on holistic education (Chakraborty et al (2020) ). Ancient education always focused on higher knowledge of self and knowledge of strength. Modern-day education emphasizes this concept of self-awareness and skill development through experiential and multidisciplinary learning.

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