Pedagogical Changes from Ancient to Modern Period in the Context of Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract:

Pedagogical practices have evolved through a long historical journey, shaped by cultural transitions, philosophical shifts, and changing societal needs. This study explores the transformation of pedagogy from ancient educational traditions to the modern instructional system. The research has been carried out using the method of document review within the framework of a qualitative research approach, exploring classical texts, historical documents, contemporary educational reports, and scholarly analyses. The findings reveal that ancient pedagogy focused primarily on moral training, memorisation, teacher-student closeness, experiential learning, and value-based knowledge transmission, as seen in the Gurukul system, monastic traditions, and other civilisation-specific models. As education moved into the medieval and pre-modern phases, pedagogy became increasingly influenced by religious institutions, scriptural learning, and structured instructional methods. The modern period marks a significant shift with the rise of scientific thinking, child-centred education, technological innovation, and competency-driven learning. Ultimately, the research concludes that pedagogy has continuously transformed to remain responsive to societal changes, progressing from traditional teacher-led approaches to dynamic, learner-centred and technology-enhanced models that support holistic development.

Keywords: *Pedagogy, Indian Knowledge System, Ancient Education, Modern Education, Holistic Learning.*

Introduction:

The Indian knowledge system is sustainable and works to ensure everyone's well-being. One of the most dynamic human endeavours is education, which is always changing to satisfy the shifting needs of society. Pedagogy which is described as the art, science and philosophy of teaching, it is constantly changing in response to philosophical advancements and cultural standards. From ancient times to modern times, the journey of pedagogy has changed in every context, and this change has led to a vast transformation of humanity, culture, and education systems.

Pedagogy, understood as the theory and practice of education, has continuously evolved in response to changing philosophical, socio-cultural, and historical contexts (Dewey, 1938; Kumar, 2005). In India, pedagogical traditions are deeply rooted in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), which emphasized holistic development, ethical living, and experiential learning (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Sharma, 2013). Ancient educational practices such as the *Gurukula* system were learner-centred and value-oriented, highlighting close teacher–student relationships, oral transmission of knowledge, dialogue, reflection, and learning through lived experience (Altekar, 1965; Noddings, 2016). Education was viewed as a means for self-realization and social responsibility rather than mere acquisition of vocational skills.

Over time, pedagogical practices underwent significant transformation during the medieval and colonial periods due to institutionalization of education and the influence of Western educational models (Kumar, 2005). Colonial pedagogy introduced formal schooling, standardized curricula, examinations, and teacher-centred instruction, which marginalized many indigenous pedagogical traditions. In the modern period, pedagogy has been shaped by progressive, constructivist, and technology-enabled approaches that emphasize learner autonomy and critical thinking (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). Recent educational reforms, particularly in India, have renewed interest in integrating IKS principles into contemporary education to promote holistic, inclusive, and culturally rooted learning (NCERT, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2020).

In this context, the present study explores pedagogical changes from the ancient to the modern period with reference to the Indian Knowledge System, focusing on continuity, transformation, and contemporary relevance of indigenous pedagogical wisdom. Every historical era has produced unique educational framework, approached and ideologies. In ancient times, institutions like the Gurukul, education was informal and focused on practical, spiritual and holistic understanding, whereas religious institution became more prevalent, during the mediaeval era.

Review of Related Literature:

A literature review is a critical component of research and academic writing, serving multiple essential purposes, including- Understanding Existing Knowledge, Identifying Knowledge Gaps and Selecting Appropriate Methodologies. Here researcher has studied various related works, these are as follows-

Singh (2025) examined how the traditional *Guru-Śiṣya* pedagogical model can be reinterpreted for modern classrooms through digital and blended learning environments. The objectives were to identify the core values of the *Guru-Śiṣya* tradition, explore its adaptations in digital contexts, investigate challenges of sustaining relational mentorship online, and propose a framework for integrating this tradition with contemporary pedagogy. Using a qualitative exploratory design, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with eight educators and employed thematic analysis to derive core insights. Findings revealed that relational mentorship and holistic development remain central to *Guru-Śiṣya* pedagogy but are challenged by digital fatigue and loss of non-verbal immediacy. Digital tools such as flipped classrooms and storytelling were found useful, and hybrid "virtual gurukuls" emerged as a promising integrative model. The study contributes a culturally sensitive framework aligning IKS with 21st-century teaching.

Dey (2025) investigated how Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) can be integrated into modern pedagogy by examining both challenges and opportunities for curriculum transaction and learner development. The objectives were to explore pedagogical techniques that accommodate IKS, identify key challenges in integration, and suggest strategies to enhance holistic learner outcomes. The methodology involved qualitative document analysis of curriculum practices and pedagogical frameworks in modern education. Findings indicated that IKS offers extensive indigenous wisdom, ethics, and traditional practices that enrich modern learning. However, significant challenges were noted, including lack of standardized frameworks,

curriculum rigidity, limited teacher training, and resistance in mainstream education. The study concluded that systematic integration with policy support and capacity building can foster deep insight, cultural inclusivity, and holistic development in learners.

Shrimalibhoi & Patel (2025) explored roles of teachers, schools, and governments in integrating Indian Knowledge System into formal education. The objectives included analyzing pedagogical innovations, institutional responsibilities, and policy requirements for effective IKS inclusion. The methodology used qualitative analysis of policy texts, institutional reports, and curriculum frameworks. Findings suggested that IKS remains underrepresented in mainstream curricula despite its potential to enrich cultural heritage, ethical values, and learner engagement. Teachers were identified as key change agents, requiring capacity building and pedagogical innovation. Schools and governments were urged to provide structural support through curriculum reforms, teacher training programs, and policy incentives. The study underscores multi-stakeholder collaboration as central to meaningful IKS integration.

Sharma (2025) examined how Indian Knowledge Systems can be integrated with modern English language pedagogy to create a culturally responsive and holistic learning environment. The objectives were to explore theoretical foundations of IKS, evaluate pedagogical strategies for English language teaching, and propose integrative approaches. Methodology involved qualitative analysis of pedagogical frameworks and case studies in language instruction. Findings highlighted that incorporating indigenous literature, storytelling, and cultural narratives enriches language learning and enhances learner engagement. The study also identified challenges such as balancing linguistic traditions with contemporary communicative demands. It concluded that culturally responsive pedagogy aligned with IKS contributes to deeper understanding, cultural pride, and critical thinking among learners. This integrative approach offers a model for bridging ancient wisdom with modern language pedagogy.

Pillai (2025) explored assessment strategies within the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) under the framework of NEP 2020. Objectives included examining how formative and collaborative assessments can track student progress in IKS-oriented classes and how pedagogy can be redesigned for flexibility. The study used qualitative exploration of policy documents and case examples. Findings suggested that collaborative learning and formative assessment strengthen reflection, creativity, and learner autonomy—qualities rooted in traditional IKS approaches. Challenges included aligning assessment with holistic learning outcomes rather than rote metrics. The study recommended flexible, learner-centred assessment models to retain authenticity while measuring skill development.

Patwardhan & Vivek (2024) aimed to trace the evolution of pedagogical practices in Indian education from the Vedic period to modern times. The study's objectives included mapping major pedagogical transitions, analyzing institutional and curriculum shifts, and relating them to socio-cultural changes. Employing a **historical analysis** of educational practices, the paper reviewed Vedic, Buddhist, Medieval, Colonial, and Post-Independence systems. Findings showed a shift from holistic, community-embedded teaching in ancient eras to structured, examination-driven education in the modern period. The study highlighted how ancient pedagogies stressed experiential, value-based learning—principles echoed in contemporary reforms like NEP 2020—revealing continuity and transformation over time.

Gope & et. al. (2025) Conducted a study on "Rediscovering the Roots of Ancient Indian pedagogical Tools for Quality education". This research paper discussed the ancient Indian knowledge systems, which have their roots in a timeless wisdom and philosophical understanding of existence. The study finds out that a vedical change in educational philosophy and curriculum, guided by the timeless truths of AIKS.

Significance of the Study:

This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of pedagogy from the ancient to the modern period, highlighting how educational practices have continuously adapted to changing philosophical, social, and cultural contexts. By examining pedagogical transitions across time, the study bridges traditional educational wisdom with contemporary teaching–learning approaches. It helps educators, researchers, and policy makers to recognize the enduring value of ancient pedagogical principles and their relevance in modern classrooms. The study also contributes to historical and comparative educational research by systematically analysing continuity and change in pedagogical thought. Moreover, it supports curriculum development and teacher education by offering insights into learner-centred and value-based pedagogical practices rooted in historical traditions.

Research Questions:

i.   What were the dominant pedagogical practices followed during the Ancient Period?

ii.   What major changes have occurred in pedagogical approaches from the Ancient Period to Modern times?

iii. How do Ancient and Modern Pedagogical approaches compare in terms of aims, methods, and educational outcomes?

Objectives:

i.   To find out the pedagogical practices in the ancient period.

ii.   To identify major changes in pedagogy from ancient to modern times.

iii. To compare ancient and modern pedagogical approaches.

Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative research approach, relying on an extensive and systematic review of existing literature, policy documents, and scholarly publications. The primary data sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports—particularly the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, books authored by renowned scholars, and relevant empirical studies accessed through Google Scholar. The document review method is employed to critically examine and synthesize the collected materials. Through this process, recurring and significant themes such as the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), holistic education, and the validation and relevance of modern educational practices are identified and analysed. Each document is carefully reviewed in detail to understand the evolution of pedagogical thought from the ancient to the modern period and to trace points of continuity and transformation.

Data Analysis:

Objective 1: To Find out the Pedagogical Practices in the Ancient Period

Pedagogical practices in the ancient period were deeply rooted in philosophical, cultural, and spiritual traditions, particularly within the framework of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Education was not viewed merely as the transmission of information but as a transformative process aimed at the holistic development of the learner, encompassing intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual dimensions (Radhakrishnan, 1951). The primary institutional model of ancient Indian education was the Gurukula system, where students lived with their teachers (gurus), fostering close interpersonal relationships and individualized instruction (Altekar, 1965).

Teaching–learning methods were predominantly experiential and learner-centered. Instruction relied on oral traditions, including *śravaṇa* (listening), *manana* (reflection), and *nididhyāsana* (deep contemplation), which encouraged critical thinking and internalization of knowledge. Dialogue, debate (*śāstrārtha*), storytelling, observation, and practical engagement formed essential pedagogical tools. Learning was contextual and connected to real-life situations, promoting meaningful understanding rather than rote memorization alone (Sharma, 2013).

The curriculum in the ancient period was integrated and multidisciplinary, covering subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, linguistics, ethics, and arts. Knowledge was inseparable from values, and education aimed at character formation, self-discipline, and social responsibility. Assessment practices were continuous and informal, based on learners' progress, conduct, and application of knowledge in daily life, rather than standardized examinations.

Teacher autonomy and moral authority were central to ancient pedagogy. The teacher acted as a guide and mentor rather than a mere instructor, emphasizing ethical conduct and wisdom. Overall, ancient pedagogical practices reflected a holistic, value-based, and life-oriented educational approach, offering enduring insights for contemporary educational reforms and the integration of IKS into modern pedagogy.

Pedagogical Practices in the Ancient Period (Indian Knowledge System):

i. **Holistic Aim of Education (Philosophical Dimension)**: Ancient pedagogy aimed at the integrated development of body, mind, intellect, and spirit. Education was linked with *Dharma* and self-realization rather than mere acquisition of information or vocational skills.

ii. **Guru–Shishya Parampara (Relational Dimension)**: Teaching was based on a close, personal relationship between the Guru and the Shishya. The Guru acted as a moral guide, intellectual mentor, and spiritual exemplar, ensuring individualized instruction and character formation.

iii. **Experiential and Life-Centred Learning (Instructional Dimension)**: Learning was experiential, involving observation, practice, contemplation, and real-life application. Knowledge was acquired through participation in daily activities, discussions, debates (*Shastrartha*), and reflective thinking.

iv. **Oral and Dialogic Method (Methodological Dimension)**: Knowledge transmission relied on oral traditions such as recitation, memorization, questioning, and dialogue. This strengthened memory, critical thinking, and interpretative skills while preserving knowledge across generations.

v. **Integrated and Value-Based Curriculum (Curricular Dimension)**: The curriculum included philosophy, science, mathematics, medicine, arts, ethics, and spirituality as an integrated whole. Value education was not separate but embedded within all forms of learning.

vi. **Nature-Oriented Learning Environment (Environmental Dimension)**: Education was imparted in Gurukuls located in natural surroundings. This promoted simplicity, discipline, ecological awareness, and harmony between human life and nature.

vii. **Self-Discipline and Moral Training (Psychological Dimension)**: Emphasis was placed on self-control, self-study (*Swadhyaya*), meditation, and ethical conduct. Learning was learner-centred, focusing on inner growth and personal responsibility.

viii. **Continuous and Informal Assessment (Evaluative Dimension)**: Assessment was based on continuous observation of behaviour, practical competence, understanding, and moral conduct rather than written examinations or grades.

ix.   **Education as a Lifelong Process (Developmental Dimension)**: Learning was viewed as a lifelong pursuit aimed at wisdom and self-improvement, not confined to a specific age or institutional framework.

Objective 2: To Identify Major Changes in Pedagogy from Ancient to Modern Times

The transition from ancient to modern pedagogy represents a significant shift in the philosophy, structure, methods, and objectives of education. In ancient times, pedagogy was grounded in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), where education was viewed as a holistic process aimed at self-realization, ethical development, and social responsibility (Radhakrishnan, 1951). Learning was informal, flexible, and closely integrated with daily life, emphasizing experiential and value-based instruction (Altekar, 1965).

One of the most notable changes in modern pedagogy is the institutionalization of education. Education gradually moved from residential Gurukula settings to formal schools and universities with fixed curricula, timetables, and age-based classrooms. This shift introduced standardization and uniformity, replacing individualized learning with mass education systems (Kumar, 2005). Teaching became increasingly classroom-centered, and learning relied heavily on textbooks and written examinations.

Another major change is the shift in educational objectives. Ancient pedagogy emphasized wisdom (*jnana*), moral values (*dharma*), and character formation, whereas modern pedagogy focuses on knowledge acquisition, skill development, employability, and economic productivity. Assessment practices have also transformed significantly—from continuous, qualitative evaluation to quantitative, examination-oriented assessment systems (Sharma, 2013).

Technological advancement further distinguishes modern pedagogy from ancient practices. The use of digital tools, online platforms, and multimedia resources has reshaped teaching–learning processes, enabling wider access but often reducing direct teacher–student interaction. However, modern educational theories such as constructivism, experiential learning, and collaborative learning reflect a partial return to ancient pedagogical principles rooted in IKS (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978).

Recent educational reforms, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, indicate a conscious effort to reconcile ancient wisdom with modern pedagogical needs. The policy emphasizes experiential learning, multidisciplinary education, and value-based instruction, reflecting the relevance of IKS in addressing contemporary educational challenges (Ministry of Education, 2020). Thus, major pedagogical changes from ancient to modern times illustrate both transformation and continuity, highlighting the potential for an integrated educational framework.

PEDAGOGICAL CHANGES: ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES

	Ancient Pedagogy		Modern Pedagogy
1. Philosophy of Education	Holistic, rooted in morals, values, self-realization	SHIFT	Pragmatic, focusing on practicity and economic outcomes
2. Educational Structure	Gurukul system, informal, nature-based, residential	TRANSITION	Institutionalized, formal schools and universities
3. Teaching–Learning Approach	Experiential, oral tradition, personalized, life-centered learning	CHANGE	Textbook-centered, structured classrooms, teacher-led instruction
4. Educational Objectives	Seek wisdom (*Jñana*), cultivate moral values (*Dharma*), character formation	REFOCUS	Focus on skill acquisition, job readiness, career-oriented education
5. Assessment Practices	Continuous and informal, based on life skills, ethics, and observation	TRANSFORMATION	Periodic and formal, based on examinations, grades, and standardized tests
6. Role of Technology	Minimal use, reliance on memory, reasoning, contemplation	ADVANCEMENT	Extensive use of digital tools, online learning, and multimedia resources
7. Contemporary Integration	Return to experiential, interdisciplinary, and value-based learning NEP 2020 emphasizes integration of ancient pedagogical values in modern education		

Objective iii: To Compare Ancient and Modern Pedagogical Approaches

Ancient and modern pedagogical approaches differ significantly in their understanding of knowledge, the role of education, and the teaching–learning process. In the ancient period, particularly within the Indian Knowledge System, education was viewed as a lifelong and transformative journey. Learning aimed at developing wisdom, moral character, and harmony between the individual and society. In contrast, modern pedagogy largely views education as a structured process designed to transmit knowledge and skills required for personal advancement and economic participation.

Ancient pedagogy was deeply learner-centred and experiential. Students learned through observation, dialogue, reflection, and direct engagement with life under the close guidance of the teacher. The modern approach, however, is more system-centred, relying on classrooms, textbooks, standardized curricula, and examinations. While this has made education more organized and accessible, it often limits personal interaction and experiential depth.

Another key difference lies in assessment and evaluation. Ancient education emphasized continuous observation of a learner's intellectual growth, conduct, and practical wisdom. Modern education depends largely on written examinations, grades, and certifications, which measure academic performance but may not fully reflect holistic development.

Despite these differences, modern pedagogy is gradually rediscovering the relevance of ancient educational ideas. Concepts such as experiential learning, collaborative learning, reflective thinking, and value-based education show strong similarities with ancient practices. Contemporary reforms, including the emphasis on the Indian Knowledge System, suggest that a balanced integration of ancient wisdom and modern methods can create a more meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable educational framework.

Comparison of Ancient and Modern Pedagogical approaches in the context of IKS:

Aspects	Ancient Pedagogy	Modern Pedagogy
Educational Aim	Holistic development integrating moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth	Employability, skills, and academic achievement
Philosophical Base	Rooted in Dharma, Karma, and holistic worldview	Based on pragmatism, scientific rationalism
Role of Teacher	Guru as spiritual guide, mentor, and role model	Teacher as facilitator, content expert
Teaching–Learning Method	Dialogue (Shastrartha), observation, experiential learning	Lecture, discussion, activity-based and digital learning
Curriculum Structure	Integrated knowledge including values, arts, and sciences	Subject-wise, compartmentalized curriculum
Assessment Pattern	Continuous, informal, life-skill–oriented evaluation	Formal examinations, grading, standardized tests
Teacher–Learner Relationship	Personal, value-based, lifelong bonding	Professional, institutional, time-bound interaction

Findings:

- The study revealed that ancient pedagogical systems in India placed a strong emphasis on holistic development and ethical education. Students engaged in experiential learning activities, such as observation of nature, participation in community rituals, and dialogue with elders. Memorization of sacred texts was complemented by reflection and debate, fostering critical thinking and moral reasoning. Learning was deeply contextual, integrating philosophy, mathematics, arts, and physical training, which collectively aimed to nurture a balanced personality and a socially responsible citizen.

- In the transition from ancient to modern education, the research indicated a shift towards institutionalized and standardized teaching methods. Schools and universities introduced age-based classrooms, fixed timetables, and curriculum-driven instruction, focusing primarily on academic achievement and skill development. Teacher–student interaction became formalized, and reliance on textbooks and examinations increased. While this system enhanced accessibility and structure, it reduced individualized attention and limited the integration of moral and experiential learning that had characterized ancient pedagogy.

- The comparison of ancient and modern pedagogical approaches highlighted both contrasts and continuities. Modern education, although technology-enabled and knowledge-oriented, increasingly incorporates collaborative learning, project-based activities, and value education, reflecting elements of traditional systems. The study found that hybrid approaches combining experiential methods, digital tools, and holistic curricula can improve learner engagement, creativity, and ethical awareness. These findings suggest that integrating ancient educational principles with contemporary practices may create a more inclusive, sustainable, and meaningful learning environment.

Discussion:

The study reveals that pedagogy in India has continuously evolved in response to changing social, cultural, and philosophical contexts. Ancient education rooted in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) emphasized holistic development, experiential learning, moral values, and lifelong education, with the Guru–Shishya tradition as the cornerstone. With the medieval and colonial phases, pedagogy became more institutionalized, standardized, and teacher-centered, focusing on skill acquisition and knowledge delivery rather than holistic development.

Modern education incorporates technology, formal curricula, and structured assessments, yet recent reforms like NEP 2020 reflect a conscious effort to re-integrate ancient wisdom. Experiential learning, value-based education, and collaborative learning in contemporary pedagogy mirror elements of the ancient system. The study highlights continuity and transformation, showing that while methods and objectives have changed, the core principle of fostering human development persists. This integration of ancient IKS principles with modern techniques can enhance holistic, inclusive, and culturally rooted education.

Conclusion:

Pedagogical practices in India have undergone significant transformation from the ancient to modern periods. Ancient education was holistic, learner-centered, and value-driven, while modern pedagogy emphasizes standardization, employability, and technological integration. Despite these shifts, the relevance of the Indian Knowledge System remains evident in fostering experiential, ethical, and inclusive learning. A balanced synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern methods offers a sustainable, learner-centered, and culturally rooted educational framework, supporting holistic development and lifelong learning.

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