



Mahatma Gandhi's Basic Education with Reference to Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract

The Indian knowledge system encompasses a vast range of disciplines including ancient sciences, arts, languages and philosophical systems. Indian knowledge system is based on texts like Vedas, Vedangs, history, religion, Smriti, Darshan and classical literature. These texts provide insights into various fields such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine (Ayurveda), and architecture (Vastu Shastra).

The integration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) with skill-based education is a key focus of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This approach aims to blend traditional knowledge with modern educational practices to create a holistic learning environment. Present research paper analyses the elements of skill-based education in Mahatma Gandhi's basic education with reference to Indian knowledge system and its application in recent educational practices for a better education system.

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Ancient Indian Education System Institutes were Gurukuls that imparted education from primary to higher level in an integrated manner. The Gurukul system was the primary educational framework where students, called 'shishyas', lived with and learned from a 'guru' or teacher. These institutes were having large number of students who were taught many subjects for educating them about spiritual world and this physical world.

The curriculum in broad sense was essentially spiritual and religious in character but it did not ignore the material aspect. This education was not only theoretical but deeply practical, ensuring that students acquired specific skills relevant to their caste and societal duties. Emphasis was placed on learning skills such as archery, warfare, medicine, statecraft, music, art, and various crafts like weaving and carpentry.

During the Vedic period in ancient India, the Gurukul System also provided a well-rounded education that taught students concrete lesson of the dignity of labour and social service. The curriculum included practical training in skills like agriculture, crafts, warfare, animal husbandry, agriculture, dairy farming and many other fields.

The integration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) with skill-based education is a key focus of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This approach aims to blend traditional knowledge with modern educational practices to create a holistic learning environment. Skill-based education focuses on equipping students with practical skills and competencies that are directly relevant to the workplace.

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The concept of skill-based education has deep roots in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and aligns closely with Mahatma Gandhi's vision of basic education, known as 'Nai Talim'. This approach, which emphasized learning through productive work, sought to integrate intellectual and manual work to foster self-reliance and holistic development.

As an educationist of Modern India, the principles of Gandhiji on basic education which are assessed from his several writings reveals that the aim of Gandhi's basic education was to educate the students on crafts which would enable them to solve the problems of their livelihood and at the same time develop qualities of good citizenship. In Gandhiji's view, sound education must be rooted through the culture and moral values also.

Gandhi's approach mirrored the hands-on, skill-based learning seen in the Indian Knowledge System. He argued that manual work such as weaving, carpentry, and farming should be taught in schools as a means of practical learning and character development. This was a deliberate departure from the colonial education system that prioritized theoretical knowledge without practical applications.

Meaning of Indian knowledge system

Indian Knowledge System is an innovative cell under ministry of Education (MoE) at AICTE, New Delhi. It is established in October 2020 to promote interdisciplinary research on all aspects of IKS. It will actively engage for spreading the rich heritage of our country and traditional knowledge in the field of Arts and Literature, Agriculture, Basic Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Architecture, Management, Economics etc.

The Indian Knowledge System was deeply rooted in a practical, skill-based approach to education, ensuring that individuals were prepared to contribute effectively to their communities. This system, blending theoretical teachings with hands-on learning, was supported by a rich body of literature and historical practices that fostered skilled craftsmanship and professional expertise

Skill-based education has been an integral part of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), which emphasizes practical learning alongside theoretical understanding. This educational approach was deeply connected to societal needs and aimed at preparing individuals for specific professions and contributions to community life. Here's a comprehensive overview of how skill-based education functioned within IKS

The '*Suktas*' mentioned in Ancient Vedic texts like 'Rigveda' and 'Atharvaveda' describe about early educational practices, emphasizing memorization and oral transmission of knowledge, which also included practical skills.

The 'Arthashastra' by Kautilya discusses the role of guilds in regulating trades and training craftsmen, highlighting the organized and systematic nature of skill-based education. The 'shrenis' or guilds in ancient India were associations of artisans and traders that played a crucial role in vocational training. These guilds were responsible for the apprenticeship of young learners, ensuring the transmission of specialized skills such as metalworking, textile production, carpentry, and sculpture.



As Centers of Advanced Learning 'Nalanda' 'Takshashila' were renowned universities which served as hubs for comprehensive education, combining theoretical learning with practical applications in fields such as medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and metallurgy. At Takshashila, students were trained in various crafts and sciences e.g. students studying medicine learned surgery, pharmacy, and patient care by practicing on models and observing real procedure.

The 'Charaka Samhita' and 'Sushruta Samhita' are key texts that outline the curriculum and methods used for medical education, emphasizing empirical observation and hands-on practice. The study of Ayurveda involved both classroom instruction and practical training. Aspiring physicians learned about the properties of medicinal plants, diagnostic techniques, and surgical procedures.

The 'Manusmriti' and 'Dharma Shastras' discuss the roles and duties of each caste, highlighting how education and training were integrated into social structures. Indian Knowledge System included education tailored to different 'varnas' (castes), ensuring the continuation of family and community skills e.g. the Kshatriyas were trained in martial skills and governance, Vaishyas in trade and business acumen, and Shudras in various crafts and manual labor.

The 'Natya Shastra' by Bharata Muni is a seminal work that lays out the theory and practice of drama and dance, reflecting the deep integration of skill-based learning in the performing arts. Education in the arts was an essential part of the Indian Knowledge System, encompassing music, dance, and drama. Students were trained under masters in 'gurukuls' or specialized schools, learning through practice and performance.

The 'Iron Pillar of Delhi' and the advanced urban planning of the 'Indus Valley Civilization' are testaments to the high level of skill-based training in technology and engineering. Ancient India was known for its advancements in technology and engineering, with students learning skills such as metal casting and construction techniques. Training often involved building public works such as wells, bridges, and temples, which required applied knowledge of mathematics and engineering principles.

Thus, goal of Indian education and culture is sustainable and strives for the welfare of all. It is compulsory to understand knowledge system of our heritage and demonstrate the 'Indian Way' of doing things to the world. Today the whole world is following the manners and ways of Indian culture. So, it is necessary to train teachers and scholars so that they demonstrate and exemplify to the world a way of life so unique to India's great civilization.

Mahatma Gandhi's basic Education:

Nai Talim or Basic Education, is a principle which states that knowledge and work are not separate. Mahatma Gandhi promoted an educational curriculum with the same name based on this pedagogical principle. Mahatma Gandhi has given his scheme of Nai Talim (basic Education) in a well formulated approach to education in 1937 in his news paper 'Harijan' was based on four basic principles:

- i. Education or learning in mother tongue along with handicraft work,
- ii. Work should be linked with most useful vocational needs of the locality,



- iii. Learning should be linked with vocational work, and
- iv. Work should be socially useful and productive needed for living.

It is an approach to the total personality development of body, mind and spirit. It is essentially a mass education approach due to its centrality of socially useful work, and was expected to create National System of Education.

Review of Related Literature:

Both the Indian Knowledge System and Gandhi's 'Nai Talim' viewed education as a means to develop the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. They emphasized experiential learning, community involvement, and moral development through practical skills. These references illustrate that both ancient and Gandhian educational philosophies have same basic idea that true education should prepare individuals for life, not just academia, ensuring self-reliance and societal contribution.

Jena P. K. (2020) Conducted a study on Mahatma Gandhi and Basic Education. He said that there is a need of such education which was predicted by Mahatma Gandhi like 'Basic Education' or 'Nai-Talim'. His idea on basic education not only changed the educational system of India but also led a social revolution. This paper suggests that Gandhiji's idea of basic education is valid and fruitful which may also be used as guiding principles in the present scenario. The modern education system needs to be reformed at elementary stage keeping in view of the moral value and employability features of the Gandhiji's basic education.

Swaroop, P. K., Hussain & Shivakumar R. (2024) have written in their research work that Gandhi's basic scheme of education was a vision plan for education that combined practical skills with academics and was oriented toward the person as a whole. According to Gandhi, education should be rooted in actuality from the context in which one lives, and it should serve to train the mind and the hands. His proposal carried a curriculum relevant to the socio-economic conditions of rural India, putting at its top the vocational training in comparison to traditional subjects.

Rationale of the study

Present study was conducted to study the students' perception about elements of skill-based education in Indian knowledge system and its application in recent educational practices for a better education system. Perception refers to a particular way of looking at or understanding something i.e., an opinion.

In ancient India, education was intertwined with life skills; students would learn farming, metallurgy, or medicine as part of their education. Gandhi's educational philosophy also involved productive work to build character and inculcate values of self-reliance and responsibility.

The researchers collected data through survey from undergraduate students to study their perception about skill-based education as per Indian knowledge system and Gandhiji's 'Nai Talim' and its role in the development of India. This will be a significant step towards preparing students ready to face challenges of the modern world while keeping them rooted in their cultural heritage.

Objectives of the study



1. To study the students' perception about core areas of craft or skill-based education.
2. To study the perception of students about reforms in education system for making education system more skill oriented at undergraduate level

Research methodology: Survey method has been adopted for the present study.

Sampling Technique: Purposive Sampling Method has been used.

Population: Undergraduate students of Jagat Taran Girls Degree College (age group 17 to 21 years) constitute the population.

Sample: 50 students of undergraduate classes constitute the sample of the study

Tools: The researchers developed perception scale 'Skill based education' for conducting the study.

Data collection: The Perception Scale was administered on the students.

Analysis: Percentage analysis and content analysis was used for analyzing the data. Students' interviews were also conducted.

Findings of the study

Objective 1. To study the students' perception about core areas of craft or skill-based education-

Table showing Students' perception about core areas of craft or skill-based education

Medium of Education at Primary Level	Hindi 40%	English 16%	Mother Tongue 44%
Medium of Education at Higher Education Level	44%	48%	8%
If present primary system should be based on craft	Agree 80%	Disagree 12%	Not Sure 8%
If present Higher Education should be based on craft	Agree 72%	Disagree 16%	Not Sure 12%
Priority for craft	Handwork 44%	Performing Arts 16%	Physical Education- 20%, Technical Education- 20%
Appropriate Teaching Methods	Oral 32%	Experiment 40%	Learning by self experience & Coordination 28%
Students become self- dependent by present education system	Agree 70%	Disagree 28%	Not Sure 2%

On the basis of Table, following inferences can be drawn-

1. Students gave more importance (44%) to mother-tongue as compared to hindi (40%) and English (16%) so they perceived that mother tongue or hindi should be medium of instruction at primary level.
2. Students gave more importance (48%) to English as compared to Hindi (44%) and mother-tongue (8%) so they perceived that English or Hindi should be medium of instruction at higher level.



3. Majority of students (80%) perceived that primary education should be based on some craft or skill.
4. Majority of students (72%) perceived that higher education should be based on some craft or skill.
5. 44% students gave priority to handwork, 16% students gave priority to performing arts, 20% students gave priority to physical education and 20% students gave priority to technical education.
6. Majority of students (40%) perceived that experiment method should be used for skill-based education as compared to oral or lecture method (32%) and learning by self-experience and coordination (28%).
7. Majority of students (70%) agree that students become self-dependent by present education system while 28% students disagree and 2% students are not sure.

Objective 2- To study the perception of students about reforms in the education system

Findings :

The content analysis of responses given by students show that students perceive that following reforms should be done for making education system more skill oriented at undergraduate level-

1. School should be a place of quality education where students wish to go for joyful learning experiences.
2. Education system should focus on future needs and it should orient students to be self -dependent.
3. Experimental methods of teaching should be applied for practical knowledge.
4. Educational opportunities should be made available for all without any discrimination.
5. Employment oriented education is the need of the hour and it should be an integral part at every stage of education.
6. Malpractices at administrative level and using other unfair means should be monitored regularly and stopped.
7. Curriculum should be updated at all levels for meeting the changing needs of the society.
8. Practical knowledge should be given more emphasis to promote employability.
9. Educational institutes should have proper infrastructure for meeting the needs for skill based education.
10. Teachers should also get proper training and orientation for imparting skill oriented education.
11. Making students self dependent and ready for some occupation, craft should be an integral part of education.



Discussion:

It was found that students perceive that mother tongue and Hindi should be medium of instruction at primary stage whereas at higher level English or Hindi were preferred. Education should be based on craft or skill at primary as well as higher level, for this purpose experiment method should be used and majority of students preferred handwork.

As per findings, students suggest reforms like ensuring quality education with joyful learning experience, making some handwork or craft essential at every stage of education, learning by doing, equal educational opportunities for all, employment-oriented education, curriculum upgradation, teachers training, more emphasis on practical work and proper infrastructure facilities in educational institutes for meeting the needs for skill-based education.

Skill-based education in ancient India was highly developed and formed a vital part of society and culture. The education system in that era was designed to meet practical and spiritual needs, focusing on imparting specialized skills that were crucial for various vocations and societal roles. The emphasis on skill-based education in the Indian Knowledge System and Gandhi's 'Nai Talim' continues to be relevant today.

This study suggests that students perceive several changes should be made in education system especially with the push towards vocational training and skill development in modern education policies. Proper implementation of proposed changes and effective mechanism of monitoring can help in achieving the goal of NEP 2020 to transform India through reforms in education.

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