



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

(Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal)

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 8.031 (SJIF 2025)

Gurukul System of Education: relevance in modern times

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DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2025-22223489/IRJHISNC2503012>

Abstract:

The traditional Indian educational system of "Gurukul" is rooted in the teachings of the Vedas. In the ancient times, education was imparted through hearing and not writing, and has been recognised as a unique mode of learning. Here, students (known as "shishyas") would live with their teacher (the "guru"). The teacher imparted knowledge not only in academics but also in medicine, philosophy, spiritual, moral, and cultural aspects of life, where they received not only academic instruction but also life skills, moral values, yogas, spiritual teachings, fostering critical thinking, creativity, & self-directed learning. Now in modern times, the mentor-student bond is gaining recognition as essential elements for fostering well-rounded individuals. The system's emphasis on experiential learning and values-based, activity based education is increasingly acknowledged as crucial in developing emotional intelligence, social responsibility, and problem-solving abilities in students through advanced technologies like AR-VR, Cloud technology, AI, as modern education systems evolve, the core principles of the Gurukul system continue to hold significant relevance.

I Introduction:

The term 'Gurukul' originates from the Sanskrit language, where 'Guru' signifies the teacher, and 'Kul' refers to the family or lineage. In ancient India, Gurus were more than mere educators; they were revered as spiritual, intellectual, and moral guides. Unlike the narrow scope of modern-day 'teachers', who primarily focus on academic or intellectual growth, Gurus in ancient Bharat (India) played a holistic role. They were responsible not only for intellectual and educational development but also for shaping their students' behavioral, psychological, ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions. Their influence was so profound that Gurus were often considered to be more important than parents, as they nurtured the individual from basic knowledge to expertise in various fields.

In the traditional Gurukul system, students, known as 'Shishyas', lived under the same roof as their Gurus and their families, engaging in both formal education and day-to-day service. This unique arrangement instilled a deep sense of responsibility, discipline, and respect in the students.

Gurukuls were treated as sacred spaces, akin to temples, and were regarded as the foundation for personal and societal growth. The education imparted in Gurukuls was designed to shape individuals not only as scholars but as holistic, well-rounded individuals. The curriculum covered a wide range of subjects, from mathematics and economics to philosophy, logic, and medicine, many of which were invented and perfected by ancient Indian scholars. Pioneers like Rishi Sushrut, credited with the invention of plastic surgery, and Rishi Bodhayana, recognized for his contributions to geometry, exemplify the intellectual wealth fostered in these institutions.

This research paper aims to explore the relevance of the Gurukul system in the context of modern education. By examining its historical significance and its role in shaping well-rounded individuals, we will assess the potential for integrating some of its values and practices into contemporary educational frameworks. The holistic approach of Gurukul education, which emphasized not only knowledge but also character, discipline, and responsibility, offers valuable insights for reforming modern educational systems that increasingly focus on academic achievements alone.

II. Methodology:

The research article is totally a qualitative base study which shall include the analysis of multiple readings and also some personal interviews of scholars. A survey including random sampling to analyze the perceptions of Bhartiya Citizens with reference to the gurukul system of education, its benefits, its decline, its significance, its re-evolution in India etc shall be conducted.

Problem Statement:

The education system of the 21st century is more catering to the hard skills, technical knowledge and Intelligence quotient of individuals and is lacking in the holistic development from the ethical, moral and mindfulness point of view which was ensured along with a range of subjects in the Gurukul System of education.

Objectives of Research:

Some of the major objectives of this study include:

- To understand the importance and role of the Gurukul education system in building a concrete base of the modern education system.
- To study the factors of the education system of ancient Gurukul era in detail and outcomes during that era.
- A comparative analysis and relevance of the current education system and Gurukul system.
- To encourage a hybrid model of the current education system and the Gurukul education system.

III. Review of Literature:

Before jumping directly on the relevance of Gurukul education structure in today's modern era, let us understand the basic ancient human life during the era. It was much different from what we live in these days. Human Life was divided into 4 significant stages which had its own importance, roles and functions. These stages were referred to as 'Ashrams'. These Ashrams also included rituals to be followed at that particular Age/ Stage of life. The Gurukul system of education was a residential schooling model that originated around 5000 BC in the Indian subcontinent. It was most prevalent during the Vedic age when students were taught a wide range of subjects and were instructed on how to live a cultured and disciplined life. A Gurukul was essentially the teacher's (Acharya's) home, serving as the center of learning where students, or shishyas, resided until they completed their education. In this system, all individuals were considered equal, and both the guru (teacher) and the shishya (student) lived together or in close proximity. The bond between the guru and shishya was considered sacred, and no fee was charged for education. However, students were expected to offer a "gurudakshina" – a token of respect, which could be in the form of money or a specific task performed for the teacher.

At first glance, the idea of living with a teacher, the absence of a defined curriculum, and a lack of a structured routine might raise questions about how a child would learn. However, contemporary educators, in retrospect, have recognized that several aspects of the Gurukul system can be integrated into modern education.

Modern Infrastructure –

Robust student learning occurs when practical knowledge is emphasized, yet the current education system tends to focus primarily on theoretical learning and rote memorization, which often proves insufficient. The Gurukul system emphasized the application of knowledge and prepared students for all aspects of life. In contemporary times, this could be achieved by striking a balance between academic learning, extracurricular activities, and mindfulness training. This approach would help students become more well-rounded individuals.

Holistic Education –

Today's education system is primarily rank-driven, fostering competition among peers. The pressure to excel academically is often exacerbated by over-ambitious parents who equate a student's worth to their academic performance. In contrast, the Gurukul system was based on a value-driven approach, where the focus was on nurturing the unique abilities of each student. By incorporating this approach, the education system could help students excel in their areas of interest while developing strong character, free from the intense competition and stress that often lead to mental health issues.

Teacher-Student Relationship –

It is essential in modern times for teachers and students to share a relationship built on mutual respect and trust. When children feel secure and trust their educators, they are more likely to engage positively in their learning. This aspect of the Gurukul system, where the guru and shishya shared a close, respectful relationship, can be adapted today through various activities and workshops that strengthen the bond between teachers and students.

Nature and education –

The schools should be situated away from the noisy and polluted environment of the cities so that the students are not affected by the everyday fights and bad practices. In modern times, however, it is not possible to completely lead a life full of control, but we should try to adapt to such a way of living.

Community and Environment:

Create learning environments that reflect the communal and natural settings of Gurukuls. This could involve organizing outdoor learning activities, community service projects, and promoting a sense of responsibility towards the environment.

Merits of Gurukul System-

1. The Gurus had vast knowledge and knew how to teach even the most difficult things.
2. They used to acquire a particular style and inculcated high levels of efficiency.
3. The student used to have a high regard for the Guru and discipline was sought after.
5. Much of the teaching was practical and there were a parcel of advantages of this style of education.
6. The environment given to the student ensured he would turn into an artisan or an accomplished person in his field of interest.

Demerits of Gurukul System-

1. The student did not get much exposure as he was under the guidance of a single Guru.
2. The understudy needed to rely upon the educator entirely.
3. The old system didn't concentrate on the ideas behind art.
4. The student also had to help with daily chores for the master.

Flaws in the present education system:

The most significant flaws of the current education system is its commercialized nature, which has eclipsed the original purpose of imparting knowledge and fostering intellectual growth. Education has increasingly become a commodity, with profit-driven institutions placing undue focus on financial gain rather than nurturing students holistically. This shift detracts from the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and discourages critical thinking, creativity, and emotional

intelligence. Another notable deficiency is the system's insufficient attention to physical education, which is vital for students' mental and physical well-being. The curriculum allocates limited time and resources for physical activity, thereby undermining the development of healthy habits and overall fitness.

Additionally, the education system places disproportionate emphasis on rote learning and examinations, encouraging memorization rather than fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This approach stifles creativity, innovation, and critical thinking—skills essential in an ever-evolving global landscape. Furthermore, the current system remains largely disconnected from real-world applications. Students are often trained in theoretical knowledge that inadequately prepares them for practical challenges and problem-solving in their careers and daily lives.

Lastly, there is a significant lack of personalized attention and individualized learning experiences, which restricts students from exploring their unique interests and talents. The one-size-fits-all model of the present education system fails to accommodate diverse learning styles, further exacerbating disparities in student outcomes. In conclusion, the modern education system requires a comprehensive overhaul to address these flaws. A shift is urgently needed from a narrow focus on academic achievement to the holistic development of students, encompassing intellectual, physical, emotional, and ethical growth.

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