

## **A Pedagogical Perspective on Traditional Language Learning Methods within the Indian Knowledge System**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Language in ancient India was revered not merely as a means of communication but as a dynamic embodiment of knowledge, culture, and intellectual power. The Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) cultivated language learning through immersive, oral, and reflective practices that shaped both thought and character. Anchored in the Guru–Shishya tradition, learning unfolded through close interaction, where language was heard, recited, remembered, and lived. Methods such as Śruti (listening), rhythmic recitation, storytelling, structured debates, and dialogic reflection nurtured precision in speech, conceptual clarity, and cultural continuity. Grammatical traditions, such as Panini’s Ashtadhyayi, reveal the intellectual depth and systematic structure that underpinned linguistic education. These pedagogical approaches were practiced across classical languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Pali, and Prakrit, each preserving oral and literary traditions through centuries. Language learning progressed through carefully layered stages listening, reflection, memorization, chanting, and debate transforming language into a vehicle for intellectual refinement, ethical learning, and cultural preservation. This paper explores these traditional language learning methods within IKS, demonstrating how they integrated cognitive, cultural, and philosophical dimensions. By tracing these practices, the study reveals a pedagogical vision that predates modern linguistic theories, offering enduring insights into how language functions as both a medium of learning and a guardian of cultural legacy.*

**Keywords:** Indian Knowledge Systems, Guru–Shishya Tradition, Śruti and Recitation, Traditional Pedagogy, Language Learning Methods

## **1. Introduction**

Language stands as one of the most beautiful and intriguing phenomena in human civilization, carving the rhythm of life and fulfilling our deep-seated wish to be understood and remembered. Ancient India embraced this truth by cultivating a pedagogical system where language was revered not merely as a functional tool but as a vessel of intellectual, moral, and aesthetic enrichment. Language is an essential phenomenon in human civilization serving not only as a means of communication but also as a primary vehicle for the preservation and transmission of cultural values and knowledge (Lakshmi, 2018). In the context of ancient India, pedagogical traditions rooted in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) placed language at the very heart of education. Oral transmission, mnemonic devices, and dialogic practices formed the foundation for learning, ensuring that language was not just learned but experienced and internalized (Mishra, 2023). Techniques such as attentive listening (*śravaṇa*), reflective understanding (*manana*), and contemplative internalization (*nidhidhyāsana*) structured a learning process that emphasized experiential engagement and holistic intellectual development.

The IKS framework harmoniously integrated philosophy, literature, ritual, and ethics, recognizing language as the central medium through which individual thought and collective cultural consciousness evolved (Rahman, 2024). Pedagogical practices such as storytelling, oral recitation of epics, and dialogic exchanges reflected a learner-centered and contextually adaptive system that nurtured linguistic competence and cultural awareness (Chachondia, 2022). Moreover, the rigorous study of classical grammar and poetics, as evident in traditional texts, demonstrates how these methods contributed to intellectual discipline and cultural continuity (Dixit, 2024). The vast linguistic diversity of India encompassing Sanskrit, Tamil, Pali, Prakrit, and various oral traditions illustrates the dynamic relationship between language, literature, and societal evolution (Sharma, 2025). These traditions collectively reveal that language learning in ancient India was not confined to literacy or grammar; it was a comprehensive process of shaping thought, cultivating ethics, and preserving knowledge systems. This research paper critically examines traditional language learning methods within the Indian Knowledge System, analyzing how foundational practices such as oral transmission, narrative pedagogy, and mnemonic techniques can inform contemporary approaches to language education. The study aims to highlight the enduring relevance of IKS-based pedagogical principles in fostering holistic linguistic development and sustaining cultural identity.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine traditional language learning methods within the Indian Knowledge System (IKS).

2. To analyze the pedagogical principles underlying oral, analytical, and experiential learning traditions.
3. To evaluate the contemporary relevance of IKS-based pedagogies in modern language education.
4. To explore ways to integrate IKS principles with present-day teaching–learning practices in line with NEP 2020 and NCFSE 2023.

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach through a systematic review of primary and secondary sources. It critically examines classical texts, research articles, policy documents, and institutional reports, including NEP 2020, NCFSE 2023, UGC guidelines, and publications by the IKS Division. These materials were analyzed to interpret traditional pedagogical frameworks and assess their relevance within contemporary educational contexts.

### **4. Literature Review**

The pedagogical foundation of traditional Indian education is deeply embedded in the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), where learning was perceived as an integrated process encompassing intellectual, ethical, and spiritual growth. Lakshmi (2018) traces its origins to the Vedic tradition and the triadic process of śravaṇa (listening), manana (reflection), and nidhidhyāsana (internalization). These stages guided learners from attentive reception to reflective reasoning and deep internalization, transforming knowledge into lived experience.

The gurukula tradition epitomized personalized mentorship, discipline, and moral cultivation, serving as an early model of learner-centered pedagogy rooted in teacher–student reciprocity.

Chachondia (2022) examines the systematic nature of ancient Indian language pedagogy through the Vedāṅgas, particularly Śikṣā (phonetics), Vyākaraṇa (grammar), Nirukta (etymology), and Chhanda (metrics). Canonical works such as Pāṇini’s Aṣṭādhyāyī and Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya reveal a sophisticated understanding of linguistic structure and generative grammar. Oral recitation, repetition, and metrical discipline ensured linguistic precision while cultivating analytical and aesthetic sensibilities which are the central elements of language learning in IKS.

Rahman (2024) situates traditional instructional practices within the learner-centered framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. His study underscores the pedagogical value of dialogic learning, storytelling, and experiential practice in promoting holistic linguistic competence. By connecting reflection, discussion, and inquiry from ancient traditions with modern pedagogical design, the research reaffirms the relevance of IKS-based methods in contemporary education.

Prajapati and Nagaraju (2024) expand this perspective by exploring the adaptation of IKS principles within multilingual and digital learning environments. Their findings demonstrate how oral narration and interpretive engagement foster inclusivity, creativity, and linguistic adaptability, highlighting the continuity between indigenous pedagogies and twenty-first-century educational innovations.

Sharma (2025) examines the application of classical linguistic disciplines such as Vyākaraṇa, Alāṅkāra Śāstra, and Pramāṇa to English language pedagogy. She advocates for curriculum reform and teacher education initiatives that integrate indigenous grammatical and rhetorical insights into language instruction. Her work establishes a strong convergence between ancient linguistic thought and modern cognitive and constructivist learning theories.

Dixit (2024) investigates the pedagogical practices of ancient centers of learning such as Gurukulas and Viharas, identifying vāda (dialogue), tarka (reasoned argument), and anubhava (experiential understanding) as essential teaching–learning strategies. These approaches closely parallel constructivist principles of critical thinking, self-reflection, and holistic learner development.

Collectively, the reviewed studies affirm that traditional Indian language pedagogy anchored in oral transmission, reflection, and dialogic exchange constitutes a coherent and enduring framework of learning. The present research builds upon these foundations to examine pedagogical and linguistic practices within the Indian Knowledge Systems, seeking to integrate classical insights with contemporary educational paradigms.

## **5. Theoretical Foundations of Language Pedagogy within the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)**

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) embodies a holistic educational framework that integrates philosophy, pedagogy, and cultural continuity. Rooted in the intellectual traditions of Akhanda Bharata, the undivided Indian subcontinent it perceives knowledge (vidyā) not as mere information acquisition but as a transformative process harmonizing intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human development. Within this epistemic framework, language assumes a central pedagogical role, functioning not only as a communicative tool but as the primary medium for preserving, interpreting, and transmitting cultural and philosophical wisdom across generations (Rahman, 2024).

### **5.1 Understanding the Indian Knowledge System (IKS)**

The IKS encompasses the cumulative intellectual heritage of India derived from literary and oral traditions such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and classical treatises on grammar, logic, and

philosophy. It reflects a comprehensive view of learning that is experiential, reflective, and intuitive (Dixit, 2024). Knowledge in this framework is perceived as dynamic and self-transformative, where learning is pursued as both inquiry and realization.

The Indian epistemological model rests on three interrelated pedagogical principles, śravaṇa (attentive listening), manana (reflective reasoning), and nidhidhyāsana (internalization and application). These stages represent a sequential movement from perception to cognition and realization, analogous to the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of modern educational psychology. Thus, IKS situates learning as a process of holistic growth encompassing intellect, emotion, and action.

## **5.2 Traditional Pedagogical Frameworks**

The traditional language pedagogy of IKS evolved through the śruti–smṛti tradition, which relied on oral and aural transmission of knowledge to ensure accuracy, continuity, and comprehension. This process cultivated learners' linguistic precision, memory, and analytical ability, integrating the act of learning with discipline and contemplation (Rahman, 2024). The guru–śiṣya paramparā formed the cornerstone of this educational system. It emphasised personalised mentorship and experiential learning, where the teacher guided the learner through dialogue, moral instruction, and reflective practice (Dixit, 2024). The gurukul model, often located in serene natural surroundings, provided an environment conducive to introspection and holistic learning. Pedagogical methods such as samvāda (dialogue) and praśna–uttara (question–response) encouraged inquiry-based learning and critical reflection, aligning closely with constructivist and experiential models in contemporary pedagogy (NCF, 2023). Another significant feature, svādhyāya or self-study, emphasized autonomous engagement with texts and self-directed reflection. It fostered metacognitive awareness and lifelong learning principles that remain central to modern pedagogical paradigms such as self-regulated learning and reflective practice (Rahman, 2024).

## **6. Pedagogical Practices and Linguistic Strategies within the Indian Knowledge Systems**

The traditional methods of language acquisition within the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), exemplified most prominently by the Gurukula model, reflect a holistic, structured, and learner-centered pedagogy. These methods aimed not only at linguistic mastery but also at cultivating intellectual discipline, moral development, and cultural rootedness. Language learning in this framework was viewed as a means to self-realization and social harmony, integrating listening, reflection, and application in a cyclical process of knowledge internalization.

## 6.1 The Foundational Oral Tradition: Śruti and Verbal Transmission

### 6.1.1 Śruti System: Listening, Recitation, and Mnemonic Mastery

The earliest pedagogical method in language learning was grounded in Śruti, the act of hearing and internalizing knowledge through attentive listening. The process emphasized aural and oral precision, ensuring that knowledge was preserved accurately across generations. Learning occurred through listening, repetition, chanting, and recitation, often aided by mnemonic systems such as Padapāṭha and Krama-pāṭha, which helped learners retain linguistic form and rhythmic structure. These oral methods developed both phonetic awareness and memory discipline, foundational to mastering sound-based languages like Sanskrit.

### 6.1.2 The Threefold Process of Learning: Śravaṇa, Manana, and Nidhidhyāsana

Table 1.0 Threefold Learning Process in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Stage	Sanskrit Term	Pedagogical Function
1. Listening	Śravaṇa	Focused auditory engagement to absorb linguistic and conceptual content.
2. Reflection	Manana	Intellectual reasoning and self-questioning to clarify meaning and application.
3. Internalization	Nidhidhyāsana	Meditative practice for consolidating knowledge through repeated internal engagement.

Traditional pedagogy emphasized a structured cognitive progression in learning. This triadic process ensured that knowledge transitioned from external retention to internal realization, establishing the foundation for critical and reflective learning an approach aligned with the constructivist principles of modern pedagogy.

**Figure 1.0 Traditional Pedagogy in Language Learning**

## 6.2 Analytical and Structured Methods: Grammar, Logic, and Debate

### 6.2.1 Vyākaraṇa and the Grammar Tradition

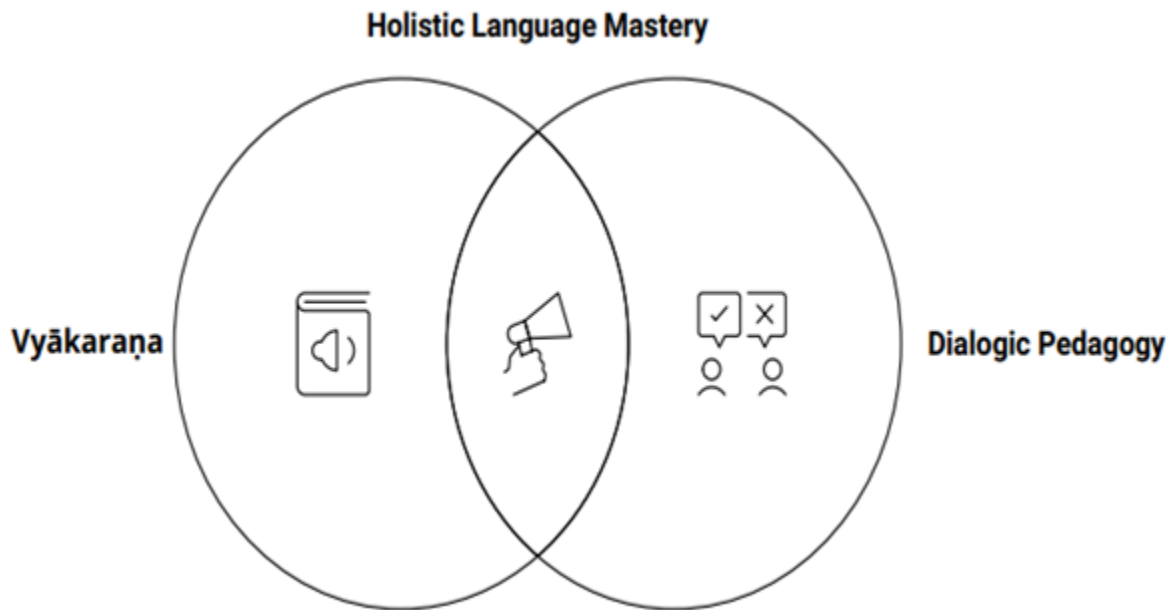
The analytical study of language formed the intellectual backbone of linguistic education in ancient India. The discipline of *Vyākaraṇa* (grammar), as developed by Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, and Patañjali, introduced a systematic understanding of linguistic structure and usage. Grammar was not seen merely as a technical discipline but as a means of cultivating precision in thought and expression. It enhanced learners' logical reasoning, cognitive organization, and linguistic accuracy (NCF, 2023). Through this framework, students developed an appreciation for the internal logic and phonetic harmony of language, laying the groundwork for metalinguistic awareness essential in modern linguistics and language pedagogy.

### 6.2.2 Dialogic and Debating Pedagogy: Śāstrārtha and Vāda

Language learning was also reinforced through dialogic and dialectical methods, notably Śāstrārtha (philosophical debate) and Vāda (discourse). These practices cultivated intellectual inquiry, rhetorical skill, and spontaneous language use. Learners developed clarity, fluency, and ethical communication by participating in structured debates guided by the Guru. Such dialogic

engagement encouraged learners to reason, question, and articulate, processes that mirror modern interactive and communicative teaching methodologies.

**Figure 2.0 Grammar–Dialogue Synergy in Language Education**



### **6.3 Experiential and Contextual Strategies: Integrating Learning with Life**

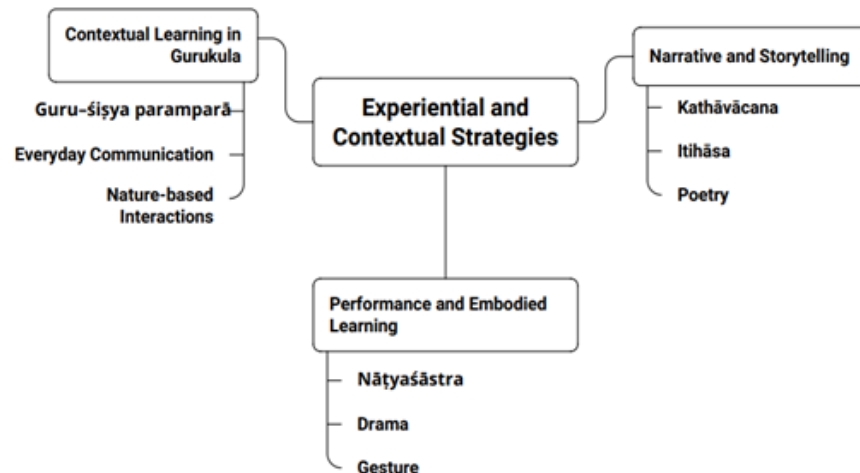
#### **6.3.1 Narrative and Storytelling: Katha, Itihāsa, and Poetry**

Narrative pedagogy, deeply embedded in the IKS, used storytelling (Kathāvācana) and epics (Itihāsa) as powerful tools for linguistic and moral development. Texts such as the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, and Pañcatantra employed rich linguistic forms to teach not only vocabulary and syntax but also values and cultural knowledge. Storytelling made language experiential and memorable, stimulating imagination, moral reasoning, and emotional intelligence.

#### **6.3.2 Performance and Embodied Learning: Nāṭyaśāstra and the Arts**

The Nāṭyaśāstra introduced an integrated pedagogical model where language was learned through performance, gesture, and emotion. Drama and poetry were used to develop pronunciation, articulation, and expressiveness. Students learned through enacting verses and dialogues, linking language to movement and affect. This experiential model reflects the foundations of kinesthetic learning and performative pedagogy, promoting embodied understanding of linguistic expression (NCF, 2023).

**Figure 3.0 Experiential and Contextual Strategies in IKS**



### 6.3.3 Contextual Learning in the Gurukula Environment

The Gurukula learning environment embodied contextual and continuous learning rooted in the guru–śiṣya paramparā (teacher–disciple tradition). Language learning was not confined to formal instruction but was embedded in everyday communication, rituals, and nature-based interactions. Within this tradition, the Guru guided students not only in language and knowledge but also in values and conduct through close personal engagement. Students interacted with the Guru, peers, and the community, integrating language with practical and ethical dimensions of life. This immersive and relational pedagogy of the Gurukula strengthened experiential understanding, promoted lifelong learning, and fostered holistic character formation.

### 7. Holistic and Mindfulness Practices in Language Learning

Traditional pedagogy integrated mindfulness and ethical reflection into the process of language learning. Practices such as meditation, yoga, and mantra chanting refined concentration, pronunciation, and cognitive clarity. These methods aligned linguistic study with moral and spiritual growth, demonstrating the belief that true mastery of language required purity of thought, discipline of mind, and harmony between word and action. This holistic approach reflects the IKS vision of education as the cultivation of the Panchakosha, the five dimensions of human existence: physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and spiritual (NCF, 2023).

### 8. Contemporary Relevance of IKS Pedagogy

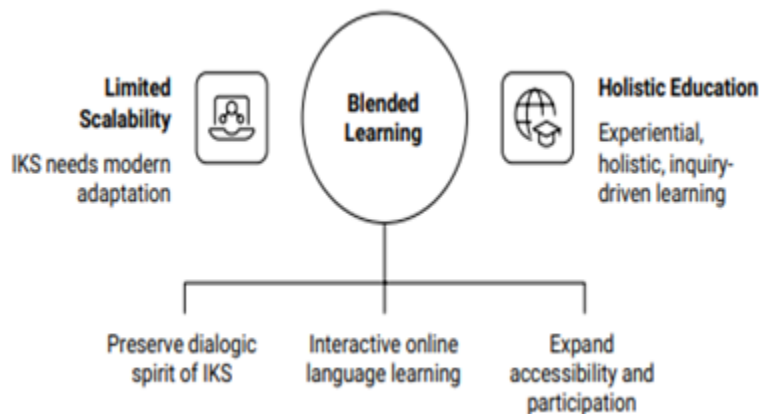
The pedagogical ethos of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) continues to hold profound significance within the framework of modern education. The oral–aural, dialogic, and

experiential traditions that defined ancient learning methods resonate strongly with contemporary constructivist, experiential, and communicative approaches to pedagogy. The triadic process of śravaṇa (attentive listening), manana (reflective contemplation), and nidhidhyāsana (internalization and application) encapsulates a structured learning progression that parallels the modern stages of input, processing, and performance. These principles emphasize active learner participation, cognitive engagement, and the transformation of information into lived understanding, core tenets of present-day outcome-based and communicative language teaching.

Moreover, the dialogic methods of samvāda (dialogue) and śāstrārtha (philosophical debate) served as dynamic instruments of intellectual exploration. These methods cultivated critical reasoning, interpretive analysis, and expressive clarity, anticipating the inquiry-based and discussion-led pedagogies central to twenty-first-century classrooms. The guru–śiṣya framework, which integrated ethical mentoring with intellectual development, further reflects the personalized, learner-centered orientation now central to progressive education. Thus, the epistemic core of IKS rooted in reflection, dialogue, and experiential engagement reveals an organic continuity with modern theories that prioritize learner autonomy, collaboration, and holistic cognition.

In the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, these traditional insights acquire renewed relevance. NEP’s call for multilingualism, holistic education, and the integration of IKS within curricular frameworks echoes the ancient Indian understanding of language as both a cognitive and cultural instrument, a medium for jñāna (knowledge), saṃskāra (values), and saḥavāsa (harmonious coexistence). The oral recitations, narrative traditions, and performative modes of traditional pedagogy find contemporary counterparts in narrative-based pedagogy, art-integrated learning, and project-based methodologies.

**Figure 4.0 Integrating IKS Pedagogy into Modern Education**



However, adapting these practices to contemporary contexts requires scalability and inclusivity. While the gurukula model flourished through close mentorship and immersive engagement, present educational ecosystems must negotiate large classrooms and digital interfaces. In this regard, the convergence of traditional oral and reflective methods with technology-enabled, blended learning environments offers a pragmatic synthesis. Digital storytelling, collaborative dialogues, and interactive online language learning platforms can preserve the dialogic spirit of IKS while expanding accessibility and participation.

Recontextualizing IKS pedagogy within contemporary education thus represents not a nostalgic return but a progressive convergence where timeless wisdom informs modern innovation. Integrating chanting, storytelling, debate, and reflective discourse with digital interactivity and multilingual resources aligns with NEP 2020's vision of education that is experiential, holistic, inquiry-driven, and culturally grounded. This alignment underscores the enduring vitality of IKS as both a pedagogical philosophy and a transformative educational framework for the twenty-first century.

## **9. Implications**

The pedagogical framework of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) presents a transformative potential for contemporary language education by reintroducing the values of reflective learning, ethical instruction, and experiential engagement. Its learner-centered and dialogic orientation aligns with constructivist and outcome-based models, offering a culturally grounded approach to language pedagogy. Integrating IKS into modern education calls for a multidisciplinary framework where traditional oral, analytical, and experiential methods such as *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nidhidhyāsana*, are adapted through digital, collaborative, and inclusive platforms. Teacher education programs should emphasize cultural literacy, reflective pedagogy, and multilingual proficiency to equip educators with the capacity to apply IKS principles in linguistically diverse classrooms. Curriculum design must embed storytelling, dialogue, and performance-based learning as key pedagogical strategies, supported by digital tools that preserve the oral and narrative essence of IKS. Policy frameworks inspired by NEP 2020 can further operationalize this integration by promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, resource development, and teacher capacity-building rooted in India's linguistic and philosophical heritage.

## **10. Conclusion**

The study reaffirms that the Indian Knowledge System embodies a coherent and sophisticated model of language pedagogy grounded in oral transmission, dialogic reasoning, and reflective practice. These methods, far from being archaic, resonate deeply with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize active learning, learner autonomy, and cultural integration. The fusion

of traditional linguistic strategies with modern technological tools offers an avenue for creating inclusive, context-sensitive, and value-based language education. In bridging IKS with modern pedagogy, education transcends functional literacy to cultivate reflective, ethical, and culturally rooted communicators. Future research should focus on developing experimental models and digital pedagogical modules that operationalize IKS methodologies within classroom settings, enabling a balanced synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern innovation for sustainable linguistic and educational development.

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