



# Sanskrit Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Revitalising Indian Knowledge Systems under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

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## Abstract:

*Sanskrit, one of the oldest and most scientifically structured languages in the world, occupies a unique position in India's educational and cultural heritage. It serves as the repository of an extensive body of knowledge encompassing philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, linguistics, literature, ethics, and spirituality. In the contemporary educational landscape, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has reaffirmed the significance of Sanskrit by advocating its integration into mainstream education and promoting Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). This paper explores the historical evolution, educational importance, and contemporary relevance of Sanskrit education in India. It reviews existing literature, examines policy initiatives, and discusses the pedagogical value of Sanskrit in fostering cognitive development, ethical values, multilingual competence, and interdisciplinary learning. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach based on secondary data collected from policy documents, books, journal articles, and reports. The findings suggest that Sanskrit education is not merely the study of an ancient language but a powerful medium for preserving India's intellectual traditions while contributing to holistic education in the twenty-first century. The paper argues that innovative teaching methodologies, digital technologies, and teacher education reforms can make Sanskrit more accessible and meaningful for modern learners. By integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary educational practices, Sanskrit education can contribute significantly to national development, cultural preservation, and global scholarship.*

**Keywords:** Sanskrit Education, Indian Knowledge Systems, NEP 2020, Classical Language, Teacher Education, Holistic Education

## 1. Introduction

Education has always been regarded as the foundation of civilization and human development. In India, the roots of formal education can be traced to the Vedic period, where Sanskrit served as the principal medium for teaching and learning. The language became the vehicle through which ancient scholars transmitted knowledge related to philosophy, science, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, linguistics, law, ethics, and spirituality. Consequently, Sanskrit occupies a unique position not merely as a classical language but also as the foundation of India's intellectual and cultural heritage.

For centuries, Sanskrit functioned as the language of scholarship throughout the Indian subcontinent. The Gurukul system, regarded as one of the earliest organized educational systems, relied heavily upon Sanskrit texts for imparting education. Great universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, and Vikramashila attracted scholars from different regions of Asia who studied Sanskrit literature, philosophy, logic, medicine, and sciences. The remarkable precision of Sanskrit grammar, particularly as developed by Pāṇini, has attracted the attention of modern linguists and computer scientists alike.

Despite its glorious past, Sanskrit education experienced a gradual decline during colonial rule due to changes in educational policies and the introduction of English-medium education. However, the

language has never lost its cultural significance. In recent decades, there has been renewed interest in revitalizing Sanskrit education, especially with the emergence of the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) initiative and the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy recognises Sanskrit as an essential component of India's intellectual tradition and recommends its wider integration across school and higher education.

Today, Sanskrit education is viewed not only as a means of preserving ancient literature but also as a valuable resource for promoting holistic education, ethical values, multilingual competence, and interdisciplinary research. Advances in educational technology, digital libraries, online learning platforms, and artificial intelligence have further created new opportunities for expanding Sanskrit learning among students and researchers.

The present paper attempts to examine the educational significance of Sanskrit in the contemporary context, analyse its relevance under NEP 2020, and explore strategies for strengthening Sanskrit education in the twenty-first century.

## 2. Review of Literature

The importance of Sanskrit education has been discussed extensively by scholars from various disciplines. Their studies demonstrate that Sanskrit contributes not only to language learning but also to intellectual development, cultural preservation, and interdisciplinary research.

Radhakrishnan (1953) emphasised that Sanskrit literature contains profound philosophical insights that continue to influence educational thought across the world. According to him, ancient Indian education aimed at the holistic development of the learner by integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions.

Sharma (2015) argued that Sanskrit is not merely a language of religious texts but also a repository of scientific knowledge. He highlighted its contributions to grammar, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, architecture, and logic. The author recommended integrating Sanskrit studies with modern scientific education to encourage interdisciplinary learning.

Kapoor (2019) examined the relationship between Sanskrit and Indian Knowledge Systems. His study concluded that the preservation of Sanskrit is essential for understanding India's traditional knowledge in Ayurveda, Yoga, environmental ethics, governance, and philosophy. He further suggested that universities should establish dedicated centres for Indian Knowledge Systems supported by Sanskrit scholarship.

The National Education Policy (Government of India, 2020) identifies Sanskrit as one of India's most significant classical languages and recommends making it widely available at all stages of education. The policy advocates experiential learning, multilingualism, interdisciplinary education, and the integration of Indian knowledge traditions into the curriculum.

NCERT (2023), through the National Curriculum Framework, also recognises Sanskrit as an important component of India's linguistic and cultural heritage. It recommends learner-centred approaches, activity-based instruction, and digital learning resources for teaching classical languages effectively.

Although existing studies recognise the importance of Sanskrit education, relatively few have examined its relevance within the broader framework of educational reforms introduced under NEP 2020. Therefore, the present study seeks to bridge this gap by analysing Sanskrit education from historical, pedagogical, and policy perspectives.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the historical development of Sanskrit education in India.
2. To analyse the educational significance of Sanskrit in contemporary society.
3. To explore the role of Sanskrit education in promoting Indian Knowledge Systems.
4. To examine the provisions of the National Education Policy (2020) relating to Sanskrit education.
5. To identify challenges and suggest strategies for strengthening Sanskrit education in the twenty-first century.

### 4. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a **qualitative descriptive research design** based entirely on secondary data. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the objective is to analyse existing educational policies, scholarly literature, and historical documents concerning Sanskrit education rather than to collect primary empirical data.

Secondary information has been collected from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, policy documents, NCERT publications, University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines, research papers, and authentic online educational resources. The collected information has been analysed using descriptive and interpretative methods to identify major themes related to the historical development, educational significance, policy initiatives, challenges, and future prospects of Sanskrit education.

### 5. Historical Development of Sanskrit Education

The history of Sanskrit education is closely linked with the evolution of Indian civilization. During the Vedic period, education was imparted through the Gurukul system, where students lived with their teachers and acquired knowledge through observation, discussion, memorisation, reflection, and practical application. Sanskrit served as the principal language of instruction, while the curriculum included the Vedas, Upanishads, grammar, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, music, agriculture, and military science.

The systematic development of Sanskrit grammar by the ancient grammarian Pāṇini marked a milestone in linguistic history. His work, the Aṣṭādhyāyī, established highly sophisticated grammatical principles that continue to influence modern linguistics and computational language studies. Similarly, scholars such as Patañjali, Kātyāyana, Kālidāsa, Āryabhaṭa, and Bhāskarācārya contributed immensely to literature, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and scientific thought through Sanskrit.

During the classical period, renowned universities such as Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila, and Vallabhi emerged as international centres of higher learning. Students from China, Tibet, Korea, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia travelled to India to study Sanskrit texts and Indian philosophy. These institutions promoted multidisciplinary education, where language, logic, medicine, astronomy, law, and fine arts were studied together.

In the medieval period, Sanskrit education continued through temples, monasteries, pathshalas, and traditional centres of learning despite political and social changes. Although Persian and later English gained administrative importance, Sanskrit remained the language of religious, philosophical, and scholarly discourse.

The colonial period witnessed a decline in Sanskrit education due to educational policies favouring English-language instruction. Nevertheless, traditional institutions preserved Sanskrit scholarship, enabling its survival into the modern era. Following India's independence, several Sanskrit universities, research institutes, and academies were established to promote teaching, research, manuscript preservation, and publication.

Today, Sanskrit education continues to evolve through schools, universities, online learning platforms, digital manuscript libraries, and interdisciplinary research programmes. The implementation of NEP 2020 has further strengthened efforts to revitalise Sanskrit by integrating it into mainstream education and promoting Indian Knowledge Systems.

## 6. Sanskrit Education under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant milestone in the revitalisation of Sanskrit education in India. Unlike previous educational policies, NEP 2020 explicitly acknowledges Sanskrit as an invaluable repository of India's cultural, intellectual, and scientific heritage. The policy advocates making Sanskrit widely available at all levels of school and higher education through flexible and learner-friendly approaches.

One of the notable features of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on **multilingual education**. The policy encourages students to learn classical languages alongside modern Indian and foreign languages, thereby promoting linguistic diversity and cognitive development. Sanskrit is no longer viewed merely as a language of religious texts but as a source of interdisciplinary knowledge that enriches education across disciplines.

The policy further recommends integrating **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** into curricula. Since a substantial portion of ancient Indian knowledge—including Ayurveda, Yoga, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, architecture, agriculture, governance, and environmental ethics—is preserved in Sanskrit literature, the study of Sanskrit becomes essential for understanding and interpreting these disciplines. Universities are encouraged to establish dedicated centres for Indian Knowledge Systems, promote translation projects, and support research based on Sanskrit manuscripts.

NEP 2020 also emphasises innovative pedagogy. It advocates activity-based learning, experiential education, storytelling, project work, technology-enabled teaching, and competency-based assessment. Such learner-centred approaches can transform Sanskrit from a memorisation-oriented subject into an engaging and meaningful learning experience.

Teacher education occupies a central place in the successful implementation of these reforms. The policy recommends preparing professionally trained Sanskrit teachers who possess both traditional knowledge and modern pedagogical competencies. Digital literacy, educational technology, classroom innovation, and interdisciplinary teaching are expected to become integral components of Sanskrit teacher preparation programmes.

## 7. Educational Significance of Sanskrit Education

Sanskrit education contributes to multiple dimensions of human development and aligns closely with the objectives of holistic education envisioned by NEP 2020.

### 7.1 Cognitive Development

Sanskrit grammar is regarded as one of the most systematic grammatical structures in the world. Learning Sanskrit develops logical reasoning, analytical thinking, memory, concentration, and problem-solving abilities. The structured nature of the language encourages learners to understand grammatical relationships rather than merely memorising vocabulary.

### 7.2 Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Thousands of manuscripts preserved in Sanskrit contain invaluable information related to philosophy, literature, ethics, law, science, and social organisation. Sanskrit education enables students to access these original sources directly, thereby preserving India's rich intellectual heritage for future generations.

### **7.3 Value-Based Education**

Ancient Sanskrit texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, and Yogasutras emphasise truthfulness, self-discipline, compassion, cooperation, environmental responsibility, and ethical conduct. These values remain relevant for addressing contemporary social and educational challenges.

### **7.4 Interdisciplinary Learning**

One of the unique strengths of Sanskrit education lies in its interdisciplinary nature. Ancient scholars rarely separated knowledge into isolated disciplines. Mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, ecology, governance, and ethics were studied as interconnected fields. This holistic perspective closely aligns with the multidisciplinary approach advocated by NEP 2020.

### **7.5 Promotion of Research**

Millions of Sanskrit manuscripts remain untranslated and insufficiently explored. Sanskrit education therefore opens enormous opportunities for research in history, education, medicine, linguistics, artificial intelligence, computational linguistics, philosophy, and environmental studies. Interdisciplinary collaboration can generate new insights from traditional knowledge systems.

## **8. Challenges in Sanskrit Education**

Despite renewed policy support, Sanskrit education continues to face several challenges.

### **8.1 Shortage of Qualified Teachers**

Many educational institutions experience a shortage of professionally trained Sanskrit teachers. Existing teacher education programmes often emphasise traditional grammar but provide limited exposure to modern teaching methodologies, educational technology, and interdisciplinary approaches.

### **8.2 Traditional Teaching Practices**

In many schools, Sanskrit continues to be taught through rote memorisation of grammatical rules and translations. Such methods reduce student interest and fail to develop communicative competence or critical thinking.

### **8.3 Misconceptions among Learners**

A widespread misconception persists that Sanskrit is difficult, outdated, or relevant only to religious studies. These perceptions discourage students from choosing Sanskrit as an academic subject despite its intellectual and scientific significance.

### **8.4 Limited Digital Resources**

Although digital learning has expanded rapidly, high-quality Sanskrit educational resources remain comparatively limited. Interactive e-content, virtual laboratories, educational games, AI-supported pronunciation tools, and multilingual learning applications require further development.

### **8.5 Employment Concerns**

Students often perceive limited career opportunities after studying Sanskrit. Greater awareness is needed regarding employment prospects in education, translation, manuscriptology, digital humanities, computational linguistics, archaeology, tourism, publishing, cultural management, and Indian Knowledge Systems research.

## **9. Recommendations**

To strengthen Sanskrit education in the twenty-first century, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Introduce **joyful and activity-based Sanskrit learning** from the primary stage through stories, songs, games, conversations, and cultural activities.



2. Modernise Sanskrit curricula by integrating topics related to Indian Knowledge Systems, environmental sustainability, ethics, science, technology, and innovation.
3. Strengthen teacher education programmes by incorporating digital pedagogy, artificial intelligence applications, multilingual teaching strategies, and experiential learning.
4. Develop high-quality digital resources including mobile applications, online courses, virtual classrooms, interactive dictionaries, pronunciation software, and AI-enabled translation systems.
5. Encourage interdisciplinary research connecting Sanskrit with medicine, mathematics, astronomy, computer science, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and education.
6. Digitise and preserve ancient Sanskrit manuscripts while promoting collaborative translation projects involving universities and research institutions.
7. Organise Sanskrit speaking camps, competitions, seminars, workshops, and cultural festivals to increase student engagement and public awareness.
8. Establish Indian Knowledge Systems centres in universities to facilitate research, innovation, and international academic collaboration.
9. Create scholarship programmes and research fellowships to encourage young scholars to pursue advanced studies in Sanskrit and Indian Knowledge Systems.
10. Foster collaborations between educational institutions, government agencies, and international organisations to promote Sanskrit studies globally.

## 10. Conclusion

Sanskrit education represents a vital link between India's ancient intellectual traditions and the educational needs of the contemporary world. Far from being merely an ancient language, Sanskrit serves as the foundation of a vast body of knowledge encompassing philosophy, science, mathematics, medicine, linguistics, ethics, governance, and environmental thought. Its systematic grammatical structure, rich literary heritage, and interdisciplinary nature make it highly relevant for twenty-first-century education.

The National Education Policy (2020) has created a favourable environment for revitalising Sanskrit by recognising its importance within Indian Knowledge Systems, multilingual education, and holistic learning. However, successful implementation requires curriculum reform, teacher preparation, technological innovation, research support, and public awareness.

Educational institutions should move beyond traditional grammar-centred instruction and adopt learner-centred pedagogies that integrate storytelling, experiential learning, digital technology, project-based activities, and interdisciplinary inquiry. Such reforms will enable learners to appreciate Sanskrit not only as a classical language but also as a living source of knowledge that contributes to innovation, ethical development, national identity, and global scholarship.

In an era characterised by rapid technological change and increasing global interconnectedness, Sanskrit education offers valuable perspectives on sustainable development, human values, scientific inquiry, and holistic well-being. Revitalising Sanskrit education is therefore not merely an act of cultural preservation but an investment in building a knowledgeable, ethical, and intellectually enriched society.

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