

WISDOM MEETS PRACTICE: ALIGNING STUDY HABITS WITH INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS IN NEP 2020

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Abstract: This chapter discusses the potential of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) to revolutionize the approach to learning for students in today's time in accordance with NEP 2020. From the philosophical and educational philosophies of Indian thought—from the tradition of the Guru-Shishya Parampara to the learning philosophies of Shravan, Manan, and Nididhyasana, from the multidisciplinary approaches of Yoga, Vedic Mathematics, and Ayurveda wellness—the chapter highlights that while there is undoubtedly a problem with the curriculum, the technologies employed, or even the teaching methodologies involved in modern education today, the real problem lies in a complete misalignment of attitude and philosophy of the learners. Today's learners have been exposed to far too much information than any previous generation, yet they lack the wisdom to learn, live, or interact with knowledge. NEP 2020's call for holistic, multidisciplinary, and IKS-driven education makes up an interesting proposition for addressing this challenge. This chapter presents the SPANDA Framework and draws conclusions based on the same.

Introduction

There is something subtly strange about today's Indian student. She carries with her a smartphone that has access to almost everything there is to know about humankind. Before she even gets out of bed, she can access a lecture by a Nobel prize winner, tutorials on Quantum Mechanics, or the entire works of Adi Shankaracharya. Yet, when she sits down to learn, she finds herself distracted, unmotivated, and overwhelmed. She highlights the pages but does not read the content. She learns on YouTube while browsing Facebook, and studies till 2 a.m., fueled by fear and caffeine, just to forget everything after a week.

This is not the tale of a struggling student. This is the tale of an education system that, for years, has confused the provision of information with education itself. And what we now have is a generation of learners who are incredibly well-informed yet under-educated—in the truest sense of that phrase. They know facts; they do not know how to be wise. They can give answers; they do not know how to ask the question.

NEP 2020 presents itself as an important corrective move. Among the various components included in it, one component which deserves special mention is the promotion of Indian Knowledge Systems. To some teachers, IKS is nothing less than a revival of the golden era of teaching and learning—a mine full of disciplined, holistic, and contemplative learning experiences waiting to be unearthed once more. For some, however, the idea evokes feelings of unease regarding uncritical romanticism, involvement in religion, and the danger of compromising scientific discipline altogether. Both views are exaggerated, in my opinion. In this chapter, I attempt to chart a balanced course that promotes the adoption of IKS principles through humanly sensitive means.

This chapter will be organized as follows. First, it will provide an exploratory look at what exactly Indian Knowledge Systems mean in terms of teaching and learning. Then, it will discuss how NEP 2020 creates opportunities but also poses requirements to incorporate IKS into learning. Finally, it will analyze how the principles of IKS can change learning habits and the challenges it can pose along with what a possible framework for learning based on IKS may entail.

Conceptual Foundations

Indian Knowledge Systems, it must be acknowledged, is a broad term. Under it fall knowledge systems as diverse as Vedic mathematics, Ayurveda, Yoga philosophy, Nyaya, Natya Shastra, Vastu, ecology and other environmental sciences known to Indians since time immemorial, indigenous forms of oral education practiced by Indian tribes. What links them all? Not an ideology or a religion, but rather an epistemology - a system whereby knowledge cannot be reduced solely to a proposition or information. In the knowledge systems we discuss here, knowledge is transformational.

This can hardly be better explained than by Shanwal (2025). IKS sees knowledge not as fragmented, but as connected. The ancient Gurukul never taught its students facts about any particular field in 50-minute lessons. It taught them through life itself, which included studying, contemplating, disciplining their body, moral growth, and engagement in work for the community. Thus, what resulted from this teaching method were not academic qualifications, but dispositions.

The following three teachings from this tradition can be of particular significance to our discussion of student behaviors. First, there is Shravan-Manan-Nididhyasana - gradual movement from attentive listening to profound thinking and then contemplative assimilation. This is not just an educational technique. Rather, it is a conception of the mechanism by which the human mind acquires knowledge. Second, there is Svadhyaya (or self-study), meaning disciplined practice of self-examination based on constant interaction with ideas expressed through books. Third, there is consideration of Kala (time). It implies respect for inherent rhythms of studying process, awareness of non-uniformity of mental activity, and acceptance of these rhythms as an integral part of any wisdom.

According to Kandwal & Negi (2024), these teachings are not just cultural artifacts. In fact, they bear great practical relevance to how students actually study, organize themselves, respond to difficulties, and remain motivated throughout the entire learning process. Now, the question arises as to how we can make them alive again and apply in our modern classroom environment.

Study Habits: A Critical Analysis of the Current Paradigm

There has been an abundance of study of study habits in contemporary educational psychology. Spaced repetition trumps massed practice, as do active retrieval and the interrogation of meaning in elaborative questioning, all findings of which we have been aware for many years. As Das and Chatterjee (2025) point out, overlearning, spacing, active assignment work, revision, and recitation are all important components of good study habits.

Something essential is, however, absent from all the current Western paradigms of study. The popular paradigm of self-regulation proposed by Zimmerman is highly cognitive and motivational but gives no thought to the internal world of the learner. Self-regulation focuses on goal-setting, monitoring, and adaptation of strategies-all of which are crucial-while posing no questions about how the act of studying can be made a sacred activity, how students' sense of purpose-their Sankalpa-influences their learning, or the importance of silence in the process.

It is not for lack of humility, but because of a certain linguistic limitation within a materialist and individualist culture that has characterized much of cognitive science research up to now, that these questions have never been asked before. IKS provides the language to formulate such questions. The challenge of NEP 2020 is to enable an authentic dialogue between the two cultures.

NEP 2020 and the IKS mandate

In many ways, NEP 2020 is the most philosophical education policy ever formulated in India. This policy unequivocally rejects the highly examination-centered and rote-learning-based nature of schooling in India and aims

at promoting education that would be holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and learner-centered. Most importantly from the perspective of the present chapter, NEP 2020 mandates the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems into the education process at all levels-as not an additional component but a pedagogical approach per se.

The provisions contained in NEP 2020 are indeed empowering. The focus of this policy on mother tongue as a medium of instruction makes possible the promotion of indigenous knowledge systems that always used to develop in vernacular language. The accent on learning by experience corresponds with the IKS principle of "learning by doing". Holistic development advocated by NEP 2020 covers physical, affective, ethical, and intellectual growth-all these correspond to the holistic view of a human being according to IKS tradition.

However, Kumar and Verma (2024) provide further insight into the discussion by exploring assessment changes brought about by NEP 2020. They contend that introducing continuous and comprehensive assessment may enhance studying practices by fostering a routine studying approach rather than encouraging last-minute cramming. The introduction of semester system in combination with portfolio-based assessment (e.g., the proposed automatic portfolio assessment described by Panda et al., 2026) may create conditions conducive to continuous studying as opposed to mechanical learning.

It should be pointed out, however, that the implementation of the new policy has certain limitations which need to be discussed. For instance, according to Shanwal (2025), there is no standard curriculum of IKS, the training of instructors in IKS-related pedagogical approaches is not sufficiently widespread, and the documentation of indigenous knowledge remains incomplete. In addition, there is a lingering concern in academia about the legitimacy of including IKS as a subject into the curriculum: some doubt whether it is a topic worthy of scientific research or simply a nostalgic exercise. Such reservations cannot be ignored.

How IKS Approaches Can Help Reform Study Techniques

Reforming one's approach to studying based on IKS does not simply entail switching from one technique to another. Rather, it requires adopting a new attitude about learning. The following represents five ways that approaches informed by IKS, when deliberately adopted, can influence not only how students' study, but who they are as learners.

From Passive Receptive Learning to Active Contemplation

Passive re-reading of highlighted sections, simply running eyes over the text in the hope that some of the knowledge would get through, is still the most common strategy of study in Indian classrooms. The IKS approach of Manan, or deep contemplation about what one has learned, is quite different from the conventional way of studying. This form of learning is not passive. It is an act of intellectual debate and criticism with regard to ideas: playing with ideas, challenging the ideas against one's experience and finding out what lies beyond the ideas.

Manan, when practiced by students, can be translated into a task which involves reading and then shutting the book and writing down for ten minutes, questioning one's own learning. For example, questions such as: 'What didn't I understand?', 'What surprised me?' and 'What do I find difficult to accept?' would all be relevant. This technique is fully compatible with modern research in cognitive sciences.

Learning In Tune with the Clock, Not Against It

IKS's view of Kala-time as a dynamic rhythm, rather than an empty vessel, can affect study schedules. Traditional Indian scriptures, like modern neuroscientific research, indicate that people have different cognitive capabilities throughout the day. The Brahma Muhurta, which is the 90-minute period before sunrise, is believed to be the time when people can achieve better comprehension and receptiveness. Modern research has shown that people generally have improved working memory skills and better knowledge consolidation during the morning.

The concept of Kala-time is also reflected in the belief that rest itself is learning. In other words, nididhyasana, which is the third part of the process of Shravan-Manan-Nididhyasana, implies that the assimilation of knowledge involves digestion-like process when knowledge gets absorbed at subconscious levels.

Purpose as the Basis of Motivation

A key problem faced by modern Indian students lies in the area of motivation. They do not study out of any love for learning; rather, they are motivated to do well in their exams due to the threat of penalties imposed on them or because earning a degree is financially essential. Thus, the resulting mode of motivation is an extrinsic one, where studying is either for reward or to avoid punishment, lacking an inner drive to keep students motivated once the outside forces stop motivating them.

IKS provides a unique model of motivation based on Sankalpa, which means intention or commitment, and Purusharthas, the four goals of human life. According to Kandwal & Negi (2024), linking learning to both Dharma and Artha can turn this activity into a profession. A student with a sense of the purpose of her education will approach her studies differently. Not only would she have a better attitude to her academic pursuits, but she would also be able to resist distractions and avoid procrastination.

The Body as a Tool for Learning

While the western tradition of education in general has largely ignored the importance of the body in intellectual learning—a separate entity that should be seated in a chair while the mind works—IKS has never doubted the embodiment of knowledge. Yogic philosophy, in its classical form, does not prescribe exercise; it offers a way to integrate the body, breath, and mind—a process without which there can be no meaningful and sustained learning experience.

By engaging in five minutes of pranayama before starting work, one is not wasting precious moments but creating conditions in which effective learning can take place. As Yadav (2025) mentions, screen fatigue and digital anxiety are real challenges to learning. Practices like yoga, pranayama, and even mindful movements help manage neurophysiological factors such as cortisol release and nervous system regulation to ensure optimal focus on a task.

Dialogue and Debate as Methods of Learning

Dialogue has been intrinsic to the Indian practice of learning since ancient times. In the famous dialogues between Indian philosophers, the focus was more on epistemology—the act of challenging and debating to gain knowledge. In today's time, the ancient tradition of Shastrartha finds an echo in the Socratic seminars, peer teaching, and problem solving.

In the context of NEP 2020, Das and Chatterjee (2025) mention peer collaboration and communication as critical aspects of the proposed improvement in study habits. However, the tradition of IKS implies that true learning requires the challenge and stimulation provided by dialogues. Without such dialogue, the learner's understanding suffers due to a lack of diversity. It would be wrong to think that integrating IKS into NEP 2020 would be a piece of cake. As mentioned in the literature review above, there are five challenges identified consistently across the sources. And these should be taken seriously.

Teacher preparation poses the first challenge to integrating IKS into NEP 2020

According to Shanwal (2025), there can be no integration of IKS in higher education without the development of faculty members; otherwise, such a step remains a policy objective but does not materialize in teaching-learning

processes. The second barrier is curriculum overload. The current curriculum in India is already challenging for undergraduate students, and incorporating IKS into it without any changes can simply cause more burden.

The third barrier, which seems to be very pertinent in this age of technology, is the issue of distraction. In the study conducted by Sharma (2026), it was discovered that students who were dependent on their smartphones had less study hours per day, poor working memory, and poor attention management capacity. The meditative practice recommended by IKS needs a focused mind.

Fourth, there is the danger of romanticization. All of the Indian education system's traditions have not been enlightened. While the Gurukul tradition had great wisdom about how to teach, it also involved exclusion of certain castes from being educated. The true integration of IKS into today's schools and colleges should be critically selective, embracing the good aspects but rejecting those which were unjust. Fifth, there is the problem of mismatching assessment criteria. While students may study using reflective methods, they still have to pass exams based on quick memorization. As long as the exam systems remain the same, there will always be incentives to study via rote memorization.

Nonetheless, several enablers do exist. First of all, NEP 2020 offers legitimate policy room which did not exist before. Growing global interest in the mindfulness and contemplative approach can create cultural readiness to implement IKS traditions in education. Finally, digital tools – if used wisely, as Yadav (2025) states – can provide students access to IKS material which they could otherwise not see.

And there is also, within Indian students themselves, an undercurrent of craving for deeper meaning: for comprehension not only of their subject matter but of its purpose, and of themselves in the process of acquiring that knowledge.

The SPANDA Framework: A Practical Way Forward with IKS-Led Study

The SPANDA Framework is offered as a practical, actionable structure which allows us to take concrete steps in incorporating the ideas behind IKS in our learning practices. Spanda, in Sanskrit, means vibration, pulse, or creative energy—a beautiful word that describes so well the concept of the act of learning as vibrant, energetic, alive. This model takes shape in six pillars, all of them based on IKS practices and all compatible with modern findings from the learning sciences.

The first such pillar is that of Silence and Centering, based on the concepts of Pratyahara (withdrawing the senses) and meditation. This would mean beginning each study session by taking two to five minutes of silence—no phones, no music, no noise. Simply allowing the brain to settle before any work commences. Studies of attention have shown us how much easier it is to focus and switch tasks when we start with pre-task centering.

The next pillar is Purpose Setting, which comes from the concept of Sankalpa in IKS. Before starting a study session, the student should ask himself questions such as what he aims to learn in this session and what the importance of that topic is. This approach is not intended as a method of measuring performance. This is a means of directing his attention towards a more conscious learning experience. The third pillar is Active Reflection, which comes from the Manan concept in IKS. After studying or attending lectures, students are encouraged to write a few words about what he has understood, what he did not understand, and what he wishes to discover.

The next pillar is the concept of Narrative Learning, coming from the oral traditions of Indian pedagogy. It is easier to grasp complex information when they are presented in the context of stories. That is what Indian scholars used as well to explain many different concepts with the help of literature such as the Puranas, the Panchatantra, and the Jataka Tales. Lastly, the concept of Dialogue and Debate, known as Shastrartha in India.

The sixth and final pillar in the framework is that of Assimilation and Rest, based on the principle of Nididhyasana and the Yogic practice of Yoga Nidra. Assimilation and Rest, according to this framework, take into account the truth that rest does not necessarily mean lack of learning but, rather, constitutes an essential component of the learning process itself. Enough sleep, breaks, and deliberate restful reflection sessions are all critical prerequisites of deep learning.

Finally, it is essential to note that SPANDA is not a protocol for following the six pillars but, rather, a set of orientations from which different individuals will benefit in different ways and from which different disciplines will derive varying importance of each of the six elements. For example, a mathematician may find more productive use of the Dialogue and Debate pillar, while a literary student may benefit more from the Narrative Learning pillar.

Discussion

Underlying the practical concerns of this chapter there is another issue which needs to be stated outright. It is the question of purpose. The colonial legacy of education left behind the goal of creating Indians in blood and colour who were thoroughly Anglicized in intellectual sensibility. This goal was accomplished in more ways than one too effectively. Higher education in India after independence has been modeled on Western academic institutions – their citation practices, disciplinary divisions, examination structures, narrow definition of achievement.

The NEP 2020, despite the difficulties inherent in implementation, is a bold step towards addressing this question anew. It indicates that perhaps Indian education should seek to utilize the rich heritage of its civilization, not as some sort of return to pre-modern forms, but as a contribution to the modern age. The Indian Knowledge System traditions covered in this chapter do not constitute quaint relics from the past. On the contrary, they are examples of a deeply human and highly developed approach to education and the formation of knowledge.

The literature reviewed above clearly and unambiguously reinforces this argument. Kandwal and Negi (2024) indicate how IKS may enhance ethical leadership and reflective practice. Furthermore, Das and Chatterjee (2025) highlight the connection between holistic learning and improvements in study practices and academic success. Moreover, Shanwal (2025) presents the diversity of resources that can be leveraged through the use of IKS for curriculum enhancement purposes. Therefore, it appears that a simple solution to improving study practices in India involves not just more effective methods and technologies but a deeper narrative about the essence of education itself.

Conclusion

Let us go back to the student discussed at the beginning of this chapter-the girl with her smartphone, her scattered mind, and her late-night anxieties in preparation for examinations. She is not the issue; she is a victim of a system which, for many years, has asked her to learn in ways entirely opposite to how a person's brain works. She has been told to memorise without comprehending, to achieve without purpose, to compete without meaning.

What IKS can offer her-and what NEP 2020 hopes to give at its best level-is a totally different proposition. It asks her to study in the manner in which her tradition has always educated, with intention, with thought, with her body and breathing involved, with her community as support and her sleep as her partner rather than as an indulgence. It asks her to comprehend that education is not something that happens to her during examinations but something that happens inside her through her entire life because of what she learned about loving learning.

This SPANDA framework is an offering towards such an end.

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