

Moral and Ethical Development in the Gurukul System: A Lost Treasure

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Abstract

The Gurukul system of ancient India represents a comprehensive and holistic model of education, rooted in a nurturing residential environment and the sacred Guru–Shishya (teacher–student) relationship. This system emphasized personalized learning, discipline, and ethical development, helping students cultivate moral values, self-control, and respect for society. This research explores the moral and ethical principles embedded within the Gurukul framework, highlighting how teachings drawn from Hindu scriptures were integrated into daily life. These values played an important role to make liable society. In contrast, contemporary education systems tend to focus more on rapid academic achievement, competition, and technological advancement. As a result, aspects such as character formation, emotional maturity, and ethical reasoning often receive less attention. Through an extensive review of literature and primary data collected from educators and students, this study examines the relevance of the Gurukul model in addressing present-day educational challenges. The findings suggest that incorporating selected elements of the Gurukul approach such as value-based learning, mentorship, and experiential activities could significantly strengthen moral education in modern schools and colleges. Ultimately, this study advocates for a balanced educational framework that combines academic excellence with ethical and emotional growth, preparing students to face the complexities of contemporary society with responsibility and integrity.

Keywords: *Ancient India, Gurukul System, Holistic Education, Modern Educational, Academic Success, Ethical Growth*

Introduction

A Gurukul system represents a notable and significant instance of holistic education that thrived in ancient India. This system transcended the conventional idea of schools; and it fostered a supportive, harmonious, and healthy atmosphere, which deeply related to the academic improvement of an individual's understanding. The Guru-Shishya (teacher-student) relationship was essential to the Gurukul system; emphasizing personalized instruction, character building and spiritual as well as religious education.

Unlike the current structure, the education system centered on the Gurukul model incorporated life lessons derived from Hindu scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita. This method encouraged the development of values such as truth (Satya), righteousness (Dharma), and non-violence (Ahimsa). The ethical and moral growth fostered in the Gurukul system seems to have diminished in today's context, indicating that the contemporary education prioritizes rapid success and experimental outcomes, often attained through unfair methods without proper evaluations. The genuine concern is that currently we are observing a lack of adequate ethical or character development within the modern education system as the global teaching and educational shifts towards competition and a rat race, along with advancements in technology-based teaching learning. Numerous instances of technological leaning can negatively impact us by causing distraction, fostering addiction to resources, shifting thinking, and even over-looking fundamental like handwriting because of digitalization, while also individual are become detached socially, showing little interest in their surroundings.

These are the hidden and serious distinctions between past and current educational systems, which quickly raise the question of whether the morals and ethics of the Gurukul system have been neglected. It is certainly essential to investigate the moral and ethical foundation of the Gurukul and its role in shaping responsible citizens and leaders for the future, and reflect on its importance in today's educational environment. By examining the previous

perspectives and contemporary challenges in education, the research seeks to assess whether the ethical guidelines of the Gurukul system can serve as a beacon for rejuvenating moral education in today's schools and colleges.

Image-1- An Ancient Gurukul System



<https://www.abplive.com/photo-gallery/education/how-did-gurukuls-look-1500-years-ago-ai-showed-images-2651086>

Literature Review:

Several studies highlight the historical significance of the Gurukul system in shaping India's educational and cultural landscape. According to the study (1), education in ancient India was deeply intertwined with religious and moral instruction, and students were expected to uphold values such as honesty, selflessness, and devotion to duty. Similarly, (2) noted that, the Guru-Shishya parampara (teacher-disciple tradition) played a crucial role in transferring ethical wisdom from one generation to the next. Scholars agree that moral education in the Gurukul system was imparted not through textbooks but through practical experiences, storytelling, and real-life applications. It was mandatory for the students to develop discipline, respect, and self-reliance on a regular basis in Gurukul also fostering a holistic learning environment beyond mere academics (3). Expanding on this, (4) explores the spiritual foundation of the Gurukul system, highlighting how moral teachings were deeply rooted in Hindu scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita, emphasizing key ethical principles like Dharma (righteousness), Ahimsa (non-violence), and Satya (truthfulness). Further, (5) discusses how this ethical framework played a crucial role in shaping leaders with integrity, citing historical examples where rulers and scholars, nurtured under the Gurukul system, exemplified wisdom, justice, and moral strength in their leadership.

With the advent of colonial education, the focus of learning shifted toward a Westernized curriculum that emphasized scientific reasoning, industrial skills, and economic progress (6). Studies suggest that this transition led to a gradual decline in moral and ethical education: (7) points out that the weakening of the teacher-student bond in the evolving classroom environment, it also has created gaps in nurturing values and providing meaningful mentorship to students, reducing the role of educators as moral guides. Building on this, (8) observes that moral education in contemporary schools is often superficial, confined to theoretical lessons rather than practical, experience-based learning, making it less impactful. This gap in holistic moral development is further highlighted in a (9) report, which notes the increasing levels of stress, anxiety, and ethical dilemmas among students in modern education systems, emphasizing the urgent need for a more integrated approach to character-building.

Studies comparing traditional and modern education models highlight key differences, (10) contrasts the community-based learning of Gurukuls, which emphasized collective growth and shared responsibilities, with the individualistic, competition-driven approach of modern education that often prioritizes personal achievement over ethical development. Supporting this, (11) finds that Gurukul students developed stronger ethical reasoning skills

due to their immersive, experience-based learning environment, where moral values were instilled through daily practice rather than rote instruction. Building on these insights, (12) suggests that incorporating key elements of the Gurukul model—such as value-based education and teacher mentorship—into modern schooling could significantly enhance students' moral and ethical outlook, fostering a more balanced and responsible society.

Several scholars propose ways to integrate Gurukul ethics into contemporary education: (13) advocates for mentorship-driven education, emphasizing the need for teachers to take an active role in shaping students' moral character through close guidance and personal interaction. Expanding on this, (14) suggests that experiential and community-based learning models can be effective in instilling ethical values by allowing students to engage with real-world moral dilemmas and social responsibilities. Supporting these perspectives, (15) recommends integrating moral philosophy and character-building exercises into school curricula to ensure a more comprehensive and value-driven education system.

Research Question:

Can principles and practices of the ancient Gurukul system be integrated into current education to strengthen moral and ethical expansion among students?

Hypothesis:

1. Statement: There is a significant association between the moral and ethical principles of the Gurukul system and students' moral and ethical development in modern education.
 - Null Hypothesis: H_{01} : There is no significant correlation between Gurukul moral-ethical principles and students' moral-ethical development.
 - Alternative Hypothesis: H_{11} : There is a significant correlation between Gurukul moral-ethical principles and students' moral-ethical development.
2. Statement: The practices of the Gurukul system have a significant influence on the relevance and need for value-based education in modern schools.
 - Null Hypothesis: H_{02} : Gurukul practices have no significant influence on the perceived need for value-based education in modern schools.
 - Alternative Hypothesis: H_{12} : Gurukul practices have a significant influence on the perceived need for value-based education in modern schools.

The study objectives:

1. To explore the moral and ethical principles embedded in the Gurukul system
2. To analyze the practices that facilitated moral development in the Gurukul system
3. To assess the relevance of the Gurukul system in current education.
4. To know the need of Gurukul System in modern education

Research Methodology:

A mixed-method research design was used, combining primary survey data with secondary literature. The study employed a structured questionnaire containing Likert-scale items across four sections; Awareness of Gurukul system, Perceptions of modern education, Integration of Gurukul values, Overall reflections on ethics and education. A purposive sample of $n = 100$ participants (students and teachers) was selected. Instrument Development, items were adapted from literature, classical educational concepts, and modern ethical education tools.

Moral and Ethical Principles Embedded in the Gurukul System

Moral and ethical principles were not merely theoretical; they were embedded in everyday routine practice and the fundamental framework of life in the Gurukul. Below are some of the fundamental values inherent in the Gurukul system:

In Indian philosophy, dharma (धर्म) goes beyond just rules and regulations; it encompasses the moral framework that supports the universe. The concept of dharma includes every aspect of life, such as education. Historically, education sought to foster a sense of ethical obligation, allowing students to learn how to live principled lives through their roles in the community. Dharmashastras, ancient texts regarding legal principles and ethical standard, emphasized the importance of virtue in both personal and communal conduct.

According to Hindu scriptures, Ahimsa (अहिंसा), which translates to "non-violence," it signifies the lack of harmful intent towards all creatures at all times (in thought, word, and deed). (अहिंसा सर्वत्र सर्वकाल सर्वप्राणिनामानभिद्रोह). In this manner, non-violence encompasses not only refrain from betraying all living beings through actions or words; it also includes the lack of betrayal originating from the mind. If any form of aggressive behavior arises then they are deemed unhelpful in achieving sadhana as per grantha.

Satya (सत्य) signifies the principle of truthfulness, viewed as a sound foundation of ethical and social behavior and a core value instilled in learners, highlighting that education prioritized the significance of consistently speaking and acting truthfully, in harmony with the notion of 'Dharma' (righteousness) and aspiring for a morally virtuous life; this was profoundly integrated into the Gurukul system, where students acquired not only knowledge but also ethical principles like Satya.

Self-Discipline and Simplicity (स्वयं-शिस्त आणि साधेपणा), were deeply ingrained through a combination of factors like living a simple life within the teacher's household, performing daily chores, strict adherence to routines, emphasis on ethical values, and a strong teacher-student relationship that fostered respect and accountability, all contributing to the development of a disciplined character and a focus on inner development rather than material pursuits.

Respect for Nature and All Beings (आदर), examining how the Gurukul system instilled a sense of reverence for the natural world and all living beings, promoting an eco-centric worldview rooted in respect and responsibility.

The moral and ethical principles of the Gurukul system were designed not only to disseminate knowledge, but shaping the character. These principles—Dharma, Ahimsa, Satya, self-discipline, and Seva formed a robust framework for cultivating responsible, compassionate, and virtuous individuals. These principles were not just taught in theory but were reinforced through the everyday practices, lived experiences, and the Guru-Shishya tradition.

These values, though rooted in ancient India, have universal significance and can offer valuable lessons for modern education systems facing increasing challenges in the areas of ethical development, character-building, and holistic education.

The Gurukul system was deeply rooted in methods and practices that fostered the moral development of students. Unlike modern, exam-driven education, the focus was on nurturing the entire personality—intellectually, ethically, and spiritually.

1. The Guru-Shishya Parampara (गुरु-शिष्य परंपरा) was central to the Gurukul system. The bond among the Guru (teacher) and Shishya (student) was one of shared admiration, trust, and devotion. The Guru not only imparted knowledge but also acted as a moral guide, shaping the character and ethics of the student through personal example and direct interaction. Mentorship was not limited to academics; but beyond the class. The Teacher

(Guru) also provided life lessons, moral counsel, and spiritual guidance. This bond encouraged the Shishya to adopt the Guru's ethical values, thereby learning through observation and personal engagement. The Guru played an active role in helping the student navigate life's moral dilemmas, thereby becoming a living example of virtue and ethics.

2. Learning was not confined to theoretical knowledge but included hands-on experiences, storytelling, and practical applications of ethical principles. Students were engaged in daily chores such as cooking, cleaning, and serving the community, all of which were done with a sense of discipline and purpose. These tasks taught the students humility, respect for labor, and the importance of service. Ethical lessons were often delivered through stories from scriptures, mythology, and the lives of great saints, kings, and scholars. These stories acted as moral parables that exemplified values such as bravery, honesty, selflessness, and righteousness.
3. Spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayers, (योगविद्या) and rituals played a key role in moral and ethical development. These practices were not only for personal spiritual growth but were designed to instill values like self-discipline, patience, and inner peace. The daily rituals encouraged students to connect with the divine, grounding them in principles. Through spiritual practices, students were encouraged to develop a sense of self-awareness, fostering inner moral strength.
4. The concept of Seva (निःस्वार्थ सेवा), were students involved in community service and helping with the welfare of the Guru, their peers, and the surrounding village. This hands-on service allowed them to develop empathy, compassion, and a sense of social responsibility. Students were taught that Seva was an important moral duty, and it helped them understand the values of humility and selflessness. These experiences promoted ethical values by emphasizing the well-being of the collective over individual gain.
5. Group Learning and Collaboration (सहयोग समर्थन), students often learned together in a community setting, which encouraged collaborative learning. This environment helped foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective ethics. Peer learning and group discussions also promoted the development of moral reasoning, as students were encouraged to engage in debates and discussions about ethical dilemmas, righteousness, and justice. This collaboration taught them the importance of respecting differing opinions and engaging in thoughtful, constructive dialogue.
6. The life in a Gurukul was governed by strict Discipline and Routine (शिस्त आणि सवय), which contributed significantly to the moral development of students. A typical day would begin with prayers, followed by study, physical activity, and chores, all designed to build a well-rounded character. Self-discipline was emphasized, as students were required to maintain punctuality, orderliness, and responsibility for their actions. This routine also fostered qualities like focus, patience, and perseverance, all essential elements of moral maturity.
7. Storytelling and Mythological Teachings (कथाकथन आणि पुराण), narratives from ancient scriptures (Vedas, Upanishads, and Mahabharata and Ramayana) were used to convey ethical lessons. Stories of great leaders, sages, and warriors were used to highlight the importance of Dharma (righteousness), Satya (truthfulness), and Ahimsa (non-violence). These stories not only entertained but also taught students about the complexities of moral choices, ethical conduct, and the consequences of actions.
8. Rituals in the Gurukul were not just spiritual but also served as a medium for moral reflection. By engaging in rituals like yajnas (यज्ञ), pujas (पूजा), and fasting (उपवास), students were taught the importance of self-control, humility, and devotion. These rituals also reinforced the importance of community, the divine, and the moral order of the universe. Through daily reflection, students developed a detailed understanding of their existence in the world and ethical obligations to others.

The application of the Gurukul system in contemporary education-

In today's society, where learners frequently encounter stress, peer influences, and ethical dilemmas, the demand for moral education and character growth is increasing. Contemporary education consistently prioritizes cognitive abilities and performance on exams and other material stuff, overlooking the cultivation of ethical reasoning and moral principles. Integrating the Gurukul principles can aid in bridging this gap. Although prioritizing ethical principles is vital, because modern education must also address the demand for global, scientific, and technological progress regarding the significance of Moral and Ethical Development within the Gurukul System.

The quality of teacher-student relationships significantly influences students' academic performance and well-being. A study (16) introduced the Teacher–Student Relationship Quality Questionnaire (TSRQ-Q) to evaluate perceptions of the students and teachers. The findings indicate that positive connect have both direct and indirect effects on student outcomes, emphasizing the importance of fostering such relationships in educational settings.

Similarly, a study (17) explored the connection among teacher-student and academic achievement among eighth-grade students in China. They discovered that self-efficacy mediates this relationship, accounting for 68% of the total effect. This suggests that positive teacher-student interactions can enhance students' belief in their abilities, thereby improving academic performance, and therefore there is a great relevance of teacher student's relationship of gurukul system in today's education.

The Gurukul system of ancient India emphasized experiential learning, where students resided with their gurus (teachers), engaging in practical, hands-on education that extended beyond theoretical knowledge. The Gurukul system was inherently pragmatic, with students participating in various outdoor and practical activities, thereby fostering a deep connection between learning and real-life applications (18).

Similarly, (19) discusses how the Gurukul system's immersive approach facilitated holistic education. Students engaged in daily activities alongside their gurus, integrating intellectual pursuits with practical skills and ethical teachings, thus embodying the principles of experiential learning. These studies underscore the relevance of the Gurukul system's experiential learning approach, suggesting that its principles can inform and enrich contemporary educational practices by emphasizing practical engagement and holistic development.

The Gurukul system of ancient India emphasized a structured daily routine that integrated academic learning with practical life skills, fostering discipline and holistic development. Regimen encompassed not only the study of sacred texts but also activities like meditation, physical exercise, and communal responsibilities, promoting a balanced lifestyle (19) suggests that incorporating such structured routines in contemporary education can enhance students' time management skills, self-discipline, and overall well-being.

The integration of life skills and values into modern education, inspired by the Gurukul model, can provide students with a well-rounded perspective, preparing them for real-life challenges beyond academic success (20). This approach underscores the relevance of structured daily routines in nurturing responsible and capable individuals in today's educational landscape. These perspectives suggest that adopting elements of the Gurukul system's structured daily routine can make holistic improvement of students in contemporary education.

The integration of body, mind, and spirit in contemporary education has garnered attention for its potential to enhance holistic well-being among students. The findings revealed significant improvements in well-being, and quality of life among participants who underwent the intervention, suggesting that such holistic approaches can be beneficial in educational settings to support students' mental health and overall development (21).

Body-mind-spirit model interventions positively impact holistic well-being, underscoring the relevance of incorporating body-mind-spirit approaches in contemporary education to foster comprehensive student development (22). These studies highlight the essence of addressing interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit in educational practices to promote holistic well-being among students. The Gurukul system of ancient India emphasized

community living and collective responsibility, principles that hold significant relevance for contemporary education. Engaging in communal activities that fostered a sense of shared responsibility and mutual support when students residing with their guru (23). This communal living environment not only facilitated academic learning but also instilled values of cooperation, discipline, and social responsibility among students.

The integration of life skills and values into modern education, inspired by the Gurukul model, can provide students with a well-rounded perspective, preparing them for real-life challenges beyond academic success (24). This approach underscores the relevance of structured daily routines in nurturing responsible and capable individuals in today's educational landscape. These perspectives suggest that incorporating elements of community living and collective responsibility from the Gurukul system can enhance the development of social skills, empathy, and a sense of belonging among students in modern educational settings.

The integration of technology into the traditional Gurukul system has been explored to enhance contemporary education. There is a great potential benefit of combining Gurukul principles with modern technological advancements (25). Madhekar suggests that incorporating computer-aided learning and cloud computing can personalize education while maintaining the communal and experiential aspects of the Gurukul system. However, he notes that practical implementation of such integrations remains limited and calls for further experimentation to validate these theoretical models.

The school in Madras 'Sri Sathya Vidhya Mandir, India, that caters to economically challenged families (26). The institution effectively blends traditional Gurukul methodologies with modern computer-based instruction, providing a unique and robust education at a reasonable cost. Dhanaraj's study highlights the feasibility and advantages of integrating technology into the Gurukul framework to enhance educational outcomes. These studies underscore the relevance of merging technological tools with the Gurukul system's traditional practices to enrich contemporary education. They advocate for further research and practical applications to develop sustainable educational models that leverage the strengths of both traditional and modern approaches.

Data Interpretation and result:

The information gathered via the structured questionnaire offers insightful information about Awareness of Gurukul system, Perceptions of modern education, Integration of Gurukul values, Overall reflections on ethics and education.

Reliability: Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Table: Reliability Scores

Construct	Cronbach's α
Gurukul Moral–Ethical Principles	0.973
Students' Moral–Ethical Development	0.926
Gurukul Practices	0.934
Need for Value-Based Education	0.918

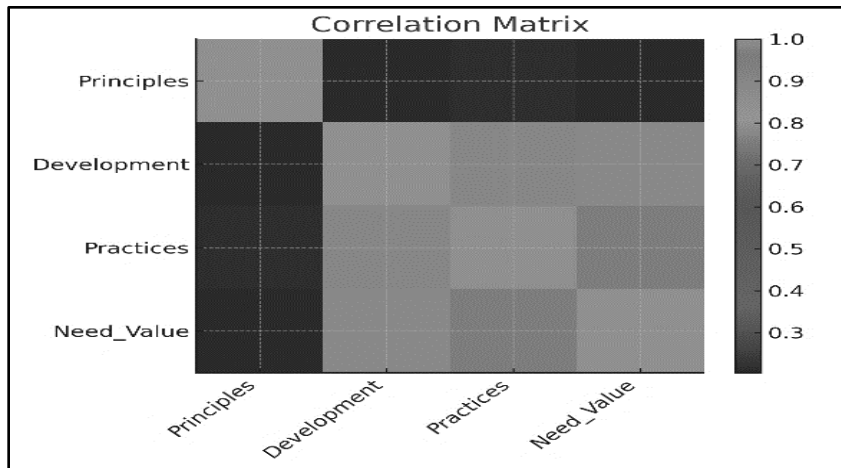
These reliability levels confirm that the items consistently measured the intended constructs.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to test the relationships between constructs.

Table: Correlation Analysis

Relationship	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Principles → Development	0.980	<.001	Very strong positive correlation
Practices → Need for Value-Based Education	0.945	<.001	Strong positive correlation

Figure: Correlation Matrix (Heatmap)



Interpretation:

A correlation of 0.980 indicates that respondents who strongly endorse Gurukul ethical principles also report substantially higher moral–ethical development.

A correlation of 0.945 indicates that Gurukul practices are strongly associated with the perceived need for value-based education in modern institutions.

Regression Analysis: Regression modelling was used to determine the predictive influence between constructs.

Model 1: Predicting Moral–Ethical Development from Principles

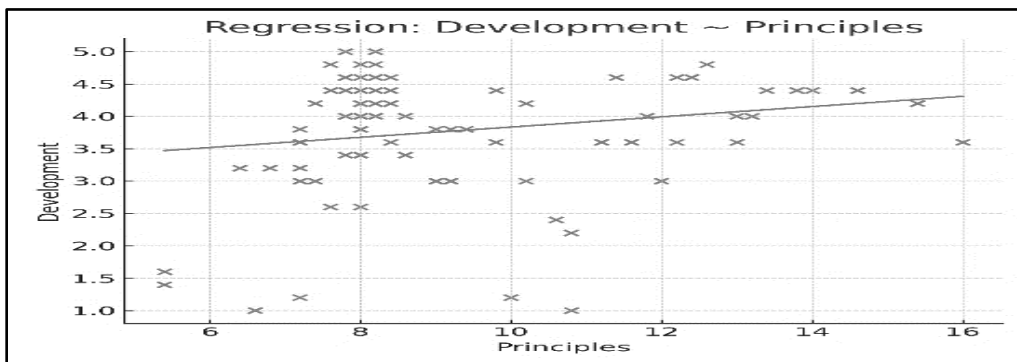


Table:

Regression Model 1

Parameter	β	p-value
Intercept	0.011	.890
Principles	0.992	<.001

Model Fit: $R^2 = 0.961$

Gurukul principles significantly predict students’ moral–ethical development. The model explains 96.1% of variance, indicating an exceptionally strong predictive relationship.

Model 2: Predicting Need for Value-Based Education from Practices

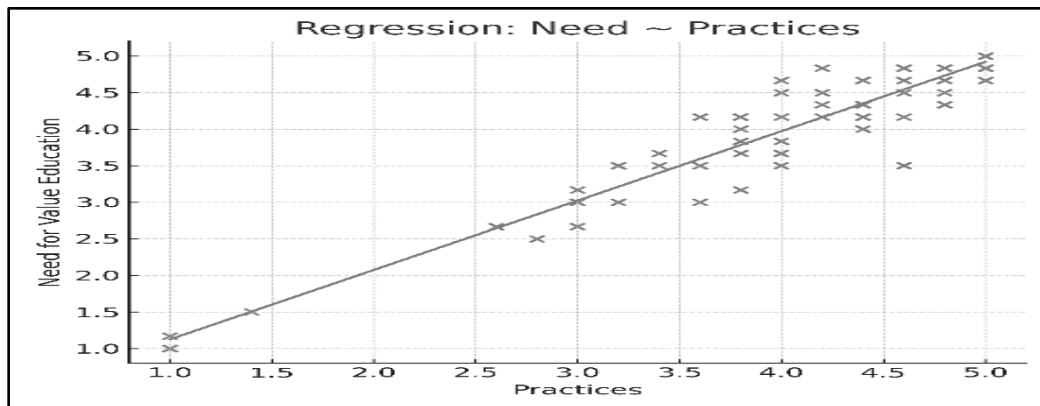


Table.

Regression Model 2

Parameter	β	p-value
Intercept	0.054	.707
Practices	0.999	<.001

Model Fit: $R^2 = 0.894$

Gurukul practices strongly predict the perceived need for value-based education, explaining 89.4% of variance.

Hypothesis Testing Summary:

Hypothesis 1: Given this extremely high correlation strength and high statistical significance, the evidence clearly contradicts the null hypothesis, which proposed no significant relationship.

Therefore, the study rejects the null hypothesis (H_{01}) and accepts the alternative hypothesis (H_{11}). This confirms that Gurukul moral–ethical principles are strongly and positively associated with students' moral and ethical development, indicating that values such as Dharma, Satya, Ahimsa, and disciplined living have a measurable influence on moral outcomes in modern learners.

Hypothesis 2: Since the relationship is both statistically significant and conceptually meaningful, the evidence does not support the null hypothesis, which predicted no influence.

The study therefore rejects the null hypothesis (H_{02}) and accepts the alternative hypothesis (H_{12}). This implies that Gurukul-inspired practices—such as discipline, experiential learning, community living, guru–shishya bonding, and spiritual reflection—substantially shape how individuals perceive the need for value-based education today.

Conclusion

The study provides strong empirical evidence that the traditional Gurukul framework continues to hold significant relevance in shaping modern students' moral and ethical development. The constructs used in the research demonstrated excellent reliability, indicating that the measurement instruments were highly consistent and suitable for assessing value-based dimensions of education.

Correlation and regression analyses revealed exceptionally strong and statistically significant relationships between Gurukul moral–ethical principles, Gurukul-inspired practices, and contemporary educational outcomes. The findings show that adherence to principles such as Dharma, Satya, Ahimsa, discipline, and respect is closely associated with higher levels of students' moral–ethical development. Similarly, Gurukul practices particularly experiential learning, community living, the guru–shishya relationship, and spiritual reflection strongly influences the perceived need for value-based education in today's academic environment.

Both hypotheses were supported, confirming that Gurukul values and practices are not only historically important but also pedagogically relevant in the present day. The high predictive power demonstrated in the regression models (R^2 values of 0.961 and 0.894) highlights that these traditional educational components have a measurable and meaningful impact on shaping ethical awareness and value-based needs among learners.

As per the gathered data, respondents consistently expressed strong agreement with statements related to the core principles of the Gurukul system such as discipline, moral–ethical learning, respectful teacher–student relationships, and holistic personality development. The high mean scores across these items suggest that these traditional values are still perceived as essential in the context of contemporary education. This indicates that the philosophical foundations of the Gurukul model continue to resonate with modern educational needs. The findings therefore affirm that the Gurukul system maintains significant relevance in present-day academic environments, primarily due to its emphasis on character formation and value-based learning, which are increasingly regarded as missing dimensions in today’s institutions.

The gathered data further reveals that respondents believe modern education is overly academic and performance-oriented, with insufficient emphasis on moral reasoning, ethical behavior, and life skills. High levels of agreement in Section B highlight a perceived gap between academic progress and moral development in current educational settings. This gap underscores a critical need for integrating value-based components, many of which are inherent to the Gurukul tradition. The data thus demonstrates a clear demand for incorporating Gurukul-inspired practices—such as ethical instruction, self-discipline, reflective learning, and close mentorship—into the modern educational framework. Such integration is viewed as essential for nurturing well-rounded individuals who possess not only academic competence but also strong moral and ethical grounding.

Contemporary education systems can integrate the holistic values of the Gurukul system into existing frameworks by focusing on ethical teaching, student well-being, community involvement, and personalized mentorship. In doing so, it is possible to create a balanced approach that combines academic excellence with ethical responsibility and personal growth, addressing the evolving needs of students in today’s world.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this study.

Author Contributions

Pooja Deshmukh: Conceptualization, literature review, Data collection, manuscript drafting and correspondence, Study supervision, analysis, Manuscript editing

Ethics Approval

Not applicable. This study does not involve human or animal subjects.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Abbreviations

TSRQ-Q- Teacher–Student Relationship Quality Questionnaire

NIEPA- National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration

UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



BMS- Body Mind Spirit Model (used in cited studies)**Bibliography:**

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