

Perceptions of Sanskrit Pre-Service Teachers on the Inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Teacher Education Curricula: A Qualitative Phenomenological Exploration

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ABSTRACT

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which have their roots in Sanskrit traditions such as Ayurveda and Vedic ecology, must be incorporated into curricula for holistic education, according to India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The views of 18 Sanskrit pre-service B.Ed. teachers in Kerala about IKS inclusion are investigated in this phenomenological study. Four topics surfaced from semi-structured interviews: the benefits of equity for inclusive learning, the pedagogical difficulties in contemporary classrooms, the policy enablers through NEP, and the cultural resonance with Sanskrit shastras. Strong evidence for IKS-Sanskrit synergies (such as Upanishadic knowledge in life skills) is found in the findings, but they also point to obstacles including a lack of resources. A decolonizing narrative frame strengthened relational ethics, while reflexive theme analysis produced nuanced insights. Faculty training and hybrid IKS modules are among the suggestions. This study promotes teacher training that is sensitive to cultural differences in multilingual Keralan contexts.

**Introduction:**

In the context of modern Indian education, the term "Indian Knowledge Systems" (IKS) refers to codified and textually based streams of knowledge that have developed through Sanskritic intellectual traditions like Dharma Shastra (ethics and social order), Ayurveda and Vrikshayurveda (health and ecology), Nyaya (logic and epistemology), and Mimamsa (hermeneutics). These systems are distinguished by an integrated view of reality where knowledge is focused on the welfare of the individual and the group, and metaphysics, ethics, ecology, and social activity are all linked. Since colonial education models narrowed the canon by favouring Western frameworks of reason, science, and evidence while marginalizing rich indigenous intellectual traditions encoded largely in Sanskrit, NEP 2020's decolonization thrust specifically calls for the revitalization and mainstreaming of such Indian Knowledge Systems. IKS place importance on contextual wisdom, ethical responsibility, spiritual dimensions of knowledge, and harmony with nature and society, in contrast to many Western epistemologies that prioritize empiricism, linear reasoning, disciplinary fragmentation, and the pursuit of context-free universals. Instead of creating a strict dichotomy, this difference draws attention to the possibility of dialogic interaction between IKS and Western frameworks, where each can challenge and enhance the other in the direction of a more comprehensive and pluralistic epistemic environment.

Within this national ambition, Kerala offers a unique sociolinguistic and educational setting for the integration of IKS, particularly through Sanskrit education. The state's multilingual legacy, in which Malayalam coexists with Sanskrit, English, and other languages in cultural and academic settings, provides fertile ground for cross-linguistic interpretations of ancient literature and notions. Sanskrit teachers in Kerala are in a unique position because they operate at the intersection of a traditional language of knowledge and contemporary educational realities that demand accessibility, relevance, and critical engagement. The same system is also heavily influenced by strong policy and social commitments to equality, social justice, and inclusive education, which include provisions for students from a variety of socioeconomic, language, and ability backgrounds.

In such a setting, Sanskrit educators are not simply transmitting grammatical rules or literary content; they are potential IKS mediators, interpreting and trans creating classical ideas on logic, ethics, health, the environment, and social relations in ways that resonate with a wide range of learners. This simultaneous expectation of maintaining the depth of IKS while adhering to inclusive education regulations makes the Kerala context especially relevant for investigating how Sanskrit pedagogy might truly anchor Indian Knowledge Systems in modern classrooms.



Despite these potential, there is a significant vacuum in Sanskrit teachers' pre-service preparation for IKS integration in inclusive environments. Teacher education courses frequently present Sanskrit as a language and a collection of literature to be learned, with no clear emphasis on how Indian Knowledge Systems encoded in Sanskrit texts might shape life skills education, value-oriented pedagogy, and inclusive practices. Many pre-service programs focus on content coverage, exams, and canonical texts, leaving student-teachers with insufficient exposure to pedagogical models that link IKS to the lived experiences of diverse learners, including those from marginalized communities or with disabilities.

As a result, novice Sanskrit teachers may enter classrooms without a clear understanding of IKS, concrete strategies for incorporating them into interdisciplinary or life skills-oriented work, or critical tools for negotiating tensions between older normative frameworks and contemporary commitments to democracy, gender equity, and social inclusion. Compounding this is the scarcity of qualitative research that highlights the perspectives of Sanskrit instructors, including their perceptions, challenges, innovations, and resistance to IKS and inclusiveness. Much of the existing discourse is at the policy or curricular level, resulting in a disconnect between aspirational papers and classroom realities.

Objectives

1. To examine how Sanskrit pre-service teachers perceive the relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems and connect them to Sanskrit source texts such as the Vedas and Ayurveda.
2. To analyse the key enabling factors, such as cultural authenticity and contextual relevance, and the major barriers, such as pedagogical misalignment and curricular constraints, that affect the inclusion of IKS in the curriculum.
3. To investigate the ways in which Indian Knowledge Systems can strengthen inclusive education practices and foster life skills development among diverse learners in Kerala classrooms.
4. To derive context-specific, participant-informed recommendations for reforming teacher education programmes in alignment with NEP 2020, particularly with regard to IKS integration in Sanskrit pedagogy.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of IKS inclusion and its feasibility among pre service teachers?



2. How does IKS align with Sanskrit pedagogy?

Literature Overview

The literature on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) stresses its roots in Sanskrit books such as Sulba Sutras (Vedic arithmetic), Natyashastra (arts and emotions), and Ayurvedic works (health, environment), which provide abundant resources for holistic, creative curriculum under NEP 2020. NEP portrays IKS as a decolonizing, Bharat-centric integration with modern subjects, aided by NCERT groups and IKS centres; nonetheless, problems include tokenism, teacher unreadiness, and the need for contextual materials and assessments.

High literacy and multilingualism (Malayalam, English, Sanskrit) in Kerala allow for translanguaging for IKS, as do activities in Ayurveda and Yoga, however exam pressures and language hierarchies cause difficulties. When combined with critical pedagogies, IKS has been shown in research to be transformative for identity, inclusivity, and life skills, transforming Sanskrit education from rote to inquiry.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory explains how Sanskrit pre-service teachers' perceptions change through reflection on assumptions generated by discourse, experiences, and environment, such as Sulba math tasks or ethical text interpretation. A research framework combines IKS content, NEP structures, Kerala's multilingual culture, and transformative processes to investigate perspective shifts, barriers/enablers, and reforms for inclusive teacher education.

Methodology of the study

Research Design

This study uses an interpretivist paradigm and phenomenological approaches to investigate the lived experiences and perspectives of Sanskrit pre-service teachers about the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in pedagogy under NEP 2020 and inclusive education. It promotes subjective meaning-making over hypothesis testing, capturing the complexities of how Keralans balance tradition, curriculum reforms, and diversity.

Participants

18 B.Ed. Sanskrit students (ages 22-28) were purposefully selected from varied Kerala backgrounds (urban/rural, genders, districts) and institutions (government-aided/self-financing, NEP-



reform centered). Recruitment through professors assures a common disciplinary focus, while informed consent emphasizes voluntariness, confidentiality, and no academic impact.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes) Use an open-ended guide with ten basic questions to probe IKS comprehension, resonance with Sanskrit texts (e.g., Vedas, Ayurveda, Natyashastra), classroom/practicum experiences, enablers/barriers, inclusive/life skills connections, and emotional reactions to NEP. Conducted in the participants' choice languages (English, Malayalam, and Sanskrit), audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim (with translations/notes), and augmented with field notes on cues/context.

Analysis, Interpretations and Findings

Adopting an interpretivist paradigm, the analysis uses Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflective theme analysis as the primary technique, which is supplemented by decolonizing narrative analysis (Kovach, 2010) to honour relational IKS epistemologies. This dual approach strikes a compromise between rigorous pattern detection and holistic storytelling, assuring rigor while honouring participants' voices, cultural settings, and oral traditions. Data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed iteratively to answer study questions about IKS perceptions, enablers/barriers, and inclusive pedagogy links.

I. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke's six-phase model provided a flexible scaffold which transcribed into these details.

During the familiarization phase, all 18 transcripts were read and the audio recordings were played several times. Overall, teachers saw IKS as both a source of ethnic pride and a burden owing to exam pressures. Emotional tones were also observed, such as ambivalent views toward NEP 2020 and frequent references to texts such as the Sulba Sutras and Ayurveda. During the initial code generation phase, approximately 150 reflexive codes were produced to capture both surface meanings and deeper notions. The content codes included "IKS as a shastra resource" and "life skills through Natyashastra emotions." They discussed techniques like "negotiating tradition-modernity" and "transformative reframing." For positionality, examples included "custodian identity" and "inclusion dilemmas. During the topic search phase, associated codes were analyzed to identify five possible themes and sub-themes.



During the reviewing themes phase, themes were evaluated for accuracy against the entire data set and weaker clusters that did not fit well were deleted. Four major topics were identified throughout the defining and naming phase. Each provided clear descriptions and tales that related to Mezirow's transformative learning theory and decolonial principles.

The themes that were fixed were used to analyse the whole content. It is as follows:

- **Theme 1: Cultural Resonance and Sanskrit–IKS Synergies**

Participants saw Sanskrit as more than just grammar or literature; they saw it as a critical channel for Indian knowledge systems such as the Vedas, Gita, Ayurveda, Vrikshayurveda (plant health and ecology), and Sulba Sutras (Vedic geometry). They linked these texts to practical life skills including self-discipline from the Upanishads, environmental respect from Vrikshayurveda sustainable practices, emotional management from shanti mantras and pranayama, and problem-solving with Sulba Sutra ratios for classroom math. One pre-service teacher stated, "Vedas, Gita, and Ayurveda make life skills meaningful for Indian students," and extended this pride to democratic guru-shishya techniques that combine tradition and inquiry-based learning.

A prospective educator commented, "When we introduce shanti mantras or small breathing practices before class, students feel calmer; it is like practical life skills coming from our own Sanskrit tradition." Another participant underlined that Vedas, Gita, and Ayurveda texts provide culturally relevant examples for issues like self-care, environmental responsibility, and societal harmony, which they believe can make life skills curriculum more meaningful for Indian students. Many people saw this cultural resonance as a source of pride and motivation: "IKS revives the guru-shishya Parampara in modern classrooms, but in a democratic way, where we still encourage questions and discussion."

- **Theme 2: Pedagogical Challenges**

Along with these favourable connotations, participants regularly mentioned specific pedagogical problems in incorporating IKS into their envisioned Sanskrit teaching. A major problem was a shortage of ready-to-use, level-appropriate resources that translated classical IKS texts into things that varied school students could understand. Pre-service teachers indicated that they rarely receive structured modules, lesson plans, or activity books that demonstrate how to apply, say, Sulba Sutra geometry to classroom mathematics or Ayurvedic concepts of balance to health education. Instead, they are expected to "manage" with their scant experience: "We are told IKS is crucial, but no one gives us sufficient



materials or training. We must explore YouTube or odd websites." Despite synergies, participants identified pedagogical challenges, beginning with limited resources and a lack of structured modules to translate Sulba Sutra geometry for arithmetic classes or Vrikshayurveda principles for health/environmental education, necessitating reliance on YouTube or informal sites. Exam-oriented curricula emerged as another significant hurdle. Many thought that board test patterns and textbook frameworks provide little possibility for creative, discussion-based IKS activities, particularly in higher-level classrooms where grades are emphasized. According to a participant: "If I take time to discuss IKS stories or applications, my students and parents may complain that I am not finishing the portions." Others stated that their own B.Ed. schedule is jam-packed, with little time for reflective practicum around IKS, making it impossible to experiment with new tactics. These demands generated a conflict between the ideal of culturally rich, reflective Sanskrit-IKS instruction and the realities of time, syllabus load, and evaluation standards.

- **Theme 3: Policy Enablers**

Despite these limits, participants identified strong policy-level signals that they believed will legitimate and encourage IKS integration in the near future. NEP 2020 was commonly referred to be a "big push" for Indian Knowledge Systems, with some students stating that they had read or heard about the policy's demand to highlight India's heritage and classical languages. A participant said, "When NEP talks about IKS, it gives us courage; we feel we are not just teaching an old language, but something the nation wants to revive." They also recognized Kerala's multilingual education system as a practical enabler.

Many people described how they naturally switched between Sanskrit, Malayalam, and English when explaining concepts, and they believed that such translanguaging could make IKS content more accessible and inclusive: "If I explain a Sanskrit shloka in Malayalam and connect it to an English science example, students from different backgrounds can follow." Some believed that the state's emphasis on fairness and public education fostered an environment conducive to innovative, culturally rooted pedagogies, even if actual guidelines were still developing. At the same time, a few participants stressed that governmental support would only be put into action if teacher education curricula, textbooks, and school-level monitoring began to openly prioritize and assess IKS-based pedagogy.



- **Theme 4: Equity Imperatives**

A recurring theme in the narratives was the belief that IKS integration must be based on equity and inclusivity, rather than only cultural commemoration. Participants were aware that some historic texts contained hierarchical or exclusionary characteristics, and they felt obligated to mediate content in ways that supported constitutional ideals and contemporary inclusive education ideas. A pre-service instructor commented, "We cannot simply repeat everything from old texts; we must choose and explain in a way that all children, including girls, Dalit students, and children with disabilities, feel respected." Many saw IKS as having the ability to meet a variety of needs, such as employing stories and analogies from epics and Puranas to engage students with varied learning styles or drawing on Ayurvedic teachings to enhance mental health and emotional well-being in stressed learners.

At the same time, they acknowledged that Sanskrit language proficiency may become a hurdle if teachers rely solely on thick original lines with no supporting translation or scaffolding. Some recommended collaborative exercises, local examples, and multimodal tools (visuals, role-plays, community projects) to ensure that all learners could engage meaningfully: "IKS should not become elitist Sanskrit; it should only be our common knowledge, in simple language." Equity was not just an ethical filter for selecting and interpreting IKS content, but also a practical design concept for pedagogy. This prompted participants to consider how Sanskrit-IKS resources could be adapted for diverse classrooms in Kerala."

II. Alternative Frame Insights

Alternative framing insights focus on what we learn when we read participants' accounts as entire tales rather than coded bits.

Many pre-service teachers report gradual, often emotional journeys from viewing IKS as "old tradition" or exam information to suddenly realizing its importance for mental health, diversity, or current ethics. These "aha" moments can take the form of a single classroom incident, a practicum experience with a specific child, or a conversation with a mentor or family member that changes their perspective on Sanskrit and IKS.

For example, one narrative arc could progress from "I thought shanti mantras were just rituals" to "After seeing an anxious student relax during a simple chanting-and-breathing routine, I realized this is a life skill tool." Such transformations are not completely obvious when experiences are coded as "life



skills" or "mental health"; instead, they emerge when we track the before-and-after storylines in each person's perspective.

Narrative reading also demonstrates how teachers transition from passive recipients of policy ("NEP says we must include IKS") to active agents ("I can creatively reinterpret this verse for my diverse classroom"). In other tales, significant circumstances such as encountering a biased passage or being challenged by a student serve as catalysts for deeper contemplation on equity, resulting in texts that are reinterpreted in more inclusive ways. These arcs demonstrate transformative learning in motion: bewilderment, questioning, experimentation, and recommitment.

While thematic analysis captures the content of perceptions (e.g., cultural resonance, hurdles, equality concerns), the narrative frame emphasizes the process and emotional texture of transformation, namely how uncertainty, pride, guilt, and exhilaration interact in real-time. These narrative episodes provide the most dramatic evidence of altering meaning perspectives, which a strictly theme map may flatten or ignore.

Comparing Analytic Frames: Thematic vs Decolonizing Narrative

A comparison of the two analytic frames clarifies not only what the study found, but how different lenses shape those findings.

Table 1

Comparison of analytic frames

Analysis Frame	Strengths	Outcomes
Thematic (Braun & Clarke)	Structured, transparent, replicable; supports clear links to objectives and literature; facilitates pattern recognition across cases	Four clear, policy-relevant themes (Cultural Resonance, Pedagogical Challenges, Policy Enablers, Equity Imperatives) that map neatly onto research questions and objectives
Decolonizing Narrative	Relational, voice-centered; preserves story arcs, emotions, and context; honours oral/IKS-inflected ways of knowing	Emergent Sanskrit–IKS stories showing “aha” moments, identity shifts, and lived negotiations that are less visible in decontextualized codes and themes



The thematic framework is useful for disseminating findings in conventional academic formats, connecting each theme to its aims, and speaking directly to policy and practice. It allows for short assertions like "participants perceive IKS as culturally resonant but constrained by exam pressures" and facilitates the development of organized recommendations (for example, resource development, exam revisions, and targeted training).

The decolonizing narrative frame emphasizes factors that a strictly thematic approach may overlook. By focusing on stories, it demonstrates how participants progress over time from exam compliance to critical reflection, from passive policy recipients to engaged curriculum thinkers. "Aha" moments, such as discovering that a shanti mantra can be used as a mental health intervention or dealing with a discriminating poem, are turning points in personal and professional identity, rather than separate coded portions. This frame also more closely accords with the epistemic spirit of IKS, which emphasizes links and lineages rather than just analytic abstraction. In this sense, the narrative technique functions as a modest decolonizing act, allowing Sanskrit-IKS oral traditions and interpretive practices to impact how research knowledge is conveyed.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings highlight the need for hybrid, context-sensitive teacher education and school-based modules that include IKS as substantive components of inclusive pedagogy rather than as ornamental add-ons.

- Hybrid content modules integrate Ayurvedic notions of balance, food, and seasonal routines with modern health education and mental well-being, with explanations in Sanskrit, Malayalam, and English. Such courses can help pre-service teachers understand how to integrate IKS into science, health, and life skills curriculum.
- Integrated pedagogy labs: Sanskrit B.Ed. students design and trial short IKS-based activities in real classrooms, such as Sulba Sutra-inspired geometry tasks, Natyashastra-based emotion literacy exercises, or Vrikshayurveda-linked environmental projects, with reflective debriefs.
- Resource development hubs are collaborative ventures between universities, schools, and IKS centres to create graded readers, activity books, and digital content that communicate basic IKS ideas to various learners.



- Conversations with boards and school officials to prioritize IKS-informed, project-based, and reflective work in internal assessments to avoid penalizing teachers for culturally rooted, inclusive activities.
- At the teacher identity level, programs can incorporate reflective spaces that explicitly address the equity tensions articulated by participants: workshops on reinterpreting difficult texts, seminars on caste, gender, and disability in Sanskrit and IKS materials, and guided use of transformative learning methods (critical incidents, dialogic circles, narrative writing).

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The study's contributions are limited by several constraints. The sample size is limited (18 participants) and was purposefully recruited from Sanskrit B.Ed. programs in Kerala, a state with distinct multilingual practices and a relatively strong public education and equity emphasis. As a result, the findings cannot be applied to all Sanskrit pre-service teachers in India, particularly those in areas with diverse linguistic ecologies, institutional cultures, and levels of NEP implementation. The emphasis on pre-service teachers is that long-term classroom implementation of IKS-informed Sanskrit pedagogy is underexplored; what instructors want or imagine may differ from what they practice later under real-world school restrictions.

Future research could build on this work in a variety of ways, including longitudinal studies that follow these pre-service teachers into their first years of teaching, comparative studies across states with different policy environments, and classroom-based research that observes IKS-inflected lessons and investigates learner responses, particularly among marginalized students. Methodologically, more experimentation with decolonizing narrative tools such as co-authored stories, visual methodologies, or community-dialogue-based dissemination could improve the congruence of IKS content, inclusive goals, and research practice.

Conclusions

This study reveals Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) as interpreted through Sanskrit texts and traditions, which serve as a solid foundation for a more decolonized, inclusive, and life-skill-oriented Sanskrit education. Recognizing IKS as a live store of ideas on well-being, ethics, ecology, and social interactions allows Sanskrit pre-service teachers in Kerala to reinvent their role as facilitators of holistic learning rather than transmitters of a traditional language. When participants use "Vedic mindfulness" practices, Ayurvedic concepts of balance, or narrative resources from epics and shastras to current



classroom demands, they demonstrate how IKS may help with socio-emotional learning, critical thinking, and cultural rootedness. At the same time, their stories show how test pressures, resource shortages, and uneven training continue to limit these opportunities. The entire synthesis is clear: IKS inclusion has great potential for decolonizing Sanskrit education and improving equity, but it will require structural support, intelligent mediation, and specific attention to inclusive principles.

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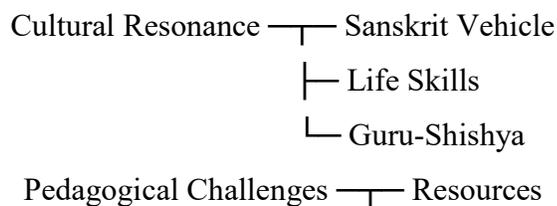
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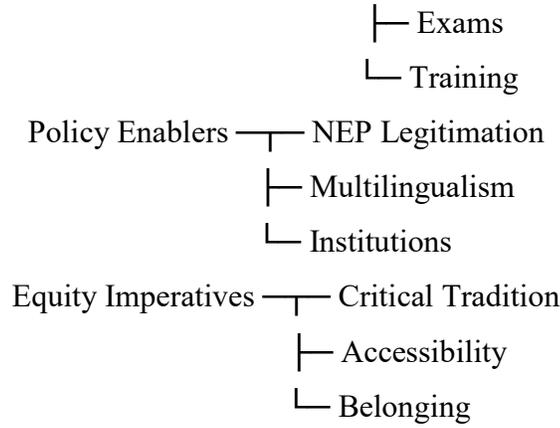


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Appendix A

Theme Development Map





Appendix B

Interview schedule

1. Can you describe your exposure to Sanskrit shastras (e.g., Vedas, Upanishads) during your B.Ed. training, and how it shapes your teaching philosophy?
2. What does Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS); such as Ayurveda, Vedic ecology, or Nyaya logic—mean to you personally, especially through a Sanskrit lens?
3. How relevant do you see IKS for modern school curricula, particularly in subjects like biology, life skills, or holistic education?
4. How does IKS resonate with or complement Sanskrit shastras in your view (e.g., Upanishadic wisdom for emotional well-being)?
5. In what ways could IKS enhance life skills development (e.g., mindfulness from Bhagavad Gita) for diverse Kerala students?
6. What enablers (e.g., policy support, cultural familiarity) would facilitate IKS inclusion in B.Ed. Sanskrit curricula?
7. What barriers or challenges (e.g., resources, exam focus) do you foresee in integrating IKS into teacher training or classrooms?
8. How might gender, regional background, or school type (public/private) influence IKS implementation from your perspective?
9. What specific IKS elements (e.g., Vedic ecology simulations) would you prioritize including in Sanskrit B.Ed. programs?
10. Looking ahead, how can teacher educators like your professors better prepare you for IKS-infused pedagogy?