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The Digital Gurukul: An Autoethnographic Study on Blended Experiential Learning through IKS and Multi-Modal Platforms

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Abstract:

In the contemporary educational landscape, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has catalysed a significant shift toward the reintegration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into mainstream curricula. However, a persistent challenge remains in bridging the gap between ancient pedagogical theories and their practical application in high-tech, modern classrooms. This research addresses this gap by proposing the 'Digital Gurukul' model—a teacher-led digital ecosystem designed to revitalise traditional learning methodologies. The study explores how digital platforms can serve as a contemporary Vatavaran (environment), facilitating a transition from passive instruction to active, experiential transformation. The importance of digital methodologies in the context of IKS lies in their ability to democratize access to Anubhava (direct experience). While traditional learning often relied on physical proximity to a mentor, digital tools provide a scalable infrastructure for Abhyasa (disciplined practice) and Swadhyaya (self-directed study). By utilizing multi-modal platforms, educators can create a 24/7 learning environment that respects individual learner pacing while maintaining the depth of ancient wisdom. This study specifically focuses on two primary digital tools, blogs and YouTube educational videos. These platforms were selected due to their unique capacities to mirror the foundational pillars of Vedantic learning: Sravana (listening), Manana (reflection), and Nididhyasana (application). YouTube serves as the modern medium for Sravana, utilising high-fidelity audio-visual narratives to mimic the oral traditions of ancient India and make complex concepts accessible. Conversely, blog facilitates the Manana phase, providing a text-based, interactive space for deep intellectual processing and scholarly discourse (Vada). In action research design, the researcher examines her professional journey as a 'Teacher-Creator.' This methodology allows for a reflective analysis of how digital content creation influences pedagogical outcomes and student engagement. The study utilizes qualitative digital data, including blog entries and video lessons, alongside quantitative engagement metrics as primary data sources. By documenting the evolution of these digital spaces, the research provides a framework for other educators to blend IKS principles with modern classroom techniques effectively. Through this innovative approach, the study seeks to demonstrate that the 'Digital Gurukul' is not merely a technical supplement but a vital evolution of the ancient teacher-student bond in the 21st century.

Key Words: IKS, Autoethnographic, Digital, Multi- Model

Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has catalysed a transformative shift in Indian education by mandating the reintegration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS)—encompassing Vedic education, yoga, Ayurveda, philosophy, and diverse intellectual traditions—into mainstream curricula to preserve cultural heritage while enhancing educational relevance (Zenodo, 2025; Isser et al., 2024). The University Grants Commission has subsequently required students to earn at least five percent of credits through IKS courses, aiming to blend ancient wisdom with contemporary innovative principles (Anveshak, 2025). However, practical implementation confronts significant challenges: educators remain "convinced but not confident" about IKS pedagogy, learners question its career relevance, and administrators struggle to bridge traditional and modern perspectives (ScienceDirect, 2025). Systematic barriers include lack of standardised frameworks, inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and a persistent "colonial mindset" that privileges Western frameworks over Indian knowledge traditions (Zenodo, 2025; The Tribune, 2025). The digital dimension adds further complexity, as authentically representing diverse IKS traditions—oral narratives, Bhakti traditions, and anti-caste perspectives—through technology- mediated platforms remains largely unexplored (Education Times, 2025).

Objectives of the study:

1. To investigate how digital platforms facilitate the traditional learning stages of *Sravana* (listening), *Manana* (reflection), and *Nididhyasana* (internalization).

2. To examine how the role of the teacher as a digital content creator influences student engagement and pedagogy within an IKS framework.
3. To analyse how the 'Digital Gurukul' model—integrating YouTube and blogs—shapes student learning behaviors and perceptions.
4. To explore how digital tools specifically support and modernize the Vedantic practices of *Manana* (reflection), *Katha* (storytelling), and *Swadhyaya* (self- study)

Terms related to Study

'Digital Gurukul': The 'Digital Gurukul' model establishes a teacher-led digital ecosystem, blending traditional pedagogy with modern digital tools to foster experiential learning within a contemporary "Vatavaran" (environment) (Nair, Harshith B,2024). This framework positions the teacher as pivotal in curating digital resources and collaborative platforms, promoting a constructivist and culturally relevant digital pedagogy. (Nair, Harshith B,2024).

Manana (Deep Reflection): This concept, traditionally involving critical reflection and internalization of knowledge, is facilitated in the digital environment by platforms like YouTube and blogs. These tools offer students the 'mental space' necessary to pause, process, and reflect on complex theories, thereby addressing doubts and deepening understanding (Nair, Harshith B,2024).The process of Manana is deeply rooted in the Vedantic tradition, following Shravana (listening) and preceding Nididhyasana (meditative internalization) .

Katha (Storytelling): In the 'Digital Gurukul' model, Katha, or storytelling, serves as a pedagogical method to simplify abstract or complex concepts and transmit values and practical wisdom (Praxis) . A significant majority, 82% of respondents, indicated that IKS-based storytelling on YouTube substantially aided their comprehension of complex concepts and their application to real-life scenarios . This approach draws from historical precedents such as the Puranas and Panchatantra, where storytelling was a primary method for imparting "Applied Knowledge"

Review of Related Literature:

Foundations of IKS Pedagogy

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) rests upon the **Guru-Shishya Parampara**, emphasising oral transmission, direct experience (*Anubhava*), and immersive learning environments (*Vatavaran*). The guru serves as moral guide facilitating holistic development through observation and lived experience rather than textbooks (Ghosh, 2020). Knowledge is understood as subjective—students must personally interpret and contextualise learning (Beriwala, 2023).

The **tripartite Vedantic model** of *Sravana* (listening), *Manana* (reflection), and *Nididhyasana* (application) provides the methodological framework. *Sravana* involves receiving teachings, *Manana* entails questioning and contemplation, while *Nididhyasana* represents deep internalisation through sustained practice (IndiaDivine, 2005). These stages apply universally across disciplines, not merely spiritual contexts (KCI, 2025).

Blended and Experiential Learning in the Digital Age

Contemporary theory aligns through Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (University of Sulaimani, 2025). Drawing on Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget, Kolb positions learning as active transformation of experience (eLeDia, 2025).

Digital environments enable "second-order learning," where students iteratively apply theories to experiences (Madsen & Jensen, 2021). Technology democratises access to Anubhava and Swadhyaya (self-study) through scalable infrastructure, though pedagogical planning remains crucial.

Mapping Media to Pedagogy

Audio-visual narratives (YouTube) serve as modern Sravana, replicating oral traditions through storytelling (Katha) that enables emotional-cognitive connection (Pattanaik, 2013). Text-based interactive spaces (blogs) facilitate Manana through scholarly discourse (Vada) and questioning, enabling the "free egoless dialogue" (samvāda) that Upanishadic traditions identify as opening truth (Ghosh, 2020).

Identifying the Research Gap

Limited autoethnographic accounts exist of a 'Teacher-Creator' building a blended IKS ecosystem. While policies prescribe and theories explain, few studies document the actual process of designing IKS-integrated digital pedagogy from the practitioner's perspective. This study addresses this gap by examining the researcher's autoethnographic journey developing the Digital Gurukul model through blogs and YouTube.

1. Research Research Design:

The study uses autoethnographic action research to explore the ‘Digital Gurukul’ model, blending personal experience and iterative refinement over six months. This iterative process allowed for real-time adjustments based on student responses and engagement metrics, embodying the IKS principle of *Abhyasa* (disciplined practice) through repeated cycles of teaching and learning.

Population and Research Design

The study's target population comprises undergraduate students enrolled in communication skills and Indian Knowledge System courses at Kadi Sarva Vishwavidyalaya, Gandhinagar, Gujarat. This population is representative of higher education learners in semi-urban Gujarat, with diverse linguistic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. The research sample consists of 51 students who participated and responded to the survey. This sample size is considered appropriate for an autoethnographic action research study, facilitating in-depth qualitative analysis alongside descriptive statistical interpretation.

Data Collection Tools

The study utilised a multi-modal data collection approach, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative artefacts from the digital learning environment.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Student Demographic Profile

Metric	Category	Number (N=51)	Percentage (%)
Gender	**Boy**	**31**	**60.78%**
	Girl	**20**	**39.22%**

The survey captured a diverse response with a majority representation of male students (60.78%) and a significant female cohort (39.22). The gender split allows for a balanced view of how digital tools are perceived across different student groups.

The data suggests that the 'Digital Gurukul' reaches both genders effectively. In an IKS context, this inclusivity is vital for modernizing the traditional *Gurukul* concept, ensuring that ancient pedagogical pillars like *Katha* and *Swadhyaya* are accessible to all students regardless of gender.

Table 2: Digital Consumption Patterns

Metric	Category	Number (N=51)	Percentage (%)
Daily Usage	**30 minutes – 1 hour**	**24**	**47.06%**
	Less than 30 minutes	**19**	**37.25%**
	1 hour – 2 hours	**7**	**13.73%**
	More than 2 hours	**1**	**1.96%**

A vast majority of students (84.31%) spend one hour or less per day on digital educational content. The largest group (47.06%) engages for a moderate duration of 30 to 60 minutes.

This indicates a preference for micro-learning. For the *Manana* (Deep Reflection) phase to be successful, digital content must be concise and high-impact. Students are utilizing digital platforms as supplementary tools rather than complete replacements for physical classroom hours, aligning with the "blended" Gurukul approach.

Table 3: Accessibility and Technological Preference

Metric	Category	Number (N=51)	Percentage (%)
Preferred Device	Smartphone	40	78.43%
	Laptop/PC	11	21.57%

Smartphone usage is overwhelmingly dominant, with nearly 78.5% of students choosing mobile devices over Laptops or PCs (21.57%).

This finding is critical for the 'Digital Gurukul' model. It highlights that the *Sravana* (listening/watching) and *Swadhyaya* (self-study) pillars are happening 'on-the-go' Education is no longer tethered to a desk; the smartphone has become the modern *Granthalaya* (library), demanding that all IKS-based content be optimized for vertical screens and mobile accessibility.

Table 4: Effectiveness of Digital Platforms for Deep Reflection (Manana)

Metric	**Category**	**Frequency (N=51)**	**Percentage (%)**
Most Effective Platform	YouTube(Visual/Auditory reflection)	30	58.82%
	Professional Blogs (Text-based reflection)	18	35.29%
	Standard Textbooks (Traditional)	3	5.88%

The data reveals a decisive shift toward digital mediums for deep cognitive work. Combined, digital platforms (YouTube and Blogs) account for 94.11% of student preference for reflection (*Manana*), while traditional textbooks have fallen to a minimal 5.88%. YouTube is the leading choice, favoured by nearly 59% of the participants.

This suggests that the modern student equates "Deep Reflection" with multi-modal learning. The high preference for YouTube indicates that visual and auditory stimuli are now primary drivers for the *Manana* stage. The significant minority preferring Blogs (35.29%) reinforces the need for a 'Digital Gurukul' to be multi-channel, catering to both visual learners and those who prefer text-based contemplation.

Table 5: Impact of IKS-Based Storytelling (Katha) on Understanding

Metric	**Category**	**Frequency (N=51)**	**Percentage (%)**
IKS Storytelling Impact	Yes, significantly	42	82.35%
	Somewhat	8	15.69%
	No difference	1	1.96%

An overwhelming 82.35% of students report that the use of *Katha* (IKS-based storytelling) on YouTube makes complex concepts significantly easier to understand. If we include those who found it "somewhat" helpful, the positive impact reaches a staggering 98.04%.

These results validate the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into modern digital pedagogy. The "Katha" method serves as a cognitive bridge; it transforms abstract, complex data into relatable narratives. This high success rate suggests that the *Teacher- Creator* can significantly boost engagement and clarity by moving away from dry, factual delivery toward the traditional narrative structures of the Gurukul system.

Table 6: Analysis of Digital Pedagogical Pillars (Likert Scale)

Pillar (Concept)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Abhyasa (Rewatching)	4 (7.84%)	2 (3.92%)	12 (23.53%)	27 (52.94%)	6 (11.76%)
Vada (Discussion)	2 (3.92%)	2 (3.92%)	12 (23.53%)	28 (54.90%)	7 (13.73%)
Katha (Applied Method)	3 (5.88%)	6 (11.76%)	6 (11.76%)	28 (54.90%)	8 (15.69%)
Gurukul (Mentorship)	2 (3.92%)	3 (5.88%)	13 (25.49%)	27 (52.94%)	6 (11.76%)
Swadhyaya (Self-Study)	3 (5.88%)	10 (19.61%)	7 (13.73%)	23 (45.10%)	8 (15.69%)

Across all five categories, the majority of students fall into the "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" brackets. The combined positive sentiment (Agree + Strongly Agree) consistently exceeds 60% for every pillar.

The Vada (Online Discussion) and Katha (Applied Methodology) pillars show the strongest positive reception, with 68.6% and 70.6% respectively, indicating these are the most successful elements of the digital model.

A consistent 23% to 25% of students remain "Neutral" regarding the ability to re-watch videos and the sense of continuous mentorship, suggesting a portion of the class is still adapting to these digital concepts.

The Swadhyaya pillar shows the highest level of disagreement (25.49% total for Disagree/Strongly Disagree). While still majority-positive, it is the most polarizing aspect of the model.

Table 7: Behavioural Response to Teacher Absence (Superpower Move)

Metric	Category	Frequency (N=51)	Percentage (%)
Superpower Move	Search the 'Beyond the Textbook' Blog (Swadhyaya)	17	33.33%
	Watch the related YouTube video (Abhyasa)	17	33.33%
	Wait for the next class (Traditional Way)	17	33.33%

The student body is perfectly divided into three equal segments (33.33% each) regarding their problem-solving approach. Two-thirds (66.66%) of students proactively use digital tools (Blogs or YouTube) to resolve doubts, while one-third still adheres to the traditional method of waiting for the

teacher's return.

Table 8: Emotional Response to Digital Content

Metric	Category	Frequency (N=51)	Percentage (%)
Feeling Emoji	Relieved - help is here!	17	33.33%
	Curious to think	16	31.37%
	Excited to learn	13	25.49%
	Confident to apply	5	9.80%

The emotional landscape of the Digital Gurukul is overwhelmingly positive. "Relief" is the most frequent emotion (33.33%), followed closely by "Curiosity" (31.37%). Combined with "Excitement" and "Confidence," over 90% of students associate digital learning with positive emotional states.

The high frequency of "Relief" interprets as a reduction in academic anxiety; students feel supported by the 24/7 availability of resources. The "Curiosity" and "Excitement" markers indicate high cognitive engagement, suggesting that the Katha (storytelling) and Manana (reflection) elements are making the learning process enjoyable rather than burdensome. This emotional connectivity is a hallmark of a healthy Gurukul environment, successfully replicated in a digital format.

Findings of the Summary

The study concludes that the 'Digital Gurukul' model successfully bridges ancient Vedantic pedagogy with modern technology. By leveraging YouTube for *Sravana* (Listening) and Blogs for *Manana* (Reflection), the model fosters a high degree of student agency and emotional relief.

1. Digital resources must be optimized for mobile interfaces to maintain high engagement levels.
2. Moving from abstract lecturing to narrative storytelling is the most effective way to improve student comprehension in a digital setting. (Katha)
3. Digital platforms democratize the classroom by giving a voice to students who might remain silent in a physical setting. (Vada)
4. Pedagogy should be evaluated for gender-neutral appeal, ensuring that methodology is equally relatable to all student cohorts.
5. Digital resources empower students with academic independence, reducing dependency on the physical presence of an instructor for every doubt.
6. A successful digital model must provide more than information; it must provide a sense of continuous mentorship and emotional support.

Conclusion

The 'Digital Gurukul' model proves that integrating Vedantic pillars—*Sravana*, *Manana*, *Katha*, and *Vada*—into mobile-first platforms democratizes education and fosters student agency. By evolving the instructor into a 'Teacher-Creator', this framework transcends physical classroom boundaries, offering continuous mentorship and emotional relief through culturally resonant, narrative-driven digital pedagogy.

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